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OCEANS

There are anxieties
shaped in every letter
there are great whales
chasing us in the smallest seas
ocean of what I mean
(ocean of what I mean
(or broken land, nightmare
avenue, slithery at our feet)

think of the whole sea as an island
inconstant, think of it
as movement to which
the steady heart assents—
and that assent is continent

think of living there,
endless island, Akarana,
boundless time and only dark
now and then to limit the domain—
you rule it all and dare not take
a single step.

Everything
belongs to the senses, you say,
quoting some Barabbas of the schools,
but the senses belong to everything,
they are the world’s double agents
set to do their mole-work in your flesh,
making you care about the Other,
all the shimmering faces of the other
until you become the shadow of what is there,
dependent. Where you could be alone
the whole sea yourself.

27 December 2005
MEDULLA

There is a bitter taste today
a dream, someone cut
while I cried out,

someone cut the spine cord of another
thus ending life – a life
we have no right to stop – cut

with one half-reluctant press
a small blade through the marrow.
Some life ended and I witnessed.

But all I saw was hand
a knife, a bone
and the quivering spinal cord itself

tender harmless alone in all the world.

27 December 2005
Could we send the nervous system
to walk around the world without a body
just the tree of its stem and branches
pure awareness traveling the earth?

27 XII 05
CHRISTMAS

The religion they took away from me.

The god they said no longer mattered.

Embrace the Christ Child and forget the Man God.

Ignore everything Jesus said and contemplate instead the blank slate of a pretty child sleeping snug in a Family Values pantomime.

The infant (=un-speaking) Jesus replaces the hard talk of the grown man.

Current religion worships in the manger the new-born consumer, to whom the subject peoples of the earth bring gifts. That is not what Christmas means, but is how the terrible secular atheism called Public Christianity uses this strange and terrifying festival, birthday of a dying man.

27 December 2005
Something breaking is a law
a thornbush full of documents
ill-lit by moonlight
and you must read them all

because that is what you are
a tanner of human hide
a milkmaid of dragons
and you beseech the river

and you defile the moon
with your explanations, you
shred the darkness itself
with endless commentary

why did I take you to myself
why did I burrow in your lap
as if you of all disasters
knew the one thing I had to learn?

27 December 2005
I haven’t gotten here yet.
I thought I had but I have not.

The tree is here and the little stream
I always meant and always wanted

and the sun straight over the mountain
and more trees than I can name

and a valley deep in snow.
But no me yet.

All these years I’ve been hurrying
to this appointed place

I see it sometimes so clearly, this house my house,
my window, the locust tree

with a crow in it,
all complete except for me.

27 December 2005
NIGHT EYES

Can it stand there and look in my face
like the deer last night beside the dirt road
coming out of Rokeby, just stand
in the brush and have bright eyes
and regard me signifying nothing?
Or what is this nothing it was
or would have been signifying,
can I have it too, can I be
what an animal can mean, looking
vigilant, his whole life in his eyes
on a cold night standing in trees?
There must be something there –
it is the old I-am-here razzmatazz,
the sexy saxophone warble
of sheer ontology, or here-I-am,
the trumpet cry of brassy certainty,
something, anything, any sound
in a winter night to help me mend
the absence at the core of my mind

28 December 2005
EPOPTΕΙΑ

Given: One choosing, one chosen. A bird of one sort or another, nothing too written down, more a shadow quick on snow, you don’t know ‘bird’ but it’s gone before you look up and name it, gone before identity. Call this shadow the choosing, you are the chosen then, the witness of this ἐποπτεία, the formal revelation of the visible component of the Mystery.

Some snow. Some dark flits across it, reminding ‘bird.’ Then it was night. The conspirators mumbled by the dying fire, deliberately kept low to hold down the telltale flames.

We have seen one said. And another asked But what have we seen? We have seen a shadow moving on the snow, From this we must infer the world as it is: things, movement, winter, light.

We know what we must change. What must be changed? Silence. The way we see or the way things are? Silence. Is there a difference? Silence. The bird is trying to tell us something: I don’t know my own name either but you are salt.

28 December 2005
ORLOG

Binside and boutside
my fate my ur-law
a fate is what is fatum,
what is spoken, a destiny
is law, a law is broken
except the first one,
the prime one, ur-law,
what is written,
the law is written
and I am the paper
or the birch bark
in which those runes are set
you can read them
better than I can,
my inside is my outside
and you can tell

... 28 December 2005
All those lemon slices on all those rec room bars
lemon in one saucer lime in the other
how much we need to be various—

I own you, by your ears I lead you
gold-chainletted down through the turba,
this gallimaufry congeries of creeps, a party,
your friends and mine. I close my eyes
and think about lemon slices. Rock salt.
Candle flames. There, I feel better already:

there’s nothing like a thing to soothe the mind.
A thing is so much itself, so competently
in the core of its identity, touch a thing

and be healed. Pigeons overhead?
Don’t give me that, I don’t want ornithology,
I want the actual, the blue-eyed murder victim,

Iraqi suicide, the broken drawbridge,
the burning tractor trailer. No pigeons.
Texas on fire and the woodcocks flee.

29 December 2005
TURBA

is the crowd
of all the wise alchemists
assembled, gazing
letchfully at one another’s
famuluses and famulae,
the cute assistants –

the gleam of mercury, the silk
of sulfur’s touch –
now believe me,

I am a radical of matter
I believe everything that I can touch,
everything that makes me feel.

Maybe something is enough—
but not for me.

