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When we were born fire was still new,
Had just been improvised. We knew
No better than to cook our food
And warm our dens – what fools we were!

The animal part just won't go away—
It bites and snuggles, gets wet and dry
And falls asleep over the pages of this book
Or else wakes up boasting I am the lord of pain.

If only you could live on contour,
On the shapes of things as we live on music,
The lines we see and the lines we hear
Enough – and no one ever need to touch.

Because sunrise really happens inside
And the sky is just a mirror to our minds,
Let the light pour out so other folk can see,
The way a lover murmurs: Wake up for me.

Am I there yet? Is the water on my skin
The river I intended? Does the shadow on my face
Fall from the hill I have been looking for?
When does feeling turn into knowing? And he laughed.
LXV.
Why does landscape always make me feel so blind?
So much to see and all of them at once.
A view from a hill is like eighty years of life,
A thousand hands outstretched to touch me.

LXVI.
Poets only understand about men—
So every woman is an island, John,
But there is no sea. No tragedy.
No bleating billygoat trying to sing.

LXVII.
All I meant to do, I did. A stream
Full of water runs round my little house
And I’ve made full sets of leaves for every tree.
Everything has been said. What am I listening for?

LXVIII.
If I were a kingdom it would be something else—
All the rivers would run backwards, clouds
Would walk on human feet and mountains sink.
But I’m just the woods I long ago got lost in.

LXIX.
Have you read the Ramayana?
Have you stood below the dome of Saint Sophia?
Have you studied the Missa Solemnis?
But I saw a red leaf topple from a maple.
LXX.
So every poem is a translation
To begin with from another language,
One we were born hearing and all our lives
Struggle letter by letter to learn. To speak.

LXXI.
For every language is a second language
That sometimes silences a lost original,
Your hair resting on my shoulder,
A crow upset outside, sun trying to wake up.

LXXII.
All we have to do is translate the translation.
Lermontov stands up and spits the bullet out,
Shelley swims ashore. Nothing is finished
But everything is done. God bless us everyone.

LXXIII.
Who knows enough to look away from me?
I am the magician with a tarnished mirror,
My cards are sticky, my rabbit dead.
They look me in the eye and lose reality.

8 November 2008
LXXIV.
What could I have done to help the angel?
I barely understood he or she was near me,
Just heard the breath down in my mind
And words that were not mine made me speak.

8 November 2008

LXXV.
There was no sense in what I said, all the sense
Was in the silence that chose to answer me.
Help me, I heard, help me be, help me be
As empty as you are and suddenly I was.

8 November 2008
When it comes time to talk of the death
Of those who have no business dying,
Lovers, parents, friends, we are impatient.
That bleak door is supposed to open only in—

We are incredulous, annoyed, determined
To keep everything just as it is. A will
Means determination to go on. Testament
Means living witness to all they know.

How can we live without how they know us?

8 November 2008
If there were something could a second be?
Querisome category, fireplace flicker.
Is it cold enough for a fire? Why does it?
And things sound so ridiculous at home
When you actually say them and a man
Is sure about his own name but what about you
Don’t you have some rights too
To spell or not to spell, to look at birds
Through the window or go outside and see them
Though then they may get scared away.
Like friends when the camel bells clank out
And we know it’s time to hang the moon up
And hurry into the shadows where we sleep.

8 November 2008
JAPANESE RITUAL DANCES

1.
Turn it so ON is on top
before you plug it in
then the message will come out right—

your character, accurate as ever
and neat as a muscle,
will be like a tight ship in one
of those eighteenth century metaphors
about states and statesmen and
(this is what’s important)
you will sleep now. Sleep Arizona sunset,
wake up in Vermont,
everybody is a mountain walking past your bed:

show me. Show me how it’s done.

2.
The place where men plant peas.
What exactly is sorghum anyway
and could I tell you if I knew?

I am generous with my information,
it’s the mud I swine around in,
here’s some for you: the privilege
of the hypotenuse is equal
to some of the fugues on the other nine themes
but which?

Lead me to your thalamus at last
where all the silly conjugations lead
and leave a lady
asleep in her suppose.
I always leave the answer
so plainly writ you think it’s the question.

