

1-2021

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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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IDENTIFY

**eye-tooth—
dental records
of our civilization,**

**how
did whatever we took in
change our taking
change us,**

Babylon, Tassili, Ladakh?

1 January 2021

=====

**Weaponry of the weeping eye
Giotto's frescoes
safe against impiety,
safe against the loss of meaning
*it made my angel weep***

**each image a portal
every word a door,
so the appetitive eye
ravages the Paduan frescoes
until satiety drives it back
to look inside—is that
what happens?**

Study

the Crucifixion to learn who you are?

**Are you the dying god,
the grieving friend, gainting mother,
Roman soldier leaning on his spear**

**waiting for his shift to end?
Who sees in you?
It doesn't have to be Giotto,
Italy, Christendom,
doesn't have to be on a wall
or on a page.**

**The eye
does it for itself:
stares something into being,
into meaning.
I am the history of what I have seen.**

1 January 2021

=====

**Wielder of night
strokes along
a luminous thigh
and we are sleep.**

**Sleep after sleep
so many years
we go to school
to learn
or make
what will be there
when we wake.**

1 January 2021

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**To know the name
and not say it,
not be able to trust
your mouth to make the sound of it,**

**that is what sleep is about,
a dream is a word
you can't speak out loud.
Aloud. Allowed.
Sleep has frightened lips.**

2 January2021

ROBERT

**I would never rob anything
though once I stole an apple
and I wear my robe
well into the day,
comfy as Balzac at my writing desk.
And I can be a bit of a bore.
Still, I hope I'll get the O.B.E.
for all the rot I write?
Could be? Don't bet on it.**

2.1.21

THE SMILE OF JANUS

The year begins to speak to me
quietly as my own breath--
have I confused myself
with what's around me?
Am I just the time of things again?
Whatever the word is,
the year is speaking.
Young winter, mild sky.
Everything is prophecy.

2.

I begin to feel again
like the self you know.
And I am here for you,
so at least I have shown
up for work on time--
that's the good kind of year.

3.

**He swept away liturgy
he rolled away the stone.
Come in and sit down
in the dark and know your mind
he said and then come out again
and make the world happy
one by one.**

4.

**I think of that now,
the calm of the inner room
where we learn to be
and do something useful
with our being. And what
a wonder is a simple door.**

5.

**Mystery is a white tree
up the road,
a road is a riddle.
So many friends have
walked into the sky,
amazing how their voices linger
or I feel them almost at my fingertips.
Tree on a hill,
sky hidden in the sky.**

6.

**If you're so smart, she said,
you could dance in your dreams
where feet are nimble
and syllables count themselves
up and down the famous steps
the Viennese set such store on.
By now she's lost me, I'm stuck
yet again trying to find a name.
A name not mine. Or not mine yet.**

7.

**When it comes
it will sound at first
like language
then as you listen longer
it will seem music
and finally silence.**

**But your hands feel
as if there's something
firm and clean in them,
an oval lapis perhaps
or a flower bulb but
you look down and they're empty.
But the word has been spoken.**

2 January 2021

== ==

**The whale over the door
makes me happy**

**I think about you
your whale
is made of wood
you caved itr
when you are young
the times get confused**

**soft polished wood
high relief, mounted
on a wooden plaque
neat, professional,**

**exact to how we think
of whales wood art
making anything
long ago it is here,
times get confused,**

**what you cut out of wood
forty years ago
makes me love you more now,**

**how kind time is
to confuse us this way,**

**always more whales,
more wood, more love.**

2 January 2021

WOMAN WALKING DOG

**We passed her on the way
and half an hour later
on the way back, facing us
each time.**

**Cold night
but not too cold.
Dog but not too dog.:
small, dense, bulldog, black,
more used for nicknames
than for bulls.**

**‘Walking’
is a funny word, means
what you do by yourself
and also what you do
to someone else. Walking
the old man home safe.
walking the dog. Mysteries
these to me. But she wears
a white coat hanging open—
mild enough for not bundled up.**

**Would she walk if no dog.
Does the dog make her do it?
Small tenacious tough little dog?
Why do I even notice all this?
Why do I care?**

Do you know?

**Can you walk a poem until
its gets there and its meaning
looms clear on the horizon?
Or what is the difference
between a word and a dog?
One can be walked
and the other walks you?
Cold night buty not too cold.
I didn't see the dog myself
you told me it was there.**

2 January 2021

=====

**The answer doesn't come.
But it is there,
quiet in the rock.
Answers are hidden inside things.
Stone for instance must be touched
to understand what Peter felt
when he first heard his new name.
And what is your name
the river asked me--
small river, not huge estuary,
but it too finds its way
to the great sea.
Wait for the answer in glass,
in buckwheat, even
plastic has something to tell.**

3 January 2021

=====

**A face says who you are
but not what you are.
If I look like myself
that's because of you,
your insight into
more than what faces know.
I read your breath
to know your truth.**

3 January 2021

=====

**All nations are divided—
Israel just shows it more.
A wall can be torn down—
but who can mend the gap
between black and White?
Start by calling every
country the Holy Land
then try to feel compassion
tingle in our fingertips.**

3.1.21

=====

**The enigmatic spanking
violates the pontoon.
It said that on the cover of
a book I wasn't reading
but someone said it anyhow.
Be careful what you hear,
it might be words and then
where would any of us be?**

3 January 2021

=====

**Very pretty snow O said
looking out at the new-faling
inch of it that outlined
every branch and cable
,napkin'd every surface.
And then I felt ashamed
to have spoken so off-
hmedly about the snow,
about anything that happens
by itse;f. who am I to praise
or patronize the weather?
And who knows how much
more snow is yet to come?**

3 January 2021

January 2021 20

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**Holes in the rock
cracks in the pavement
are too close to read.
Back off and see.**

4 January 2021

=====

Magic

**means eating food
you haven't grown,**

**spending money
you haven't earned,**

**having power over people
without the pain and beauty
of loving them.**

**Magic is trying to own the Other—
a grievous sin.**

4.I.21

=====

**The immense difference
when you're on a ship
between looking out
at the broad everlasting sea
and looking down over the gail
to watch the anguished churning
waves of your journeying.**

4 January 2021

= = = = =

**Only an inch or two of snow
and the roads neatly plowed
but I'm waiting for the dogsled
anyhow.**

**I need an animal
to remind me I'm an animal.
Because only an animal can go.**

4 January 2021

== == ==

**There was nothing waiting,
it was Africa, north, 29 B.C.
Everything was over, Miriam
had come down the marble stairs,
given the good news to her lover,
gone for a swim. Feel with me
the smooth stone of the banister,
the cool breeze gently from the bay—**

**isn't this enough for you to know,
Marcus went on studying his maps,
some people from Libya
were coming tomorrow. Miriam
understood their language
better than he did but he
was alert to their designs.**

**Nothing new, nothing to fret
a house about, or waste
another cruse of oil**

worrying the dark away.

