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Coming close again and all the mermaids

meaning on the other side of going in,
snapdragon. Orbital highways
the first one Belt. Exit Pennsylvania Avenue.
Cal Abrams slugging flies. The elegant
occasional, fungo. Or 128. “exacerbates
insect damage” said the carpenter
about the rain. What call do we have waiting?
How do houses get into this condition,
what does time want? We draw close
to a point on the curve predicted
by catastrophe theory, athletes.
It’s all over in the first inning
or Averroes in Paris – interfered
with Natural Temporal Inurement
using Logical Indirection Process.
Did magic, spoke, woke the dead,
the dead spoke, I asked, they answered,
phantoms are the shadows of our questions.
Where is the gold? Where the gold is.
Does the Mystery Line run from Saint Sulpice to someplace where the grail is hidden? The grail is hidden.

Run there. Kiss the rim. My shadow tastes like me. No one with a name is altogether dead. Hence Averroes,
a posse of cardinals swaggering crimsonly through Notre-Dame,

little fruit fly fell in my coffee,
lift-flicked him out, he flew,
anything’s enough to go on,
save my people. Let the black rose that grows from the golden sand of the Qur’an open its fragrance in suburban living rooms, the poet has given you a text to strive with,
a poem that always threatens to turn into law. Sometimes be literal.
Sometimes take off the words and dance naked in the sand itself,
let it stick in the folds of your body,
invigorate, impregnate, elucidate.

Privilege the smell of things,

revere porters, alleyways, culverts

by roadside, revere clouds

more than clarity, eat less red meat,

study the clouds using reverence

as your alphabet, write God’s ads

on your forearm and study it

day and night, in exile, always,

then send him a letter from nowhere.

14 July 2004
THE INVENTION OF THE ILIAD

The Germans did it. Before,
we had the sweet byways of Odysseus,
honeyed mysteries, all his lies.
The Germans hated that, they liked
only the truth, any truth,
the truer the better, and what could
be truer than to kill?
A corpse always seems the one
incontrovertible evidence.
But of what? Seriousness? Rage,
as the book says, a man’s rage
and how it prospered. Boys
pretending to be men – no wonder
it became a privileged classic,
schoolmasters make up the lists,
they all are men ill-cured
of being boys. This long poem
about war that Shakespeare and Chaucer
never read gets made by Goettingen
and Harvard soon the core text
of what we are supposed to mean.

Pile the bodies high beside Scamander,
burn them with oil and wine and salt,
let the bale-fires leap, the flames repeat
accurately in the water, let the water
carry the word of fire out to sea
till every drop of ocean gets the story,
it is fitting and beautiful to burn and kill.

Alexander, warden of men, had
this book carried before him into battle
because of how well it showed the way.

14 July 2004

By chance I dated this 14 July 3004 – and I might just as well have been put off writing it a thousand years,
for all the hearing it will get in these days..  The classics are imposed, the crown of thorns on our striving,
and not even a pacifist seems to see how sinister the interest is that the Iliad takes in the business of war.
Give us back the Odyssey, and take this somber funeral guide away.
All the changes wait along the canal
but my gondola is slow.

There still are crucifixes
pinned to the black velvet

and a mezuzah beside my mother’s door.

Some days I think as slow as marble.

Some days I feel like a grain of salt

dissolving in your wet lips.

14 July 2004
MEN

Men are no longer falling out of the sky.
Something has happened to the system.
The system hurt its knuckle in the rain.

Now it is clear and even blue
but men are not falling out of the sky.
Instead, they are sitting around in white rooms.

Full size men in full size rooms.
White. It is easy to understand, for them.
Men are angular, all legs and arms,

but rounded a little too, even the skinniest.
Even the leanest leg is full of curvature
and is round around the skinny bone.

The strange combo of angles and circles a man is
makes them sit awkward around in white rooms,
their legs and arms go this way and that way,
their spines have to do something
stand up straight or lie down and close your eyes,
it is hard being a man,

going the plane geometry of your will
to work in a round world
after you’ve fallen out of the sky.

Poor men.
The sky was blue
and blue turns out to be the hardest color to understand.

It is the color of God the Father
who never shows Himself and is impossible to understand.
It is the color of the sky often and often of the sea

but not always, nothing is always.
The men sit around in white rooms
so awkwardly, they discuss the sky as blue
or they sing about the deep blue sea

but what does blue mean when they sing it,

it is everywhere and says nothing.

