

3-2004

marA2004

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Precision dares valleys  
but fear does mountains  
however keen the granite  
edges over Innsbruck even  
close to the crest can't look  
that rock in my eye  
the living snow all seasons  
creeps to hide the skin  
skin of the rock from  
even the noblest ascension  
picking their way along the face  
humans till the end

for what breaks the contour  
of a smooth earth hauls  
holiness close  
peak  
to solve and dale coagulate,  
hard countries of meditation.

1 March 2004

## **After Oscars**

Do I write in chains this morning?

Rubber bands. The prizes

have all been given, the gowns

sleep calmly in the closet

and all the jokes forget their point.

By dawn nothing means anything.

Nothing has been decided.

Names purr along your tongue

wanting faces to behold them.

You are grateful to everyone at all

who brought you to this silence.

Say something about flowers.

Something about war.

1 March 2004

=====

Wake walking  
as if a servant  
were my legs  
or listener

only out there  
did the beginning begin  
secret passageways  
of the light  
finding its way also  
around me

as air  
my own breath  
assimilated  
the slightest move  
investigates  
pathways,

pathways.

2 March 2004

## SUBSTANCE MEANS WHAT STANDS BENEATH THE FORM

I want it to come back  
the one I love or not so

speaking from the fire  
*she did this for France*  
*and because God told her*  
*but we have no for and no because,*  
*not even France*

yet there is a pyre  
in the heart  
where all our martyrs  
recite among the busy flames  
their pilgrim wantonness  
keeps burning from our mute wood  
litanies of beauty and reproach  
so intermingled we  
don't know which comes first  
or which means us  
like a blind man fingering a little  
elephant carved from an ivory tusk.

2 March 2004

## **FLEDGLING**

amateur

newcomer, seal-sleek  
on my latest mind,  
do you think you can arrive  
in my welcoming coils  
as if you belonged in me,  
a kind of protein wound  
in my ego, do you?

It is not easy to come in.

All your differences  
are just beginning  
and who knows how long they'll last?  
I am a connoisseur of changes too –  
I might be the one that you become.

But nothing's known.  
You are a snow-clad field  
and spring is soon.  
Who can tell what might be growing there?

2 March 2004

=====

Last as long as you've gone  
and then sweet reason  
prophesies a return

car doors have to be slammed  
around midnight, deer  
have to streak across the morning light

there have to be three of them,  
and of us too, always,  
me and me and you.

2 March 2004

## CLOSING TIME

But have to say more,  
ink dries out, the gouges  
in clay fill up with dust

time silences everything except itself  
so that we hear unendingly  
its own bassoon

sinistering its way through  
all the things we see and touch and do  
with a sound like the voice of a bored guard

ushering us almost politely out of the museum.

2 March 2004

=====

All the judges of the Low Countries assess  
evidence of social rottenness  
mapped in one bad man's face.  
All of them are his accomplices,  
pebbles in the rock pile. All of us.  
That man has the face of Kapital,  
cog in the wheel, haughty amateur of crime  
socially all too well adjusted.  
In a dark time he fits right in.  
And now the game of Blame the Jew begins.  
Dutroux is the face of everybody else.

3 March 2004

=====

There is nothing to disturb the man  
the circus has left town, the elephants  
are in nobody's mind now, Uncle Jim  
has gone back to the East, murderers  
sleep in the newspapers of tomorrow.  
He is alone. All the young animals  
he cares about are sleeping too,  
and he is stricken with alertness  
like a midnight gas station or  
or what? What is he like now, alone  
and waiting for the rain the radio  
promised him all day and still no sign?

Just a wheel in the sky slowly turning,  
white on white, with blue a threat  
of happiness somewhere far, far ahead.  
He could see it best in photographs  
where a neighbor tree suddenly became  
an outpost of enlightenment.  
He lies there and thinks about the moon.

3 March 2004

=====

He wants to but sleep won't let him in  
and that's the best place for his thinking

or yours too, where the moon is meat  
and they slice it for your breakfast

but won't let you wake. Read more books.  
Wear a nametag so they know you.

I Read Spinoza. I Love Adorno.  
Or make up your own philosopher,

someone golden and half Arabic  
someone who reads Parmenides

someone who wants to tell you  
but is too shy. A shy cosmologist.

3 March 2004

## **S T E L E**

All the licit seemings  
blue feathered smote  
at once and some few  
lewd shadows too  
of a former life  
unallowed but actual  
measure me I am born.

4 March 2004

=====

And now time is the other  
who had been Sonia's face  
when she missed a return and  
bent over laughing to grab the shuttlecock  
now just all round me this dry  
wind rushing to be done.

