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## MERCURY

The faces  
fondle us.

Mercury runs out of the thermometers  
and all mercury is the same  
each rivulet joins to every other  
to be the same,  
it is never more than a distance  
apart from itself

no feeling and no being comes between  
mercury and mercury.

Mercury blackens glass.  
The opaque side  
lets the other see

me and me.  
It fondles our faces while we watch.

This self-perceiving  
we think we do  
is just Mercury.

A living current. Pills of mercury,  
immortal poison  
turns the eyes and hair blue,

the teeth fall out and lie about the ground  
showing the way.

At Kandy in the island called Sri Lanka but that we used to call Serendip, the Buddha's tooth is venerated in a reliquary. He left a few, and ashes, scattered ashes, a knob of bone here and there, a pearly knuckle. Iridescent scraps sacred from the fire.

He left his body for us to use.

Already the mercury is running through me,  
through so many orifices absorbed,

a man has so many mouths.

Quicksilver, they said, quacksilver,  
the man who made such pills, peddled them,  
mercury-monger, quack.  
Every physician is a quack, every quack a healer.

It is Mercury that makes it so,  
the breathing metal that silvers through my veins  
and makes me see at night  
even if only dimly  
the real people who move around the world,  
the ones the light hides  
and the mirror shows

and they see me,  
the ones we see in the mirror  
not the one in the middle  
I think is me

but the others, at the side, always watching,  
a fleck of Saxon light  
that is a cool face watching me  
from the doorway of a house

that sometimes looks like mine.  
My house, my face,

but she is gone of course when I turn away  
to look right at her,  
Mercury's hidden sister,

dancing in the mundane shells.  
Arcane bells. Grass wet  
silvery snail-print, her quick feet,  
the mist is gone now into the earth  
that had made the morning silver,

the thing that sees in us  
could see an oak leaf move a block away  
but nothing moves.

22 November 2004

=====  
*for Charlotte*

If I could look you in the eye  
after all  
if I could know you  
the way your mother knows  
her Asian chrysanthemums  
sky-purple blossoming  
even now on the porches of December

but that kind of knowing  
is not given

has to be won  
delicate tendrils of ice  
imagined in the sound  
of the slowly turning gear  
that winds the ribbon up  
on this old Remington

with a human voice, sounds  
like your voice  
calling me  
by a name only you ever use—

everything has your voice.

22 November 2004

=====

What is the shadow of a shadow,  
what is it called?

Is it cold  
when the November wind  
chases the dawn mist and leaves

only you, only you?

22 November 2004

=====

At four o'clock the circle's broken

the rope won't hold the steer  
won't come to the altar  
won't sparkle with burning life  
for the gods won't remember the earth again

how could they when the circle's broken?

(from months back)  
22 November 2004

=====  
As often as I've tried  
to ring in some new year  
with an old seedless gourd  
rattling silently in the meek holiday air  
I still make noise

I make noise

I am one of those  
for whom the silence came  
but I would not let it in

I wanted the one in sequins  
sleek and voluptuous noise

she owned me by ear.

22 November 2004



## THE PRAYER

Now then determined  
determiner you mark  
the boundaries of my be,

the frontiers of my from  
the goal of my go.  
Who hark you?

Where is your listening post  
to overhear me how?  
Far from easy far from Nile

it must be to be me  
I know you've made me that  
but who? Who's glamour,

who is gale? Does all my grass  
bend down but my tree stand?  
My holy fall you habit in,

impossible I be but I am.

23 November 2004

## **BAD HYMN**

We gather together to  
fifty years pass the grey  
flicker of old video  
Jussi Björling the  
greatest tenor of the century  
bundled in an overcoat among  
stifflingly phony congregants  
summoned by mock-vicar to  
tumble into phonier nave  
while choristers sing.  
Jussi's voice is lost awhile  
inside the horrid anthem,  
that musical split infinitive  
that sentimental temple and  
I can't get it out of my  
head today and the way  
his voice belts out the end  
gleams with inane glory  
he made scant effort to  
pronounce. How thick  
he is in his overcoat,  
his accent, his clarity the  
sudden platinum ardent sound.