Miriam was back now, they went
to their chamber and tried to sleep.

2.

You wonder why I tell you this--
I was the stone of the railing
her hand ran down, I was
the olive wood table on which
his maps lay. spread, how can you
every know me if you don't
know all these things,
can't you see it in my face,
Carthage in my eyes?

5 January 2021

=====

**Walk to the ferry
the island needs you
to stand on the highest
hill and say something
into the wind. Doesn't
matter what, just say it,
the wind will translate it
into what the island needs.
Just the way the planet needs
poetry and liturgy and song.
Just make it loud--the world
will do all the rest.**

5 January 2021

TWELFTH NIGHT

Now we are all
twelve days old.
The light is stronger,
soon language
will begin, soon after
we will learn to read.
But nobooks yet--
so hungry to practice
our new skills we
study the trees.
They have never learned to lie.

5 January 2021

LASCAUX

**In the great cathedrals
we stand adoring the arches,
frescoes, columns, marble,
mosaics, wood carvings,
statues, stained glass, gold.
Thousands of percepts
to keep us from thinking
what churches are for.**

**In Lascaux, Malraux
and all the others show us
acres of animals, bull, horse,
running deer, colors, sheer
evidences of time, colors, shapes,
colors, centuries, colors, stone.**

**We hear about thousands of years.
we try desperately to see
what these images were like**

**when they were first imagined
onto the unworked stone
of a Dordogne cave.
We do not get to see
what such a place was for.**

**What are churches for?
What was a cave painted for,
Lascaux, Altamira, Trois-Frères,
all the others, and there are still
more waiting to be found,
not just in France,
not just in the Pyrenees,
what are they for?**

**I think that only those of us
who have never been inside,
who saw no Giotto frescoes,
Wells double arches, weird
priests with antlers,
only those who never went there
can get a sense of what they are**

**and why they are,
and what deity was worshipped,
what they really saw
by oil lamp or stained glass.
Close your eyes and see the face of God.**

5 January 2021

=====

**Forty acres from the Queen
along a stream
up to a grassy cliff
low above the sea.
I stood there at the end
of what was suddenly mine,
the gently rippling boundary
on my right side, mine.
I woke and wondered
what service I had offered
to be so rewarded, and why forty.
All the rest I understood.**

5 January 2021

=====

**If they sing
you have to listen.
That;s the rule
the air lays down.
Like it or hate it
the song insists,
inserts itself
among your breaths.
If you can hear at all
it says, you must hear me.
And all I am
is what I make you feel.**

5 January 2021

T.R.A.

One model geologists propose has a large land mass gradually through tectonic forces moving towards the American continent, eventually butting up against it. This landmass they called Antillia or Great Antillia. When it came to rest, its borders with the continent are today's Long Island sound, Hudson River, Lake Champlain, and the St Lawrence River.

Several years ago a few of us decided to constitute this territory (New Brunswick, eastern Quebec, New England, and a thin slice of New York State) as the Transparent Republic of Antillia. and ourselves as its government.

Languages spoken are French in the north, English in most of the middle, Portuguese in the soyjeast, Spanish in the far south, where the Bronx marks our last and most crowded community, home of Jan

Kees Stadium, fierce sister of Fen Hui Park in Boston, our eastern metropolis..

Its flag of course was invisible, though some literal-minded citizens choose to wag a sheet of transparent Mylar from a glass rod. We set up a Customs House and checkpoint at the Rhinebeck end of the beautiful wave of the Kingston Bridge, but since the booth is invisible, very few cars ever stop as they enter our country, coming as they do from America across the river. Our guards, invisible too, take careful note of entering vehicles.

I myself am Logothete of the republic, a title borrowed from Byzantine times and indicating something like a Secretary of State plus the Foreign Minister. Our president has since moved on to other preoccupations, marriage, etc., so I seldom bother him, making most of the decisions myself.

January 2021 35

At twilight I often look across the river to America, the land where I was born (on Long Island, its northeasternmost edge), I pray for my poor old country, its mountains in mournful Lenten purple.

5 January 2021

== == =

The hand has it
holds.

 Brings it
to be known.
You are a child
again, a patch of snow,
the hand
has a shadow too.
Why do we wake?
Then we said
Why is a river?
Asking
is so easy.
The hand lets go.

6 January 2021

EPIPHANY

1.

**That day at last again
the showing.**

**Now we examine, evaluate,
what has come to be shown,
come to be seen.**

2.

**I guess they used the gold
to feed and take care of
the Child and themselves.**

**The incense I imagine they burned,
watching the smoke drift off
the way prayers do,
turning into the sky.**

What did they do with the myrrh?

3.

**Now it;s time to flee to Egypt,
the big country called
the rest of the year.**

**Big river, stone buildings,
statues of improbable gods
so strange they must be real.
Breakfast lunch and supper.
One way streets.**

4.

**I don;t want to be relevant
I want to be right.
Slowly what we have learned
turns into summer.
All the children are grown up,
at this distance hard to tell
one from another.
We're all adults now,
we are who we are.
That is what summer means.**

5.

**And that's why so many years in Egypt,
so many months from now
to solstice, when the sun
comes in the front door.
He whispered this to me
before he went away.**

6 January 2021

AT THE CAPITOL

**The attack failed.
It always does
even when it seems
to storm the castle.**

**The anger in it lasts
and spoils the peace
it hoped to force.**

**It shows up always
in the blood and fear
ghost-white in the flag
a child's taught to wave.**

**And under peaceful rooves
stir savage dreams.**

7 January 2021

FOR TANDY

**Here is the boat
you wanted
she said to her son
but are you sure?**

**I want it to be mine
he said, but she
explained that for any
vessel to be your own
you must be in it**

**and when you're in it
you have to go
where the boat goes
because a boat knows.**

**But doesn't the water
control such things?**

**You asked for a boat
the mother said sadly,
you did not ask for the sea.**

7 January 2021

=====

**Whistling might do it,
national anthem of the frightened.
Or squeeze your hands together
as if you held something small,
strong, in your control.
Nothing there, just you
alone with what you fear.**

**I wrote that note
and sent it to myself,
pinned it up beside the mirror,
maybe someday I'll
take it down and read it.**

7 January 2021

=====

**Go somewhere there are stars
in the sky at night and by day
a blue-eyed Slavic sky looks down.**

**Go where you can't see the air
but only breathe it,
Learn the language of limestone,
the sleep of meadows.**

**Then come back, please come back,
and give me them to dream.**

7 January 2021

=====

**Around the corner from the cod fish
(stiff white sails of baccalà
in the window full of clams
closest store to the sea
empty lots and a marsh away)**

**I lived the chaste life
of pre-puberty, loving
how close we lived to the sea
the city petering out around us.
wondering about everything.**

**Where does anything really,
really begin? What is an edge?
Who made streets do they have
to be straight? And wires in the sky,
are we teaching nature a lesson?
And what are birds thinking?**

**Who wrote all these books
and can I write one too?**

**The candy store sold papers
in German and Italian even
though we were at war, and one
they told me was Russian
but who really knows?
What does *Golos* mean?**

8 January 2021

TEMPLUM

**sits on a hill
thinks about god
and makes you
do too.**

**All
that stone rushing
upwards, late
for the sky.**

**Doesn't the broad
flat earth all green
and soft think too?
Isn't it all a church
if one is needed?**

**I will stand beside
a telephone pole
and gaze straight
up to heaven,**

as once
by Winchester's spire,
straight up to
isn't it the same sky?

