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VARIATIONS ON *QUID DIXI*

Will it blossom before the skirt
flies off and the laid-bare bulb
listens to the ordinary wind?

Did you think I was God
whispering to you all that night
what morning you wrote down

the little bit anybody can remember
on the back of a letter from the bank?
Maybe I was. The speaker

belongs to his words in a way
no moralist supposes when he proposes
we should 'stand by your word.'

Pilate's sin was to say *What I have
written I have written*, whereas:
what I have written is what wrote me.

And you listened. The words
do it all by themselves. But nothing
is ordinary, least of all the wind.

22 February 2009

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Trying to forgive the greatest sinners
is easier than forgiving
the loud car radio in the night.
A noise like that makes me doubt myself
and then who's left to do my thinking?

22 February 2009

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Russia colonizes a South Sea island. By the grave of Gauguin, a bright modern leprosarium has been constructed. For its inauguration, Dmitri Shostakovich has been asked to compose a somber anthem, to be performed by viola and piano, and meant to express the grief of the disease, the hope of recovery. Wind moves gently through the palm leaves as the musicians play. Wind is always a little sinister, isn't it?

22 February 2009

Olin

(during the Hoover piece)

FOUR SONNETS ON THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

1.

Storming the gates of somewhere
Plato in hand and on the back a hod
full of books and a wall
to get built just in the nick of time
to get over it and be away
into the landscape of pure contradictions—
you know it well, you kissed
her there last night, the sun
and the moon are always in the sky
together or none is. Read.
You might get there. Drop
the book and look up: you're there.
The cherry trees. The young hares.
Greek soldiers embarking for Syracuse.

23 February 2009

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2.

And there is one left
or always is, sun
in my eyes and the epebes
dead in a sudden foray.
No time to get ready for war,
irises the color of nobody's hair.
Think about cats, a cat is all
about slinking through flowers
and never eating even one. Young death
old death, different animals,
a post horn heard in the forest
far or at the sudden door.
A message from the silence,
it takes you apart as you read.

23 February 2009

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3.

I wanted to say, but what it
wanted me to say, and what I said—
none of the three really matter.
What counts is what you heard,
every child has three parents
but only one body to boy in. Or girl.
In English, 'I' applies to either gender,
other languages have other arguments
— this is why the mind of the race (human
I mean) stays young while we grow old
one at a time. Learn a new tongue
every year and death will be baffled—
the death squad tracks its victims down
by the vocabulary of their explanations.

23 February 2009

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4.

One more chance to get it right
and then the sun comes up. You're stuck
with what you see. Your book
goes back into its holster, the red
cock mutters in the corn. Why
do they call it morning when
you're weary of all this perceiving,
naming, remembering, deciding?
Shouldn't morning be a silent thing
all rivers and roses? Think of trees,
a tree is all about being there, tall
until it falls. Nothing to evaluate.
Yet it too inscribes within its bark
the weather of what passes for its thinking.

23 February 2009

OKRITUDE

and lots of biscuits
drive a man right up the wall
but keep him sleek.
Oh but I would be a wonder
if I wandered as I would!

2.

Spirit days and matter nights.
Cauliflower fields reek of cow manure
and carbon is the luminous opaque.

I spread her on the motel bed,
said: Be my diamond. She
was natural, shone, gleamed,
and was hard, asked Why?
I knew but didn't answer.

3.

Or the other way round.
She got up and took a shower.
Or shook a tower
and I fell. So many
myriads have built me up

I have failed. So many
alternatives. Persian
hoplites drowning in an Attic sea.

4.

Or I would be a character
in her play. All right,
I play the war, I run
around the stage hurting people,
mostly men. But women too
are wounded too, even if
not by me they still are crying.
I wrap myself in an old flag
and call out names, lots of names,
as if each name were a long story
only I know how to end.

23 February 2009, Weis

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Returning to the vessel
the ardent immigrants
ankles in the sea-slosh weep.

23.II.09 , Weis

[Theory of Knowledge Sonnets]

5.

Seldom when awake the meritorious
lineage (I am who I was yesterday
and the year before that) falters
but when it does the silence says a word
and you are smitten with hearing.
Hearing nothing but hearing hard. What then?

Were you dreaming the whole unrolling scroll,
the captive constellations in your horoscope?
Did anything ever happen?
Is it all just a trick your father taught you
he could take back any minute with a word
and you don't even know which word?
Just form a question and hold onto it—
that in itself will be answer enough.

24 February 2009

[Theory of Knowledge Sonnets]

6.

Maybe there need to be a few more words—
take your father's sword out of its sheath,
unscrew the flask of Turkish olive oil,
garlic bulbs they bring from China these days
so dry so papery and inside rot.

And when you pick up your favorite shirt
and notice for the first time some fraying
on the collar, what can you call that,
thirty years? The long desuetude
of Reason in the house of Yearning—
I read that treatise too, a wealthy girl
with a sick cat, something about prompt
obedience, there are people who think
mortality is somehow different from death.

24 February 2009

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Why do all dancers look the same?

Is every dance the same dance

and there's only one dance at all?

Only the smell of the dancers different?

24 February 2009

OSMICS

Do people smell less individually than they look?

We say: the smell of stale sweat, as if it's all the same.

We do not say: I saw a face, and think we're saying something.

What if smells were as distinctive as our faces, postures, gaits, our darling eyes?

What if they are, but we can't smell them,
can't avail ourselves of these interesting differences,
differences which are us?

Ironic. Bittersweet. Tragical. Ridiculous.

24 February 2009

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Causeway interlude:

a crow

riding down a current in the air

brings me here.

25 February 2009

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I see it clearly
though it is nowhere
to be seen.

25 February 2009

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Everything knows how to turn
inside out but us
we have to tell it all
at second hand. Language.

25 February 2009

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I don't mean
to be brief
but breath is.

25 February 2009

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Christmas card
in another language
come a month late—

a different Christ
a different Mary?

wise men older, wearier
come from the boundaries of time
and still not here.

25 February 2009

NEXT CHRISTMAS

The next time

Man must be born as God.

Who will be the Mary
of that Incarnation?

Let me be the angel
who tells her what's to come.

25 February 2009

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The little superstitions
that make it work

not to number a page
before you write on it

not to look at the moon
without feeling something—

and any time you look
the moon is either new or old,

stare unflinching at her
a mirror in the sky.

25 February 2009