29 December 2005
I understood some of it, 
the part with the cucumber and the trout, 
mist over the little pond and rain, 
I always understand rain.

But there was a religion to it 
new to me, something about a child 
and a crossword puzzle, a dog, 
a trombone. How can they hold, 

live together a mere afternoon 
even in winter? Boys 
miss their father forever 
whether he is there with them or not—

biography is only a detail, 
the absence is permanent, part 
of being a boy, inescapable:

He is gone 
from the beginning 
and only I am left alone

I see this in his eyes when he looks up from his book.

29 December 2005

for Esther Allen
THE TRUTH BEHIND SANTA CLAUS

We start out in Smyrna or Izmir
a city full of Byzantines, Armenian poets, Circassian dancing girls, Greek alchemists. The sea not far.

We see him standing, a fat bishop as it seems, over a fat barrel from which three naked boys are beginning to stand up—

they had been slaughtered, chopped in pieces, pickled in the barrel and meant for food. Saint Nicholas (for that is who the bishop is)

has not only brought them back to life but made them whole, each collop neatly back in its original boy and all the boys unpickled, sweet pre-adolescent flesh, ephebes anew. “The Desalination of the Virgins” some called this miracle, others “He is good to children, very.”
The reputation lingered. But slowly he turned port wine red and jolly—we picture that Anatolian bishop morose as any prelate (they get points for frowning at the laity) suddenly blossoming into smile. We ask: where have we seen another picture much like this, a naked human reconstituted from a cauldron, the old king made young again? Aha! The old alchemical burlesque, the lugubrious history of the elements rescued from chemistry into Spirit Land and some merry old party giggling with Faustian delight that life and light have come again.

Santa Claus is all we have left of the Alchemist. But how (and why!) does he migrate to the North Pole, surround himself with dwarves and compact deer, why toys, chimneys, Christmas Eve? As Philo Vance would say, Perpend. Here comes the explanation.
Thule. The magic mystical order
of the Sun Behind the Sun
the Tropical Civility (two words
that seldom go together) hidden

in the Arctic, the North
beyond mere north, the Polar
Crown, the light that loves us
and speaks old German,

the runes that Jack Frost scrapes
along your windowpane
this very day, a message from Thule,
the autograph of Santa Claus.

The secret of alchemy is the northern light.
It comes through every window
but up there it’s purest. The little men
(homunculi) the alchemist creates

(they are not dwarves at all,
they’re just smart and small,
like the puzzling Cabeiroi
of old Samothrace or the Three

Gods Wearing Hoods in Yorkshire),
compact people, compact reindeer,
hidden in the glory of aurora,
busy in their workshop making
what? What do they make
so far away from raw materials?
Why there? It’s light they build with
and the mind they make

into the dreams that stream
down along earth’s magnetic field
(the Reindeer Path) and come
every night (not just Xmas)

down into your dreamless body
and fill it with their information
from which you wake astonished
and run to share it with

all the other lucid human children.

30 December 2005
Jazz a slug a blue sun
kind of fat-hipped day
it could be Ornette,
imlagro, I meant you so
well once and here we are
child after child getting born
and so what, so what
we need and should
devote our lovely selves to
is figure out a proper way
to propagate our mind
across the spaces of time
without treating women
like machinery, no more
children! cloned
instead magnificences!
Athena full grown!
Mind born from mind
responding to our own
willful Intelligent Design.

30 December 2005
Poughkeepsie Starbucks
Sometimes all you need’s some baking soda some flour and some sugar to dream your way to heaven and a little milk from that eternal lake till we are of those who once upon a time were ordinary smokers.

30 December 2005
Poughkeepsie
Le soleil est mort.
Seule dans la nuit obscure,
j’écoute la voix confuse des étoiles.
Mon âme m’abandonne.
--Roussel’s Padmâvatî, her funeral aria.

I hear the confused voice of the stars
and then I think it’s one, one voice
all these points of light rehearsing
to tell me something, and my hearing
of this telling is what I call confused.
The stars say nothing. Or one thing clear.

30 December 2005
The world understands waiting.

What is not understood is a Chariot that goes and goes.

There comes reading in the Bible (Revelations; or the woman taken in adultery; or the lilies of the field – are they anemones like the ones from Battenfield’s, are they roses the Magi brought from Persia) and some sort of flowers. But there is no sleep.

  No real sleep.

Men are afraid to close their eyes.
So close to the end of everything.

Is it hours? Is it anemones really, mane of the lion, turbaned tulips, what grows at this imaginary altitude?

For it is time to harvest the sea.
A gong back there, yes, darling, the sea is a gong.

I love you because you never say so.

31 December 2005
SOLOMON

But then Solomon came out of his tomb
(only I know where he is buried) and said:

I am undead
I am a name

every time you say my name
my wisdom and my strength are with you

and my weakness comes too
to rest like silk along your throat.

A man’s nature can’t be held down beneath a stone.
Any name to can pronounce

will hurry to your aid—
it will do to you or for you

whatever its man or woman could
when they still bore it

strolling about the quick world
vanishing as you will too

leaving some sort of name behind.

31 December 2005
NEW YEARS EVE

At least listen. Something, something else. The Limmat flowing through chestnut trees into its lake. At least that’s what I remember.

And what has remembering got to do with listening. Listen, I’m only telling you what comes to mind, one thing after another, isn’t that enough for you? It’s enough for me, a day with you and then another, another, always, this and that and this and that pouring from the future towards us, it’s like Arabic, a fluent line from right to left and who knows what it means?

31 December 2005