I think ll things lead us.

8 January 2021

LAW

**Don't just obey the law—
become the law,
Enter into the spirit of it,
the compassion and intent of it.**

**A law to begin with means love,
means how to live with one another
harmless, and happy as our flesh permits.
Even some tepid civic ordinance
has loving-kindness as its goal,
don't hog the parking space,
give someone else a chance.**

*I learned this in dream, where I tried to explain
post-war French theology to a muscular believer.
The sentence I began with was true enough to
startle and please him. And me too. I don;t think it
had much to do with the French.*

9 January 2021

FOR BARBARA

**The night we met
was your birthday.
At least it was January,
I mean at least
it was California,**

**we danced a few
minutes even, in Bob
Callahan's house
in the Berkeley hills,**

**we danced
(I never dance)
and then. And then
we talked for forty years.**

**Today is your birthday
again, I think, you're up
in the Berkshire hills
I'm forty miles away,**

**no music we can share
but we're still dancing.
I mean talking, so hard
to tell these things apart.**

9 January 2021

THE ONUS OF EVIDENCE

is how long it takes.

The handkerchief

drops from the pocket,

the shadow gets stuck

on the windowsill—

who goes there? All

we need to know

about the world is hidden

in our dreams, each of us

dreams a piece of the truth,

not just our silly lives, the whole

truth, the real truth that only

dreams can tell us

but no one can read them.

Not yet. That's where science

must go. Don't analyze them,

synthesize them.

See what they say.

21 January 2021

FOR SUSAN

her birthday

**There is a muscle in the mind
holds people together
no matter how much time goes by,
even if they touch in no other way,
barely meet, speak slightly
different dialects of love.**

**We're mostly silent, swimming
through other people's words,
wonderful others, our blessings,
wonderful words
that let us coast in silence.**

**Sometimes a glance
smiles into a certainty
and no more needed.**

**Just more years. Years
and coffee and little cakes
and give those to others too.**

9 January 2021

=====

**What would it say
if it could speak?
Turn me around please
I have faced
the dark too long.**

9 January 2021

WALKING UPSIDE DOWN

Can I do it?
Yes, I did it
and the birds aloft
can read what I said
but tomorrow
can I read it too?

9/10.I.21

*(Written with my left hand, late night,
to please Dr. Gupta.)*

=====

1.

**Walking seems obvious
or sliding downhill.
But what about climbing
up through the air
clutching to light alone?
We do not speak of flying,
bird business, wings.
We mean the clambering
awkward upness of
our own weak strength
inch by inch all by ourselves.**

2.

**No, I'm not speaking of music
though in some ways it fits
the description. It;s quieter,
just the sound of our breath,
the lovely Roman word susurrus**

**if we're lucky, if we don't start
panting halfway up. Sometimes
you stand quiet on a hill
and know what I mean.
Get simple. Be there in person.
There's so much room in the sky.**

10 January 2021

== ==

**Shouldn't I be talking about
sweaters and bar stools,
shades down, TV bleating?
There's nothing real there,
nothing actual about that house,
cluttered with discarded metaphors.
But heated car seats, that's
another story, and silver
sequins on a midnight frock
hanging on the closet door.**

10 January 2021

OPORTO

**What happens is this:
the grape juice
teases madness from
the wood of the barrel,
oak has so many minds.
truths, illusions—enough
to space. Years it takes
for the juice to sip so slow
that serene wildness
drinkers cherish when
it all turns into wine.
They drink the story old trees tell.**

10 January 2021

COLORS

1.

**Wrap me in colors
for I would see
myself seen
as I am, parceled
by sunlight
into districts
of desire, marshes
of dream,
blue seas of renewal.
For colors tell
all, keep no secrets,
yellow sapphire,
blood-brown amber
with the sun
still in it, so many
years, the tiny
bright sky in the heart
of the diamond,
mother's ring,
everything reminds.**

2.

**Even now someone is writing
a note to me from a distant city:
“I dreamt great sheets of green,
not grass, not any special thing,
just sheets of color. So I knew
right then that I was you.”**

3.

**These things are permanent.
Colors fade but color never does.
Reach out and take what yo need,
ivory of your steady hand.**

4.

**In the hills some men are saying
prayers to help the world go round,
and with their words or sounds**

**or brains or breaths, who knows,
they fumble beads with their thumbs,
little ones in lapis, broad in bone.**

5.

**Everything we say
has color too.**

**Or hear someone remark,
or just the weather
sounding its way
unceasingly our own.**

**On these grey winter days
open the dictionary,
it will be our crayon box enough.**

11 January 2021

=====

**Mailbox full
of ads and catalogues.
Who would I be
if I were the one
these merchants
take me to be?
Eager for costume
jewelry, touring
in Yucatan? A rich
debtor yearning
for relief and risky
investments? A man
wanting to read
radical books, lose weight,
gain influence,
buy even more insurance?
Or am I the woman
of their dreams, greedy
for alpaca, bikinis,**

**luxurious hair of dead animals
cowled around my cheeks,
how dare they kill wolves,
minks, ssbles, and blame it
on me? And no, I don't
want to go to your theaters,
I have enough impersonations
right here, lies and subtleties,
music, clang of the mailbox door,
the screen goes blank.**

11 January 2021

== ==

**Close to the dream
is the feel of skin,
one's own, subject
to one's fingertip,
the feel intimate and strange,
far as a dream can go.
One hand touches the other
and you wake.
Where have you been?
Who am I today?**

11 January 2021

=====

**The world is an envelope
waiting to be opened.
You can't make out
the return address, the stamps
are all smudged.
There is something inside.
Be careful how you open it.
But open it you must.
Feel your way in,
speaking softly all the while
in case someone can hear,
in case someone's there.**