23 November 2004

=====  
I will answer you when crosses come  
walking out of the desert one by one

they stalk like broken trees  
dried blood of all our soviets  
lustrous in the corrugated bark

we have only one savior  
one voice raised to represent  
the shape of sky on earth

sky is never there  
is always here  
as inside every woman is the father

judging every move she makes  
waiting to be said  
served, worshipped

the way it is  
no one can untie the father from the cross  
no one can let the cross alone

they stalk out of the desert and inhabit us  
your father owns you and there is no way out.

23 November 2004

=====  
The polished place, cenotaph,  
ne'er do well, I'm waiting,

say it *is* an opera, say we do need  
all this random song

just suppose an anemone  
from a hothouse

dappled with those famous wounds  
the way the woman said

only a woman would know them so well  
the purples the dark entrances

the final doors.

23 November 2004

=====

Listen: the far away companions  
caress your skin, their fingers  
seem of local air, their thoughts  
your thoughts. You are never alone.

24 November 2004

=====

A package came.  
It understands me.

I bend to pick it up  
from the porch steps

it has my name on it,  
could it be me

come home from the Indies  
after so many years?

I thought I was bigger than this  
but memory deceives.

24 November 2004

## **How much does it want to reveal today**

of how the world was made? *It cried  
out a name, and the one named  
came.* Every piece of bread  
(you don't eat bread) repeats  
this difficult history. The mystery.

Every stone says it also, in two ways:  
by crumbling; by standing still.

Only one word  
that said all this!

Imagine what will happen  
(*befall* used to be the word)  
when the answer comes.

There are as many world  
as there are words of course  
they all knew that  
and some of them told you so.

Thistledown dictionaries  
the stars all night –  
but all we see from here  
is just one neighbor word.

Already the breath rouses  
(rises) in us to answer.

Will they finally manage to ask the question  
before the answer bursts out of our mouths?

24 November 2004

## **THE KNOWING FAMILY**

not in Dearborn these al-Arifs  
but right around here  
impersonating my heart, your wavy walk.

Where ordinary people like ourselves  
have shadows, they have animals.

So when you see an animal  
they must be nearby.

And if you ever become one of that family  
(by marriage, say, or impersonation,  
or repeating certain phrases over and over)  
then you'll see animals everywhere,  
with no night free of their suffering, their howl.

24 November 2004



## RAIN

It's raining on the downward slope.  
I want to go out there and review it  
before it all falls. Interview water.  
I will publish you in *Elle* or *Vogue*,  
be careful, I will tell all your wet secrets,  
what you did last night in the cloud.  
And I will try to hide my own biases,  
the reader will never notice but you  
because you have been everywhere  
and touched everything know how  
much I want you to fall.

24 November 2004

=====  
but it was the cause  
not the consequence

just a little worm  
nestled in a pear

and the pear dropped  
and rolled along the floor

who makes things happen  
who is there

24 November 2004

=====

Can it say?

Nay.

Then can it strife?

Knife.

Know?

No.

Can it become?

Comes.

Can it breathe?

We.

24 November 2004

## OLD PEN

Does it work?  
The dear does.

A thing  
is fond of saying.

\*

What it wanted was to write

and now it feels just like my first pen,  
the fine-nibbed Parker 51,

writing, writing even  
what I want it too

in hopes someday soon I'll write  
what it was made to say.

24 November 2004

∴ με-τογ ∴

But what name  
that flower,  
the one from Paradise  
delivered in a dream  
and brought back offhanded and by chance  
through waking  
and here it is?

Tibetan *metog*, flower. Me is fire. They  
know the petals are flames.

And what do I know?

24 November 2004