Who am I fooling?
Nobody understands.
There’s nothing for them to work with,
just colors on my hands
I leave on their skin—
what kind of testament is that?
I knew you, now you are blue.

23 December 2010
It snowed. I have a cold.
It is a human thing.
It would be no different in Japan.
In Ancient Greece though
someone would be after me
clutching his cold bronze spear.

23 December 2010
I am incorrigible
like a dirigible
over your picnic

spying on you from my gondola
and blocking your sunshine
I hover

These words right here
right now are shadows
quiveringly opaque.

23 December 2010
CAITLÍN

C. Hello?
M: Hello, is that Catchleen?
C: We say Kate-Linn over here.
M: Could it be I know your name better than you do?
C: Anything is possible—tell me more.
M: You are fleshy and a little moist, on weekends you wear glasses so you can see people in the park better.
C: Right so far.
M: And on Thursday nights, because the weekend is so close, you celebrate the waning workweek by eating Thai.
C: Vietnamese. If I can get it. Beef Seven Ways.
M: May I touch your thigh?
C: We’re on the phone—I’d have to do your touching for you.
M: Will you?
C: I don’t even know what you look like.
M: What do looks have to do with it?
C: Appearances are everything. Beauty is skin deep. That’s why you look at women.
M: I can’t even see you. That’s why I want to touch you.
C: With me doing the touching?
M: Right. Will you?
C: I might, but you’d never know. I might do it and not say so. I might not do it but say I did. I might touch myself somewhere else. And you’d never know, it all depends.
M: Depends on what?
C: On whether I wanted to please you or please myself.
M: I’m flattered to think that my touch, even second-hand and from afar, could possibly please you.
C: As I said, anything is possible. I don’t know what you look like.
M: That again!
C: I don’t know who you are.
M: I like the sound of your voice.
C: Me too.

[Pause]
M: I love your name, the way the Irish say it.
C: Not all of them.
M: That’s true. How about you?
C: What do you mean?
M: Deep deep down, when you’re at the bottom of yourself, how do you say your name?
C: I don’t talk down there. Certainly not to myself. Not in human language.
M: What kind would you use?
C: Never mind.
M: But if you did say you name…?
C: Since I don’t do it, if I did do it, I’d be somebody else, and have a different name.
M: Then I could call you up and pronounce your name correctly.
C: You wouldn’t have my number.
M: I’d find it.
C: But you wouldn’t know my name. I could be any name, any number.
M: That’s true. But there must be some way…there usually is.
C: I don’t know your name, for instance.
M: Why haven’t you asked?
C: It wouldn’t mean anything to me. One name is as good as another for a voice on the phone.
M: Suppose I told you my name was John?
C: I’d say you were lying.
M: Why would you think that?
C: Because men lie, men always lie.
M: Not always.
C: You’re right, men just mostly lie.
M: I guess that’s true.
C: Is it John?
M: No. That’s why I said ‘suppose’.
C: That was decent of you, honest even—sorry I missed it.
M: Someday we’ll be talking all the time, we won’t even need the phone.
C: You mean everybody everywhere, like telepathy?
M: No, I mean you and me.
C: When will we get anything done, if we’re talking all the time?
M: What is there to do?
C: That’s true.
M: And if there’s anything to be done, we can always do it in our sleep.
C: I have to go now.
M: Where?
C: Nowhere, it’s just an expression for getting off the phone.
M: It’s a little like a lie, isn’t it?
C: I’m hanging up now. Good bye.
M: So am I.

23 December 2010
NORTH NOT

Fight white squalor.
No *arktos*. No anarch.
Not north man.

Northwestman.
The Swedes etc. only got to knowing/singing their Eddas
when they moved west and south,
the ones down the Volga didn’t do it,

only west, where the Irenman had gone before
churching the rocky islets,
churning the ocean of language
that it be ready
when the north moved west.
Mark this, and mark the dingy
sordid town we’ve made out of Alashka,

west, where they pried the words out
of sunset and green islands.
Run me till I run out of north
into the west and then I’ll mean.

The directions count. I mean there is not only one north.
The north that counts is the north that comes with me
when I move west, when I do things like love and speak.
The other north, people live shabby there,
everything cracks but the will
but the will to what?

Sad citizens of afterbirth
squalid because drink
but they do not drink as in the gardens of Jamshyd
where wisdom is wet on the lip.

24 December 2010
GRAIN

It has to be denser
the grain, too many knotholes
and your plank splits.
We want clear pine
bright, continuous, a text
with room for itself, to *vector*
the skill grain forth.

24 December 2010
They walk around the world
the world knows.
The stroke of pen on paper
is enough to make
something on my table shake—

think of what the crows
are doing to the lawn!
Their tread brought
down from heaven
heals the earth hard.

24 December 2010
Your name tells you what you’re running from—
stare it down—look your name in the eye and say No.

24.XII.10
All these envelopes from Christmas cards
lettuce left on the diner blueplate,
unnutritious. Yet these empty envelopes
were licked by their tongues, bear
quintessences of body-mind discourse
as sacred spit. The cards themselves
were only bought or writ.

24 December 2010
If I wrote one number before the other
would it change the wind, make
the tide flood untimely in
and the moon weep?

Be good
when it comes to numbers,
polyvalent toxicities. But two
men holding up the sky.

24 December 2010
But among believers
the moment of sunset
must never be witnessed.
Each carries a dark handkerchief
called osnat, ‘wall’
that he’ll whip out and hold
between his eyes and the setting
sun if there’s no house or hill
to hide from it. The golden
radiance around he is allowed
to see once he’s past puberty.

24 December 2010
from the Urdu

You do not know me
but I am closer to you than your name,
you have never seen me
but my eyes are on you always.

When you slip on your clothes
I am between the silk and your skin
you barely even feel me
except by knowing that everything is right

you are ready for love
and the world is very big around you
though it is I who make you happy
you know me only as your pleasure.

24 December 2010
When I look in the mirror
it tells me all its lies
pretends I’m the same one
who looked in yesterday

twenty years ago fifty
years ago, the faces change
the mirror stays the same.
Just once I want to see

a difference in that glass
someone I’ve never seen
never pretended to be.
Hear what he’ll say to me.

24 December 2010
INTERMEZZO

As much as he loved her
the composer had to tell a story—
she was jealous, was pettish,
excused herself and blamed him—

for this was opera, people
had to laugh at married people’s
little contretemps, the letter
gone astray, the telltale hair.

But in between the silly words
the music worked, told
a different story, as in the Sixth
Orchestral Intemezzo

in the opera called *Intermezzo*
the real composer poured
the deepest sensuous passion
of tenderness for his real wife,

four minutes of beauty\(^1\)
with no hint of irony, four
minutes of telling the truth
at last no words will let.

24 December 2010

\(^1\) Beginning at 62'30" of the Felicity Lott 1990 performance
for Charlotte, Christmas 2010

But it’s you I have to tell,
how you look now and bring
in any season freshness with you
when you come in, the calm
clarity of your skin, the noble
uplift of your profile—I see
so many ways of you I need
and know and wake up happy
knowing. What can a man
say but what you mean to him,
I can’t presume to explicate
the you of you. There’s always
more, I think, but what I think
is just more of me, you spur me
to say everything and know
everything and talk about everything,
silenced only when I try to speak
ordinary words about the truth of you.

24 December 2010