11 January 2021

=====

**The sacrament of saying so.
Lodgers in this curious hotel
we breakfast on each other's dreams,
chattering happily over
what we think is our food.
We keep talking all day long,
helping the earth to spin.
One day the door opened
and a man came in and said
in rather a loud voice
Real silence makes time stand still.
Then he went out again and we went on.**

11 January 2021

=====

**what does something else mean,
how can I find it
and where have you been waiting
all these years of a music
kept working and making me hear?**

11 January 2021

=====

**Want to know
what *something else* means?
Imagine one night
you're looking up
and the whole sky opens
so you see something else.
That's what it means.**

11 January 2021

=====

**Everything has been said
and the trees are still bare.
The morning is bored
with our silences
and finally speaks.**

**That's better. That's a letter
from the other,
the one I need to hear.**

**Soft and beautiful the grey day,
the old world asleep by the stream.**

12 January 2021

=====

**This is the day
of karma in Guatemala,
k'at they call it,
the basket where all our deeds
collect and ripen.**

**I wonder which saint
the day belongs to
among Christian folk,
some of them living right there.**

**I would look it up
if I had a tree
or a ladder
or a pool of black ink
big enough to show everything.**

And language is our karma too.

12 January 2021

NIGHT LETTER

The rain was still falling but the hen went on pecking at her concerns along the edge of the road. A white bird, ashen really, vigorous and wet. I;m not sure than I'm not one of those people who expect other people to do their chores for them, looking at the rain and the wet road, it was hard to be sure. The writing table then, a right old antique, had fleurs-de-lys in yellow wood inlaid into the slightly darker philippine mahogany. Colors!

Letters don't write themselves, I mean, and the woman is waiting down in that

ridiculous city for some word from me--
not a reply, how can one "reply" to
affection,
tenderness. Something has to be said. I;m
sure you've noticed how the heating coil
on a hotplate or electric range turns
always to the right, as if a left-trophic turn
would suck the natural heat out of meat or
root and leave it instead a frigid corpse-
whigte on a pan too old to touch. I mean
too cold--but you know that: see, I almost
left it for you to discover, be my
corrector..

Remember, there is some tropical fruit
or gourd which, hollowed out and dried,

can be pierced here and there with holes and become an ocarina, that 'little goose' fluty thing rovally round and nestles in the palm of the hand, hooty-hoot the soft sound of it played. Now is the song inherent in the gourd, and all our native crafts exist to let it out? Ask this about everything.

By now the chicken is out of sight, hidden in the bushes or maybe flown away. Can chickens still fly? If not, is it Darwin or the farmer's knife responsible for their grounding? Look what happened to penguins, and nobody even eats them. Can chickens even swim?

It is at moments like this that one says to oneself, or I say, my God, the road is empty, empty. What can I tell the woman in Belem? A little song: *If you care / why are you there ?* Dangerous. One thing I've learned: we are all where we should be. Going was our first mistake.

I hope the fox didn't get the hen. Time for music. I turn on the radio on the table, internet, set for the Catholic station in Vienna plays classical music 24/7. tossing little maxims and bon-mots between the selections. but all in German so they don't break in to the solemn worship music is, if

you don't mind my saying so. Listen if you like.

But I have to write something.

Language demands hat of her children—

'hear a word, say a word. That's the rule.

Why is she even in Brazil? Crocodiles, and

river dolphins that come up on land at

midnight to court young women,

so I've been told. Or is that another city?

There are so many. So little empty spaces

left for me and the chicken. And the fox. So

maybe I'll tell her that: Dear friend, there

is an empty road between our houses,

bending always to the right, it will bring

us together as the world turns. There.

**That doesn't make much sense but at least
it's written. Maybe the sense comes later,
grows out of the worlds, like ordinary
flowers when this winter is over.**

13 January 2021

=====

Pains of certainty.

**echoes of the doctor's office,
board room, bulletin.**

***Docta ignorantia.* Learned**

ignorance, might work,

learn it. Don;t listen.

Words are too precious to hear.

13 January 2021

=====

**Seeing in the dark
is a song in itself,
music no more than
a flicker at the edge
of anything anyhow.
I closed my eyes
and saw pigeons swooping
up round Columbus Circle—
that shows you who I am,
gouging words into silence.**

13 January 2021

====

**Rattle the flag
wave the sword,
no one gets hurt
and the moon
looks on, displeased
a little by all this
sudden clemency.
Scrape the barrel,
lick the wound,
the sun will thank you
when she comes.**

13 January 2021

=====

**A crowd of trees
standing by the road
talking among themselves
the way they do. they
let ,me listen as we pass,
happy I'm not driving.**

13 Janary 2021

=====

for Sherry

**The amazing thing you do
I don't know how you do it,
you see something inside
and somehow show it to me
out here in the world all
shade and distances. Me
and everyone else, I mean.
And once we see it, it
is not any more about you.
what you know or feel inside
but about me, I mean all of us.
So what you make us see
is a sudden glimpse of inside me,
whoever I am. The picture knows.**

14 January2021

FREE WILL

1.

**Among the river gods
we revere one on the other side,
hair in the eye,
slothful argument.
We know her name
and that eases our debate,
we saw her ride from the shallows
and in some glory ascend
into the forest of all the rest of us.**

2.

**Is the will free,
is free will ever so,
is there a willer in us
all clean and unimpeded?
That's what we had to solve
in the sanhedrin of the dream
all night long.**

3.

**Better, I thought,
to watch her
as long as she was visible
among the woodlots,
unmistakable shimmer of her going.
No, the will is not free yet.**

4.

**Consider the shale beds
behind your house,
little cliff, a man could fall
and still survive, maybe hurt
a bone or two on that descent.
How each century left its stone
identity for the next to cover
and nice fresh living dirt
fills the crannies with grass
and soon flowers. Earth
tries to help us understand the will.**

5.

Those who dare to sleep
athwart or across the meridians
rather than aligned with the poles
endure fierce dreams.
Your choice, dear friend.
The howl still hurts my head.

6.

Texts were being offered
burnt with reverence
on an altar some ways ahead.
A friend took one of mine
and hurried on. I stood,
feeling weak, my work done,
in the woods. I perched
on a stool by the path, knew
something had begun.
In monasteries they call it the retreat.

7.

The postcard said
You are always halfway home.
But where is she
or he who wrote it
and why no signature,
just a picture of the river,
Danube I guess,
but east of Budapest.

8.

So where had my will gone,
Voluntas mea, when I needed
her so badly in the woods,
I mean the woods on this side,
not across the river.
These trees, the exact
inscription of their bare
branches on the ever-patient sky,
where is she when I need her well,
I read what things are saying

but till she comes close
I cannot speak a word.
Or so it seems. I clutch
the tree trunk and call again.
And this too is a word, isn't it?

9.