4 March 2004

## NOMINA NUMINA

Nobody has had your name  
in fifty years. Names are not free  
there is an angel or an arbiter  
who arranges what we think is choice,  
who takes some names away  
into the ark up there  
to breathe new history in them  
and maybe bring them back  
full of prowess their bearers  
get to wield, names that dreaming  
parents fasten on their kids.  
When will you come to me again  
Violet, Loretta, Muriel?

4 March 2004

## TRANSFIGURATION

The times I tried  
multiplication table  
Averroes answer  
street corner suicide

no it has to stay  
right here pretending  
penetration  
pretending to be us

school of medicine  
dream of a donkey  
indifferent to carrots  
roses but roses

across the street  
a sandwich waiting  
pale cheese and gherkin  
and still more roses

the oldest sign you  
were lifted up  
into the mild light  
calling her name.

4 March 2004

=====

Probably enough  
**to write one word**  
dividing in roughly  
into ten or twelve  
words names breaths  
so that you hear  
the single thing I say.

4 March 2004

=====

Why can't everything  
take a different door?

I want to eat the book  
and drink the music,

everything come me  
new ways in.

4 March 2004

=====

**Now we know everything**

again. The loss

is permanent.

Memory is always true

only to the moment of remembering,

never to the remembered.

Memory always and everywhere lies,

white lies mostly

to help the actual along.

There is no past,

only these scars.

That tattoo

growing paler every year.

Nowadays

people pay to have them written in.

5 March 2004

=====  
It's so hard not to respond  
when the weather works it  
animal by animal along your arm.  
Merciless journalists arrive  
in smudged Aerostars, fortunately  
you are disposed to welcome them  
preferring the pain of exposure  
to the comfort of obscurity always  
just like me, when I was in fourth  
grade I set fire to my red tie  
just to get attention, the best answer.  
Yes we wore neckties in those days  
at least I think we did, mirrors  
were rare then so I'm not certain.  
Or even what you're asking. Yes,  
I'm the lucky dad, I trained her  
before she outgrew my limited  
musicality but never my ambitions,  
sang in the choir at Saint Barbara's  
just like her sister Vesta but she  
took off for parts unknown  
maybe she'll see this and come home.

5 March 2004

=====

Never forget anything and never remember –  
that's the golden rule around our house,  
spring in the trees and the shades pulled down,  
maybe pull them up at noon to keep an eye  
on the girls next door having a precocious picnic  
when it's almost raining and it still is Lent.  
All I can make out is a big jar of mustard,  
can't tell what they spread it on. Mustard in March,  
holy shit, and there's a robin on the maple branch  
before there's even a lawn for it to prance on.  
Sometimes I fell like an old opera ready to explode  
with dueling and mad scenes and suicide,  
sometimes I just hear the music far away  
and forget the plot if I ever knew it, people  
shouting their hearts out and girls eating bread,  
what a weird planet I wound up on this time.  
Clueless in Rhinebeck. Who'd pay to see that?

## HISTOMAP

Kids are right to feel – as they clearly do – that history is only the story of their own time. What other time is there, or could there logically be, except what we experience now? Now includes our memories – and of such inclusive nows all history is made.

The only time history as such knows is the time of its own writing. Our Own Times.

It should be a crime against the state to write a history of a time before your own – which is always an exercise in romanticism (Kantorowicz) or slander (Gibbon) or crowd manipulation (Michelet).

When I first came to the small college where I still teach, freshmen had to buy and mount on their walls a five foot tall narrow brightly colored chart called Histomap. It showed, like muscles bundled together in a great oblong arm, the flow –now thick, now thin again, now dwindling away – of individual cultures over a grid of time. Down meant closer to this hour, bottom means now. All the cultures were falling into our hands. But falling.

Each culture looked out of a different color, and each color was smudged with names and local dates, battles fought and books published, within the general flow of time.

Of course I wanted them to learn all that too, as we did, those who had been already trained in the imputations of pastness, of years assigned to people and people discovered like frightened wayfarers in the wastes of time. But how sad it is, that all their Christs and Napoleons and Newtons were just names of fantasies, shared perhaps, but far from their own hands still soft from being born. I wanted to tell them: learn all the names, dream all the battles, but that is not history,

that is folklore or ghost stories or something that has no name, lovely tender stories, stories to hold and remember, but not history,

history is nothing but now,

investigate now. Investigate what people are thinking now, and why they're thinking it. Investigate what people who live in Red Hook think Red Hook is, and how it got that way.

History. Istorein = investigate. What is there to investigate but what people say?

And if the past concerns you, read only texts written in those days. Don't dream a world to hold those things together,

or do so as novels. Novellae, news from nowhere.

5 March 2004