marD2003

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PHAGE EROTOTOME

Something has to have been lust
the swim of beavers
too many tourists
shagging in the woods we
need a lump of coal
to polish and study
eerie pictures of what’s going on
in all the world, world
they won’t let us know
so we have to see it for ourselves,
coal or jet from Whitby or
this TV subdued by alien gauss
what’s really going on,
scrying, seeing the truth
by looking close
at something else,
the geese are passing
sometimes you see the wind
just swinging in the trees
and sinners on the rue Rambuteau
up the block from art
hurrying to shop,
pietons in their piety
pedestrian purchasers
around the corner from the world
and over central cities
rockets fall, mall, milk, mercury,
blood, palm leaves, nothing at all.

18 March 2003
FEAST OF ST. JOSEPH

Spell waves of accident.
Sow curious wheat? Incorrigible amateurs at our white work
but our shade is blue —
so much for poetry – and the guide usually joins us from below
(her haunches in the diner, his biceps nursing beer). Trillium for spring.
Stuff comes up. Today Saint Joseph is even older,
still carrying the child into Egypt,
mourning his son and wife in heaven while he’s still earth. He is part earth,
feast of all our giuseppes, but flowers this year have not risen at our wish,
we must owe back rent to the mother part, she’s tired of waiting, tired of war,
I imagine Joseph’s beautiful forearms sinewing tough-ankled blue flowers from the ground, wouldn’t that be ecstasy and opera, darling Italian, wouldn’t that be spring?

19 March 2003
PENETRATING EQUINOX

When the Romans feasted till the sun
posed on the horizon like a naked god
oily with light, rapt in self-exposure
before a camera kind of world

and they sang their puzzling springtime hymns
so simple for so complex a people
and then they jumped
three times over furrows in the ground

and with a golden spoon scooped up
a little dirt and tasted it
held it on tongue tip to find out by listening
what word the earth would make them say.

19 March 2003
HAVING

Having room for it and putting it in room
Having time for it and putting it in time
Having love for it and putting it in love
Having heart for it and putting it in heart
Having pity for it and putting it in pity

Having a word for it and putting it in a word
Having thought for it and putting it in thought
Having room for it and putting it in time
Having time for it and putting it in love
Having love for it and putting it in pity
Having pity for it and putting it in heart
Having heart for it and putting it in a word
Having a word for it and putting it in you.

20 March 2003
MIXED KARMA

After a while you get to be a planet with its problems, lepers and earthquakes and newspapers, you wake up and they’re there and already they’re you, you dream about them for millions of years before during and after the civilized phases, some people and animals, if there’s a difference on your planet, on your planet they pray to you, but most of them just think you’re the ground beneath their feet. You were like that once, before the long epochs of Personal Development led to a planetary incarnation and you have no hands any more so what do you do?

One by one you have to dream things into their consciousness, your people, your beasts, your élèves, all the life that lives on you, otherwise you dream the long hard instructive dream of stone the quick Irish courage of running water, you dream things into the air, you dream faces into open fire, you dream plasma flares, you dream the shadows, the shallow light of other people’s moons onto your deserts.

And who do you pray to, alone in the sky? All your onetime wives glitter around you,
your husbands and mothers, lost in their duties
through the night, stars, planets, asteroids and you.
You dream your selfish hopes into the open hearts
of sleeping creatures and behold, the hope
turns glad and measureless and empathy and sweet,
the vague impressionistic innocent hypothalamus
of your animals charge with strange impulses,
decencies, desires, repentances, and you
trap them inside your atmosphere. Never
will you stop telling them the dreams you mean
and never tell the same dream twice.

It makes sense to be alive. Everything
your people do spills out of the dreams
you give them, how confusing and terrible
for you to watch all the things you make them do,
the wounds and kisses, their appalling certainties
when all the while you’re just trying to make
some peace and beauty in your corner of the sky.

20 March 2003
ON THE THIRD MORNING OF THE WAR

does a day say?
And what kind of thing decides?
A disk is so many directions
like a blue word
spoken in the dark
behind the field house or behind itself
where so many others are waiting
to adjust the circumstances
or be serene, like a knife,
like heavy traffic slowing through fog.

Heavy fog this morning
after day of rain
it must be spring
with the sun coming
midpoint of annual slippage
sit in the north
facing south
if you would rule large kingdoms
“I’ll give you anything you want”
the voice whispered, or was it
he tried to remember “everything?”