So be careful where you wake
after you've been sleeping.
The will wanderds, daylight
wields confusions of its own.
If you sleep on your back
who is that you spot on the ceiling?
If you sleep on your side
what is that on which you turn your back?
Nothing's easy, the machine
keeps running, you start to remember.
And maybe your pillow
still has news for you.

14 January 2021

=====

**The cinnamon side of things
where the clouds go for color,
evening, sound of what we taste,
the *blending place* all round us,
I see it even nm your skin.**

**(13.I.21)
14 anuary 2021**

MERRY-GO-ROUND

**r what other answer
could there be,
all the bright horses
leaping, panting and prancing
to get where they are.**

**2.
We travel so hard
to be here.
No sun, no rain,
but it's worth it,
to see our shadows
vague on the frozen lawn.**

**3.
Because of the music
of course, the brass
fancy-work calliope
that plays by itself—**

every child knows
that's what makes the horses run
and it's their endless stampede
drives the machinery
that makes the music come.
Every child knows
we cause each other
and then we forget.

4.
Sometimes there's a swan-boat
ora dragon cart
and there the old folks sit
rescued from the up-and-down.
I sat there once gladly
in a very nice dragon
fierce and green and gold,
to watch the others jump
at the mercy of the beasts they ride.
Peaceful a moment
I travel where I am.

15 January 2021

=====

**There are lyrics
to be written
to the never-
ending tune—**

**business as usual
on Mount Helicon
or Mermaid Tavern,
wherever you are.**

**Your job-description
has such small print
but you get the point,
sail on, sail on.**

15 January 2021

====

**When everything looks grey
be a good islander
and weave it into heavy tweed
to warm the day back to life.**

15 January 2021

CONFESSIO AMANTIS

**Yes, I am a Metaphysical,
can't deny it.**

**They raised me up in school
to be one.**

**Now I can't look at anything
withut worrying
about what it means
to myou, I mean, and me.**

we are the last lovers in the world.

15 January 2021

=====

**Walking on ice
low-salt shallows
of the Baltic coast
two yards thick
is walking on the sea.
I had to pick my time
with care or by chance.
Others can do it
any time They choose.**

16 January 2021

====

**Far from what we touch
an eagle flies. I think
that is the bird whose
slow shadow haunts
what we can see,
over what we can touch.
The mercy of maybe
quivers between the eye
and any hand. How far
is near? And why is
so much of what we see
a road bending out of sight
or else no bird at all?**

16 January 2021

OF IMAGERY

**The absence of kitchen appliances
tends to usher in the creepy feeling
that this is sentimental poetry—**

**remember egg beaters?
Waffle irons, porringers,
where are they now?**

**Roman ruins have kitchens too
and here on my shelf I swear
is an egg-cup from Eden.**

**The point is to make literature
relevant to people who eat breakfast.
wear clean socks, drive cars,
carry a fat bunch of keys
that make holes in their pockets.
Some of them even have dogs.**

**This is foreign terrain to me,
I trust trees more than therapists
so relevance seems just past my grasp.
I haven't had a waffle in thirty years--
how can I see into your heart?
Ah well, bruises make brothers of us all.**

16 January 2021

THE JESSAMINE

does it mean jasmine,
the white flower that blossoms
so fragrant by the midnight lake,
Switzerland, life in quiet,
poetry as a sort of elegant hotel
that lets you, sometimes, sleep free?
what do we know of any flower?

Fresh from the shower a young
person hurried past me, I could feel
the wafture of cleanness, freshness
of natural skin, clothing
just an echo of the real beneath,
the flower beneath all our going,

is that the name of a place,
a waterfall with pale beavers below
engineering as they do a refuge,
the only thing it makes sense to build,
Gloucester Cathedral in late winter snow,

**bungalows in Rockaway, Cambaluc.
We know so little of what they know,
flowers, yes, but also the names
we give our children, the names we ride,
we know nothing about the names
that guide us, lead us to the lake, say,**

**Carl Sauer says *Homo* is a genus
of the littoral, far from the sea
we wilt and fade, or else like Milarepa
build an ocean out of meditation
and live by its shore in unending light..
There, that's two names in one argument,
and I still can feel the flutter of the one
who passed me, so quickly, in the dark.**

**I want to be a genius of the literal.
word by word till I understand
what it means to be a word,
to be a sound that even unspoken
hangs in the air around us
teasing us to remember. Who was**

that person, flower, lake, mountain
that even at midnight showed clear
against the sky of the Chablais.
I feel the clean air rustle past me
and say jessamine, night-blooming,
H.D. saw it from her window when
exhausted by comfortable exile
she looked at the outside, and knew
she was home. The flower proved it.
I smelled one too, right there, trying
like a dim scholastic to decide
is this what any flower means?

16 January 2021

THE LESSON

**Is there anybody listening
behind the stockade fence?**

No.

**Are you sure?
We're talking about Sophocles,
searching the Greek text,
it does not do to be overheard.**

**Even if just a woman
walking her dog, because
then the dog would tell her
what the Greek words mean
I've spent so many years
catching the precise flavor
of words, and the dog
would know them instantly
and would tell its woman
while they walk away.**

**Because animals don't have
what we call language
they know us in other ways
and when we speak
they know directly what we mean
from the sound that breathes out
whatever words we say.**

**Yes, I know I've said this before,
yes, I know you know it well,
but it never hurts to remind,
to be reminded, does it?
Or does reminding
wash the original Greek text away?**

17 January 2021

====

Sometimes my guard is down
and all the truth comes out
naked as November trees.
Dismal in Latin just meant
bad day. Grey everything,
starting with me.

Truth
has its own glory, though,
nimbus, aureole, dawn
over Cyprus, woman at the shore.

This changes things;
you can't see it but it's there,
stirring up the vocabulary.
Get up and dream the day awake.

17 January 2021

CAVE CEREMONY

Dig in.

**The gods are watching
from inside the stone.**

**Waiting for you
to give them faces,
bodies, maybe even names.**

**This os your job,
you were born here
shoeless and shivering
to do this kind of work
only you can do.**

**Dig in
just far enough to work them free.
They will not thank you
in particular but they will be.
And when they are, all sorts of things
become possible—living,
going, even loving.**

**But that comes later. Dig
the image out of what just seems,
out of what you see.
It is so hard to see
what is really there.
That's where digging comes in,
the hands find what the eyes miss

and there they are
in all their hidden glory,
out in the world again,
ready to free you who set them free.**

17 January 2021

NEVERTHELESS

**But I waited
for the salt to melt,
the dead leaves
under the maple tree
get wet from rain.**

**Salt doesn't melt
but there are so many
kinds of rain
the leaves will soon
be shiny red and gold again
and I can walk by the stream
without fear of my shadow
drowning in the rushing water,
but I'll find something
to be frightened of—
if salt doesn't melt what does it do?
What are all humans waiting for?**

17 January 2021

OVERHEARING

1.