They shake their heads. Poor men.

Some hold their heads in their hands and moan,

some bow their heads between their knees and weep

thinking hard about God the Father

whom they visualize as a blue man in a blue sky,

tears pour from their eyes.

When they look around and see one another

they feel comforted, the rooms are white

they understand white and feel good about it,

men are at their ease in white rooms,

never forget that, men have white

as their favorite color.
White is famous for being not a color at all
they say, they it is all colors at once
or none. The things they say!

Men in white rooms
trying to make their bodies comfortable,
there are chairs but that’s another story,

chairs and daybeds and sofas and chesterfields
but once a man has fallen out of the sky
he’s never especially comfortable,

everything doesn’t fit.
And now all the men have stopped falling out of the sky
they are sitting awkwardly at ease

in white rooms since white is the shadow of God,
because white is not a color they say
so there is nothing to bother understanding.

15 July 2004
SLEEP

Everything goes back to sleep when it can –

isn’t that spiritual enough

for the Burnt Over District and the Hill Cumora

and Letchworth and all the dark ravines

folded west towards sleep–

but seldom reaches it.

Sleep is the middle of the world

and it’s so hard to get there

even though the earth is a great bowl

inside which we prowl

and it should be easy enough to let go

and just slip or slide to the center

where sleep is waiting,

the swift horse that goes nowhere

but carries us to our desires

seen clearly in the night

as obvious as a smelly white rose in June
or a peony or a girl on a mountain
or a mountain on the plain
with wheat growing away from the volcano
and the whole sea on fire

2.
You can’t help it
you want these things
‘they are there to be wanted’ you say
but maybe that isn’t true you think
maybe there’s nothing there but you and sleep
and that horse sometimes won’t let you climb off

you wake up and want there to be outside you
the secret things the horse showed you—
this is Projection

all the philosophers of one sort or another
who argue that things have no real existence in themselves
are laughing at you as you stumble around the bedroom
looking up the phone numbers of people you dreamed about
people who probably aren’t even there
and you’re buying airline tickets and sketching
with your nice blue pencil the floorplan
of the house you want to buy
build be buried in

you hold your head and think about things
project them
they soar out of your closed eyes
and range around the world just out of reach

if you could touch them they would have no feel
thank god for your failures

you write this down: in the middle of world there is sleep
in the middle of sleep there is dream
dream is a horse who carries you to hell

–it sounds right but you’re not sure
some days you can actually touch things
or you think you remember having done so
on some day somewhere in the past

and hell is just a scary name for

thinking about things you can’t ever have.

15 July 2004
(dreamt at dawn:)

She studied their sturdy arguments,
decided there is no god but the sea.

16 VII 04
Somewhere back of what I understood
was a movie of her doing it.
Satin bathrobe, thick wad of Hungarian money.
Pigeons circling the cathedral tower,
bell, bellybutton, steam over the bathtub,
she whimpered a little and the doorbell rang.
At the end she signed a little paper: This is for you.

16 July 2004
That the sentiment
dissolves the certainty:
Will is no better
than an old movie theater in Vienna
I remember that showed only old movies
about a Vienna that people remembered
or wanted to remember
because other, older, happier people remembered
Josef Schmidt and Richard Tauber,

will is just a terrible remembering
forward, into a sweet bleak land
of what could be other
if you didn’t keep making it the same.

Sometimes a letter looks like a number
you can play the number in the lottery
you win a lot of money
you buy a horse and ride it in the Prater
the horse throws you and you get hurt—
do you think the words are laughing up their sleeves,
do you think that language laughs at us
the way angels must
given the lightness of their convictions

and because angels have no will
and having will is what cripples us,
each angel has a single word instead
she knows how to speak and how to listen to
whenever and wherever it is said,

*linden leaf, fire on the moon.*

17 July 2004
These sentimental essays
appall me with their clarity.
Being right is no excuse.

17 VII 04
The fire is there,
believe me.
It’s just waiting for some air.

17 VII 04
Don’t believe me.
Nothing of what I have read about angels
strikes me as true or even likely
though I like to read about them.

I think angels are ideas
that for a moment inhabit men
and move them to be clear
to one another, or to care

or dare, or remember.
After that push, the angels
withdraw into their own spaces
which are luminous permissions veiled

from which they soar into us at need.
But whose need makes them come?

17 July 2004