3.

o you and me, you and me
what a sexy game of rain the larder—
a Sufi person on the top shelf lodges,
I hear the click of amber beads the hum of zikr
sometimes in the wallboard from the other side

where what I thought was me was sleeping.
But my sleep was only a dream.

No, you say, it is a ship yourself
under full sail, on a wild sea
beating through the straits of semaphore—
o there’s no such place, no sea,
go back to sleep,
knowing there is no such sign.

4.

Work your way into the sweater put it on
how many yards of yarn to knit one
degree of early winter morn away
so you can know the day?

Lover, she tells me,
it is Sunday – numbers are much too holy
to use for counting things or reckoning—

numbers are for worship – kneel
before the sanctity of sevenness
and I will be your deaconess and you be glad.

5.

Then the church was empty.
The hanged man had
been dragged (or dragged
himself) over the hill
and left in the deep leaves
for vultures and foxes
as he instructed.
His books were carried off
and catalogued by nearby scholarship,
the spilled wine and lamb fat wiped up,
his thin rope unwrapped from the transom.
And all of a sudden it was just
as if he had been dead all the time,
or else a tall mirror in a furrier’s salon
waiting for the skin to speak again.

6.
It’s all right things keep starting—
can you feel the politics on its way,
the smell of it on my hands?

The brave policeman walks the lonely moon,
governments are bliss-inhibitors, that’s all,
yet those who trim our pleasures get
no pleasure from their cut.

There is a caste of men who think they’re born
to tell other people what to do
and there’s another caste to make them do it.
Without them the rest of us could stroll around
finding things and giving things to each other
all the livelong day and sleep deep
without the prattle of dismal instructors

and when we woke we’d have new dreams to share.

9 November 2008
All music is about Russia
Every river is the space between your own legs—

You think I don’t understand the dance
Just because I stand
Motionless against the wall
Counting the bricks with my shoulder blades

My poor lost wings
I fly back through the wall
I fly backwards through every solid thing,

All music is trying to describe Russia
The trees and factories of it, the bleak of season,
Torrid wheat fields and the shadows
Of hawks swoop down on alders by the stream

And every river flows inside your skin
And finds a way and finds a way

The dance leaps up into the air sometimes the dancer follows.

9 November 2008
They think I don’t understand them out there,
they think I speak all kinds of languages, I don’t
all I can speak is what I hear
when I listen hard between the collar and the skin

the dialect of sweat and the decent grammar of dirt
because we’re all in this together
and you can do something about it
but first you have to do something about me

you have to listen to me hard, hard
until the beauty of your listening faces
makes me shut up, and then I’ll know, and you’ll know,
and the only thing that can help us is what we make up,

close your ears and listen inside then speak what you hear—
there is no other way and no other universe to be in.

9 November 2008
[THESES PRONOUNCED IN DREAM]

Silent meetings to interrupt God.

*

Those who speak
permit us to speak.

Those who keep silence
permit us to hear.

*

No part of no.

*

10 November 2008
SIGNS

1.
But went to bed earlyish
didn’t fight
even though the day Knife was coming in

and we have come to understand those things—
as the four beautiful days after Obama’s election
are auspices for his four years ahead.

Tendrel. Good signs.

2.
Let the car barns (ghost lots) in Eliot
keep the ghosts of the old cars (trolleys)
under the stifling brightness of new real estate.
The sign in the agency window
read REALITY GOO when I first saw it
and I felt it dripping from my hands.

3.
And underneath these Quaternary bones
an ancient world still waiting—
just the least slippage and we’re through.

10 November 2008
NOVEMBER STREET

Sunlight on two students
bent under backpacks
trudge like old coolies
bowed down by education
there are still some
leaves on some of the trees.

10 November 2008
The fire in the grate
is the image of something else.

Clouds coming, darker and darker, out of the west.

Things are the shadows of ideas, he said.
Smoke going up from our tired wood.

10 November 2008
Recorded mystic
a dance around
in whose hands

that dance the -er
from secant to
secant of

what kind of rim
has only one
name in it

no numbers at
all just wave
not even rain?

(late autumn)
10 November 2008