**What the window wants
the door demands**

**to be for once
on the right side
the other side
of what is seen**

**the bruised mind
(bruised by perception)
wants, waits in the dark.**

2.

**The sound of a bell
comes from the sky
naturally, bells
are a way to make the sky talk
and we build priests
to tell us what it says.**

3.

**When there is a wound
(speaking of percepts)
bring your ear close to it
and listen
with the reverent impatience
of a child in church.**

4.

**Or go to the zoo
and one by one
stand before the beasts and tell
yourself what part of you
(body or mind, body or soul)
this particular animal
resembles. Activates. Roars.**

5.

Every day is an exercise
in getting it done.
I mean getting it right.
Ring on which finger,
what color shirt,
what's the first word
to say to the stranger
on the sidewalk, the one
who seems to know you.

6.

*Once I had a sapphire,
hid it in the sky,
then I had an opal
hid it in the cloud
but where can I hide
my ruby but in me?*

I heard her singing that again,
and this time I finally understood.

7.

**The water boils
steam settles on the windowpane
nobody watches
the lips are sealed.**

18 January 2021

PHB

What a child the body is. Whining (headache, toothache, ear ache, back ache, bely ahce, sore knees, ankle pain) or when it runs out of pains it reaches outside for more (go jogging, lift weights, climb mountains). Not to mention puberty, pregnancy, menopause. And yet without this squawking brat we would have no chance of transcendence. Only through its incessant clamor can we can we find our way to enlightenment.

18.I.21

=====

**But is there anything to take care of,
from the exalted ruins of those cities
who art is clearer than their daily lives
and their gods clearer than their art?
We watch the archeologists at play,
shovel and snapshot and tape.
breathless documentaries in stone,
watch and wonder what can we do
to make the power of these old things
drive meanings through our world again.
Ancient monuments fill me with urgency
to do something to or with or for them.
They're here because they need us now—
all art is question, and these came first.**

18 January 2021

====

**In the days when radio
was all these was
everything depended
on a few plump gklass tubes.
Find one now? Not likely.
They're as relevant as
mustache wax. I get the point.
close my eyes and hear
Ljuba Welitsch singing Salome—
the memory has not worn out.**

18 January 2021

=====

**Can I listen
while I think,
can thoughts alone
break into the urn
where music's stored
so that ideas
pronounce themselves
in images every-
one can hear?
But isn't it always
time to be now
and who hears music then?
Cure one thought by another
and any thought by any image
and let the image sing.**

19 January 2021

=====

Retain

**your elasticity
jazz vocal
from before the before**

**so a strip of say tin
bent a hundred years
around a locket
what will it do
when you try**

**o do try
to smooth it out
go straight
like we used to say
mant do it,
do it
like other people
don't be different,**

bent mind, bent head,
bent shoulders
o God straighten me out,
there's a cloud coming
with sun behind it,
head all different ways
and still be you—

is this a question
or a gospel?
you know what
the locket said,
Father gave you to Mother
Mother gave you to the Priest
the Priest gave you to God,

the strip of metal still has some gloss
wet from the little
rain that's started again,
the rain falling up into the sky.

9 January 2021. Rhinebeck

TILIA

*Late have I come to thee
to drink from the chalice
thou hast set out for me
between the roots of my own linden
covered with silver
hidden in moss
and now at last I let me drink.*

That's how I interpreted
the Latin I found
written no too neatly
on a sheet of cardboard
pinned to my screen door,,

and knew I must have written it
myself way bck when,
in the time I have learned to call
before the before.

**Why do I do these things to me—
Everyone should ask themselves that,
the answer will likely be the same:
*I am not worthy of what I think***

**the words are holy
and streak through my clotted mind**

**until I have found the cup
and drunk it clean.**

20 January 2021

=====

**Long day
temperature normal
inside and out**

**twilight already
and I have heard
no music this day**

**virtuous ranting
from Washington,
my empty hands**

**remind me of streets
edge of my old city
down by the marshes**

**no one goes
but I heard the birds
endless information**

**give me the strength
to shape my silence
into what you can use**

in the day, days, to come.

20 January 2021

=====

Not sure but certain
the stream rubs on,
ice-fringed like all
maybe-ish things,
but getting there.

Not sure but willing
the sun up every day
recount your losses
to an audience of none
and all will hear
and some will understand—

is that true enough
to be said? A certain woman
lifts her head and hears—
if she can, then all is said.
But listen to her listening—
what do you hear?

20 January 2021

== == ==

**There is a riot
in the next room—
television being real again
though not quite now.**

**Everything it knows
is ago. I try
to know now.**

**Nice try. Voice
echoes back
as if there were no one here
anywhere.**

**I am speaking my piece,
a long rigmarole of images
vaguely gesturing towards
the form of someone.**

woman most likely,
just out of sight. *I write
to bring you back*

I whisper
half-hoping my words
get drowned by the TV.

20 January 2021

== == ==

**Hither
come this way
thither
go away**

**the words dance me
through my paces
infant steps
on Everest**

**I let them hold my traces
muffled thunder
keen of rain
horncalls from the sky
stumble me along,**

**welcome
where I go
I have to be**

**a new kind of animal
a follow-deer,
a docile trustapotamus.**

21 January 2021

A HOLE IN THE HABIT

is a hope.

A gap in a gaze

lets think seep in.

Closed eyes paradise.

2.

Immigrant I am here

but they are kind

who let me in,

so many more trees than people,

I would count them if I dared

but it seems sacrilege

so I will glory in their manyness.

3.

Such is civic sanctity

to adore the otherness of the other.

God send this land a new commandment:

Love thy other.

21 January 2021

=====

**Five in the morning
copters overhead
circling, circling
the night shows nothing
after forty minutes
they go away
the night knows nothing
war or crime
search or save
nobody knows
silence on dark roads
fear lingers like an echo.**

22 January 2021

SCRAWL

**When you're frightened
scrawl your fear
every page a wall
every word
crumbled stone
ruins of an ancient dread
primal city we still live.**

22 January 2021

=====

Alone with the dark
can be like a friend.
Or things fall
and you don't know.
Leave guilt behind you
when you go into the dark.
Waking can be such tight shoes.
Have you noticed
how light squeezes round you,
all around you,
nowhere to turn?
The woman is calling
from the dark room--
go back in
and comfort you both.