Mules are animals
and men make war,
he detects some truculence
growing in his attitude
an angry pacifist
ready to kill for peace.
But then the man sitting on the fence explained
he’d been dozing and woke to find
his long shadow stretched out east before him
and a little man crouching over it
lifting the shadow carefully from the grass
and rolling it up, his head already
was rolled, and now the shoulders
but he flexed and shrugged and shouted hoy or hay
and the little old man let the shadow slip
and disappeared, leaving the man’s head to unfurl
slowly. And sure enough the man and his shadow
were a couple again, and when he shook
his shoulders the shadow copied him
and all was well. What need
to be angry? Where is the war?

21 March 2003
[My watch is stopped and inside this house my grandmother waits for me to give her something she can hear. Needles. Tick tock. I carry her the smell of the wind and I protect the broken watch; it keeps another kind of time.]

Dear morning,
breath goes before us, calls us back, is there before we get there.

Bark is the make-up of the bare tree outside my window.
Where are the prey slain by the season? Where are the hallways of the sky?

In my sleep I recite the epilogue of childhood: the solitary tree
If magic got us into this
look to magic to get us out.
The fog is almost scattered now
but Louis’ head will not go back
on his finicky body, I still mourn
the oldest ruins, blue buses
full of Latvian Jews, broken
chairs, Golgotha, Babi Yar.

It is from equinox
that power’s born,
Bach’s birthday and blue
flowers on the Sachsenplatz

as if we needed more than
music, do we
even need music? Shadow of a crow
over naked earth, at last
the snow is melting, tell me
if you can
the measure of a man,
is it what he does or what he means
to do or who he wants or how
far he goes along a road that no one knew?
Nobody knows. There are no roads.
The seed falls
into the shadow of its tree.
I am my father at last.

21 March 2003
CHANNELING

Save your mercy for the miracle
the stuff you have to use all day
—kitchen range, limestone, subway tokens—
is only some dismembered sign
the ghosts left behind after the séance
annoyed because you used the holding
hands part of the ritual as excuse
to let the sweat of Sarah’s nervous palm
negotiate the channels of your palmistry
until your lines were running with her
and you were sopped in girl effluvium
while the disembodied spirits were
justifiably irritated at your tactless
obsession with the current flesh, rope
in the house of a hanged man, say no more.
And so they said no more of Spiritstan
where it is April all year long
and lilacs infiltrate your allergies
and even hummingbirds move sedately
in a biteless world. They repeated no more
truths from Samas the Carthaginian
their guide to elevated afterlives,
so you’ll just have to wait till next time
if even then to learn who killed the Pope
and why the common daisy has exactly
seventeen white dew rays round a matte
yellow fluffy mesa, count them
and blame your fingers if I’m wrong.

22 March 2003
TOO MANY NUMBERS

to deceive you with
the orchestra plays faster
wedging tone
needle into artery
to download
a condition you think
is you. You have been counted.
Spring always outside
no one waits.

23 March 2003
ARROGANT SON
stands under a morning
not mine sometimes
yours the decisions
are endless are cetera
you made him
in your body
all the wrong instruments
rafters of a house
hates pregnancy.

23 March 2003
HEDGE
without adjective
gorse keeps them out
who don’t read
thing messages
sealed letters from the emir
hide under leaves
huddle skeptical
lunar literate
everything kills.

23 March 2003
DON’T TRUST SILENCE
it is stale it waited too long
nightingales are books
unwinding in the trees
autotorah recitation
loentropy uncorking
the last bottle of you.

23 March 2003
MAKING SUNS
fall clouds speak hands
senses glimmer
between letters unsent
forget my last address
nobody biology
count the teeth and tell
who this meat was.

23 March 2003
SO LEFT

many me alone
roadside shadowvender
so beautiful this warm cup
empty of everything but itself
I loved you I held
it in my hand.

23 March 2003
SCRAPE AWAY NIGHT

no snow to brown
to green maybe
everywhere on line
before anybody
knows it it knows.
Morninging.

23 March 2003
TRY TO THINK
of this as if
and then the next
also in line
thinglessly
on your mind
a dream of taxes.

23 March 2003
MILKING TROUBLE
from the forge pour light
into form beat
till something holds
edge and wait
imperatives of art
to happen
now takes a long time.

23 March 2003