22 January 2021

== == ==

**Maybe we dreamed it all,
like Schliemann's Troy
or anybody's Babylon.
Maybe there was nothing there
except what we wake with
again and again,
dreams lingering in our eyes
to make us see faces
pf gods and beasts in stone
and give them names.
Our names.
We write them with our tears.**

22 January 2021

=====

Well into the year
the wheel is turning.
I want there to be music
where she walks,
nobody has to hear it,
music can just be there
all by itself, for itself
like the twelve-tone stuff
I grew up hearing
and nobody plays anymore,
no matter, Schoenberg,
the beautiful mountain no one sees.

2.

But she should have it round her
as she goes from room to room.
She's looking for now
and I'm looking for her,
always that way,
and the music helps.

3.

**But what if it had to be metrical,
what if the numbers hidden in the words
made all the difference and all meaning
just an ornament of sound? So now how
can I find her? I reach out and my hands
plunge into clothing in a dark closet,
thick wool, shallow cotton, leather stiff.
And some people will still call this music.**

22 January 2021

====

**Some days you wake up
with no religion,**

**just a pillow
and your head.**

And a sense of dread.

**Fear is a meager
sort of meaning
but it is meaning.**

**Let it lead you
out the door**

in search for more.

23 January 2021

=====

**If all I see
is what I see
what am I looking for?**

**Mauve ibises
on a warm river will do,
or swallows floating
in their sleep
over the chateau.**

**I make do with a white
car half-hidden in the trees.**

**and then the glory of
a blessed pair of crows
passing very close and very fast.**

23 January 2021

=====

A thing that's not nearby

a tune

someone else is whistling

in the produce aisle—

remember

when people whistled,

remember when there were tunes?

23 January 2021

CHANGING SHIRTS

midmorning
color of the trees
changing vowels
in the middle of the word
mean what the sound says
for a change
but the old-fashioned wire
still stretches
from sender to receiver
just like any sky
blue when She is yellow
otherwise otherwise.

2.

Gravamen, the bedrock
meaning of what you mean
that's what the day
insists on hearing--

**tune your tubes accordingly.
the hollow hurry of your breath,
leave your damned lute unpluck't
and shout your song.**

3.

But how.

Moo-cow on the meadow

baa-lamb in the byre.

Be young. Younger.

**Babies howl, children whimper,
adolescents sulk.**

**Get loud. The cloud
is waiting to part
at your command.**

4.

**I tell you these bold moves
but mouse along myself.**

That's what comes of knowing Latin,

reading books, watching women
slyly from the corner of the missal,
eating oats for breakfast,
being Irish and other lies.
I don't have the chutzpah to be real,
I slink along in shadowland
murmuring my dialects
but at least I leave you hints
along the way. This way.

5.

Why can't this be
a long poem about the Nile
from mountain Africa
to land so flat they had to build
a pyramid to touch the sun.
Why can't this flow
long and natural and gleaning
full of interesting dangers
crocodiles and princesses
fetching Moses from the stream.

**Or did she hide him there herself,
this little Lenin of the pharaohs
who led the workers
dryfoot through the image of the sea
always looking for the truest mountain?**

6.

**See how soon I forgot the river
green and silky
just as much here as anywhere--
you know I'm still talking about vowels,
what else is there ever to say?
Love hovers like a dove above--
all resemblances are dangerous and true.**

24 January 2021

=====

In the dream, a tall thin young woman in a sleeveless black dress read me a poem, one of many, I gathered. She read and I listened:

*With pen
and paper
I write*

*and when
the page
is full*

*my mind
is empty.*

*After a while
I think about Baudelaire.*

25 January 2021

=====

**The measurements are all in,
the diagram is complete.
Now we only need some stone
to build the Temple. plus
a hundred thousand sturdy volunteers.**

25 January 2021

THE CHILD

I thought I was there enough to be here,
thought the sky was free
to fly in if I could fly,
I thought the flowers at my feet
had me in mind
then it all, I all, changed—
why did you make me grow up?

I didn't know how to answer the child
or whatever he was,
I was silent but looked serious
as much as I could make my face look
to show him that I cared, at least,
even if I had no answer,
didn't even understand his question.

**Then he shouted:
Why did you grow me up?
His voice had the child's shrill
hidden in the man's timbre.**

**I wanted to calm him
or make him less unhappy,
so I mumbled something about
how I had no choice,
we happen to each other,
can't help it, things happen.**

**Then, more calmly but no less sternly
he explained: Things
do not just happen.
We happen them.**

**Yes, I cried in turn,
we happen them and they happen us,**

**the snowdrops at your feet
really do mean you,
the sky is waiting for your consent,
then we can both fly.**

**Yes, he said, you're right.
But where will we go?
Where will we go?**

25 January 2021

=====

**The porcelain princess
her Spode all around her—
I hear the wind
tinkle in the sky.**

**Strange places where we sleep,
strange rivers fill
the cup I drink from
cosen from all those on the shelf,

the one with the roses.**

26 January 2021

=====

Be dark enough to see—

**a word on paper
is a different kind of light.**

26 January 2021

=====

Hot coffee but the snow
began. These days
I think a lot about the dead,
the ones who gave me
most of what I know, gave
by being as they were.
As they still are somewhere in ,e.

Hot coffee. The weather,
men joshing in the bar,
women gazing at one another
in pure speculation. Who is she,
really? Who am I?
I hear them thinking. I guess because
I think that way too.

What am I put here to do?
What do parents have in mind
their bodies manage to express
as some kid who had a hundred years

**later tries to guess. And
guess again. The coffee
is still hot, the snow falls
more copiously now, as if to fill
a bowl of earth, or answer me.
On any given day, weather
ism always the obvious answer.**

26 January 2021

=====

**Man once meant both sexes
(‘mankind’), meant
anyone having a mind.**

**If I am a man
where is my mind,
what is it thinking?**

**If I am a church
where is my steeple,
who’s in my pulpit**

**preaching what faith,
sining what hymn
and who is my God?**

2.

**A man means thinking—
is that enough to go on with
almost as if the thought**

**did not matter, only the energy
flushing through the mind,**

**doesn't matter, the marble of granite
thinking crashed into, chopped
into meaningful form, the world itself
a kind of glorious afterthought.**

26 January 2021

=====

**Mantra heartbeat
pulse of mind
who happens in my head?
a word is a name oo
but whose
and its echo in the ears
the sound of swallowing my ears,
a kitschy trick a
rhyme with nothing at all.**

2.

**Over time one becomes
familiar with the bones of one's head,
that ancient temple yours alone
to archeologize.
You feel your qay along
delicately testing bone**

**(in German tasten means touch)
and when you press the mastoid
you hear inside a little child
asking Why is there anything at all?**

3.

**It is one of those bright
mornings when the snow
has covered everything neatly,
lace-work and none too deep,
motionless, articulate,
white writing of the trees.**

4.

**He buries his face in his hands
(as the expression goes)
just for the dark, no pain, just
please bring back my thinkless sleep.**

27 January 2021

=====

**As if the other side
of after all
became a meadow**

**maybe a maiden
maybe a cow
maybe moonlight**

**you know the way
better than most
if most means me**

**all the others I am.
Remember me
when you get there**

**if you can, I mean
if there is enough
of me to remember.**

27 January 2021

== ==

**There were problems
with being here.
the animal weather,
the memories of Spain
and how we hated
what they did to Latin**

**or was it the Moors,
or the moon, or memory
itself, and what it does
to the back of the brain.
To put it simply, stone
columns crumbled at our touch,
the ancient statues smiled
one last time and fell apart,
marble dust all over the mind.**

28 January 2021

WOLF MOON

out now
and nobody else
thin cloud under brightness

the doors are shut
all over the world,

Solway Firth or Hudson fjord,
the same. nobody
comes to call, nobody goes out,

each of us
alone in the sudden
hermitage of our ordinary place,
place, place, the plague
keeps us from seeing
one another, from touching,
hearing the pure tonus
of the speaking voice
untravelling through internet,

keeps us from us.
Pan in every demos
affrights the young,
keeps them from kissing,
terrifies the old
who are bothered enough
to begin with,
as if time were not
menace enough this
insidious creature comes—
isn't a sickness
animal too, a small thing,
invisible, urgently alive?

And yet the moon is bright.
Wolf Moon we say
though I haven't seen a wolf
on this road in close to twenty years,
close you doors, some wolves are close,

**close your doors
your friends are all
safe in your mind,**

**the ;pandemic paradox
wakes you, all of you
are so far away that you close,
snug in my mind, what keeps
us far apart welds us together,
we have never been closer,
we love our hands
but we are more than skin,
what we really are
pours into each other from afar.**

28 January 2021

THEATETEN WALL

**Bright colors
rough fresco
blue crumbling from white**

**Tibetan bowls
on a dusty shelf**

**the mind is an abandoned museum
needs a sweeping
soft broom
touch of your hand.**

29 January 2021
dreamt

=====

**That too is the work,
counting the pages
boxing the books.
It is always the day after Christmas,
blotting paper, click on SEND.**

**The weight of words
bends the shelf.**

**Will something come
to take their place,
language a halfway house
on the way there?**

**Let me linger here
on the edge of things.**

29 January 2021

TO NAME A THING

is to weaken it
it said in my head
as I tried to wake,

isn't that what I'm doing now
naming the occasion
the confusion, the blur
of not quite waking?

and is it even so?
They said that knowing
someone's name gave
you power over them

and maybe each time I see
myself in the mirror
I drain a little more
of what strength I have left.

30 January 2021

=====

If I caught up with it
before it fell
it would not a moon
or even a new quarter
slipped into the slot.

If I were still holding me
it would not burn my hand
but warm it gently, the way
an owl warms the woo
it flutters through by night.

Yes. these things are so, held
or let go they make their way
a;; round us. World, we say.
Or thing. But we have no idea
of what a thing really is.
If it really is anything at all.
But I digresss.

30 January 2021

=====

**Whalebone on the lawn
between theirs and ours.
I was an ocean once
I used to sing, *a caravel,*
a sly peninsula, a rock.
And I really was a rock,
earthbone the natives say,
and they should know.
How long have we been here,
is it all our lives or even more?
Flowers round the rock: count
the petals like love-sick girls
in some old book. Around me
the petals fall like tears—there,
I have read most of them too.**

30 January 2021

=====

**Light the candles
the door needs air,
the cellar stairs
sing by themselves—**

**what is hidden down there
but all the years before,
where else could I store
my childhood, chemistry set,
Flexible Flyer sled, secret
trove of history books,
they did not want me to know
where all of this was coming from.**

**But once I learned some of it
I stasjed in the cellar
with the old Chianti bottle.
straw cradled, candle
stuck in its neck, just like
the movies and more nooks.**

**So; light the candles,
every night is Sabbath now,
every word tries to be a prayer,**

**the wood creaks, the flame flutters,
what must they think of us
who climb so slowly
up the steps to heaven?
O how we are judged
by our belongings, the proud
displayed, the humble hidden
but all of them full of power, strong
as a clean ashtray in a French café.**

30 January 2021

THE MAN WOKE UP

**and thought he was dead.
Everything around him
was the same as ever
but no reason for it to change.
All an illusion in the first place
he thought, and it persists.
He waited for a phone call
or a visitor to contradict his fear
but what would that prove?
One more illusion, the phone
can ring in a dream too.
And it wasn't exactly fear
that he felt, almost more like
a sense of relief, a little triste,
like coming to the end of
a very long novel and closing
the cover and looking up
into the empathy air of the room.**

31 January 2021

A GRATITUDE

—for Clayton Eshleman, 1935-2021

**VISITANS INTERIORA TERRAE, RECTIFICANDO
INVENIES OCCULTUM LAPIDEM.**

**That famous alchemical maxim seems
to say:**

***Visiting the interior of the earth, by
rectification you will find the hidden stone.***

**Most writers and artists who concern
themselves with the traditional sciences
and the ‘hidden stone’ take the words as
guides surely, but swallow them whole as
a great metaphor for interior practice,
meditation, dream-work, intoxication,
ritual, prayer.**

**Eshleman, while he did not despise
some of those strategies, was a tough kid**

from the Midwest, tough enough to be brave, brave enough to take the words literally. Everything changed for him, the earlier phases of his writing (neo-Beat, Japan, César Vallejo), voluble, ardent, richly imagistic, now turned dark, hard. He took the maxim of the occultists literally, and plunged into the interior of the earth, the caves of the Dordogne. Yes, reading all he could about those primal innards of our world, but also going there. Being there. Enduring the under, the intestinal, the places where the only light is what we bring in with us.

But what we find there, what he found and tells us, when he went in, the miraculous images of the time we somehow also were.

That's the thing about Eshleman's work, it has to be us, my body, my animal presence that lights up the dark. Not that there's anything wrong with the dark...

So the 'hidden stone' for him was the cave walls, the images waiting tens of thousands of years for us to see them. To find them.

And this being literal has another aspect. Invenies: you will find, yes, but also (its etymological descendent) invent. Do we discover the hidden stone or do we invent it? And this rectification, what is that. The word means making it right, making something into its purest self. Making is right. But Eshleman knew, like any poet, that making it right means making it write... making it write itself through our bodies, breaths, words back into the visible world again after all those centuries of dark. Entering the intestines of the earth, by writing he invented a stone hidden for so long, showed it to us. It is rewarding to think about how his last works brought us news of our earliest art, just as his vital journals *Caterpillar* and

***Sulfur* brought us news of the most urgent
writings of the present.**

Thank you, poet, friend.

31 January 2021