CONFESSION

Something’s missing. The apple
on the branch casts no shadow on the grass.
What becomes of me?

Has my shadow already been measured
rolled up, cut off at the root, the foot,
where a solid body touches liquid earth,
sold to some wordy Fairy
who writes an epic on this dark parchment
that was me, writing the way they do
in silver ink.

How flat a shadow is,
but without it there’s no substance to a man,
and what kinds of stories do the Fairies tell?

At least let my shadow keep them entertained,
let them roll me up again and portage me to bed
and read me till they fall, do Fairies sleep,
do they wake up wanting prunes, Carib cruises?

Sometimes in strong sunlight I think I see
my old shadow come back to me again
and I can read on his pelt some stories of their winter
when they write and dream without exactly sleeping
and write things down I read in what is left of me
but never do I find an ending for their story,
or for mine, their stories are all middle,
so plot and resolution are what ruin stories,
as if each one of us had just one and only one
and when it’s over there’s nothing left of us.

4 April 2003
IF IF

If if is wonder if if
is alone if is
a merchant sailor can
your isles muchacha
interpenetrate
bricklayer’s archipelago
some steps in mud
if if a Carolina wren
suppose we took
their names away
would they be us
or them again?

2.
remove from ambience
the names of kings
no more Georgia no more July

3.
if if wanted to
travel up your aisles
scented by ambushes
of perfume ladies with their little spritzers
struggled past apocalypse
to reach the blossoming escalator
here try this one is
if in heaven?
4.
much as an ache
answers the querent
does it have a shoulder
does it kneel? so if
if answers the apparency
of a brick world
geography of grief

5.
waiting to blow away sorrow
a hint of pleasure
satyr play between your tragedies
I am the face of Socrates
suddenly between your knees

6.
if if if
or if and only
if what ambush
denominate ‘the real’
snares if’s ankle
into certainty?
bondage of the actual?
7.
if flees by night
to the aisles of the department store
everything belongs to if
like a river to a crocodile
if travels many miles each night
if is the wild dogs
the owners let loose when the store is closed
if if flees from the shadow of if
that lurch behind if and around if
in a blizzard or barking only if can hear

8.
if it said bondage
but if if read birdcage
if motions if their way
through someone
to be activated no
slain into security
if if is something
in other words
if is a lover too
loving ifself in
idolatry of otherness?

here let if’s other
let the cage bird
sing sideways
always and always if.

5 April 2003
SAMBATYON

I find myself sitting by the shore
of a river that keeps the Sabbath.

It is the Sabbath
and the river does not walk
the river does not put on its shoes.

I cannot see it, the river
does not turn on the light,
no hint of movement either, and a river
is all movement.

But the river is here, the river is still
the river loves its children maybe and smiles at me.
And I hear it, singing a little
in a dry special for the Sabbath voice,
making sure everybody understands everything.
A river also gets a day off
and not just to go to the synagogue, no,
the river stays home all day.

What do you do all day long?
—I keep the Sabbath.
If G-d can rest, a river can stand still,
but not impersonate a lake,
heaven forbid such an act of dissembling.
So on this day the river is invisible,
faintly audible, like the radio two houses away,
but it is thinkable, this river is, very good to think about,

and I could tell you its name too, only I’m not sure
you’re allowed to name things on the Sabbath
at least out loud, this quiet river
the runs through forest clearings
past neat little bungalows built of logs
each with a yellow dog in front of it
like a lion sleeping in the sun.

5 April 2003
Under the enamel
of April snow
something might still
be waiting

but this earth always
keeps coming up
with the same old surprises
grasses flowers

the inedible indexes
of love, the feelings
you go to bed alone with
(I hate you

when you get like this
all super-ego and no tenderness
as if you had to keep
a private winter

against me) (you hate me
because I send from
far away easy postcards,
imaginary flowers.)
SARS

Immodest destiny
American as cigars
a plague that sounds like guitars
newfangled death

it’s not smoking
it’s breathing other people’s breath
it’s having to share
a human atmosphere

closed in their snug chambers
the devotees of safe
paddled masked through
dangerous Chinatowns everywhere

I can mock them
but not blame them
I too would rather not
expire from what you’ve got

you prancing other person
fresh back from weird cities,
because we know in general
all diseases are venereal.

6 April 2003
I’ve done it my way
all these years
and gotten here and now —

what can be more pleasant
than to inhabit my own life
hard as it has been

having done everything
and everything still to be done.

6 April 2003
LUDDITE SOLUTIONS

Even the Luddite
enjoys the benefits
of modern conveniences

Two hundred years ago
he had to smash the machine
now he can just turn it off

Just don’t pay for pleasure
and the dark enemy
will break and fade away.

6 April 2003
READY FOR THE OTHER THING WHATEVER IT IS

I have to take a big ad in your home-town paper
getting you interested in the other side of this experience
you might like better, the resale value of my caresses
or how you will be able to think back “when you are old
and grey and full of sleep” upon these integers of ecstasy
we scribbled idly in the sand of the bed tonight or will
if you consent to be the person fooled by all my honesty.

7 April 2003
LISTENING TO THE LOVER

What is he after here? The tone changes like an engine in trouble, will he get to the top of the hill? Can it make it all the way to her garage?

7 April 2003
Everything asks.
But everything always
is up to something,
you can’t count on everything,

everything is too beautiful
has too many admirers —
staring out my bleak window
I’d never guess that everything has problems too.

7 April 2003
If the flower forsook the stalk
it would last only a few hours
maybe a day or two if some kindly exhibitionist
set it afloat on a shallow china dish

I can’t get started, can’t count
past me, envy is a bad teacher
no one ever loves me enough to be me

or did they once? the ferry
so in love with the ferry-slip it forsakes the sea?

7 April 2003
THE THREE LITTLE PIGS

is a very scary
story especially
if there’s only one
of me, one
little pig
in a wolf world

and I wonder
reading the bible
how bricks are made
of fire and clay and straw

and the breath of wolves
those alchemists
puffing on the fire
that bakes the bricks
I scheme to use
to keep out
the winter of wolves

but maybe I can take
the fear away by reading
the story as I read the bible,
backwards, so that the pigs
are unclean citizens
and the wolf is the Law
the breath of spirit
will never stop coming
trying to change them
by breath alone
into children of the light

and all these years I struggled
to keep spirit out
the little wolf
breathing at my door.

7 April 2003
Something let it happen, dawn
and it’s supposed to snow
but who supposes.

7 April 2003
ODE TO GARCIA LORCA

so many of you are dead now,
the lovely maricons you scorned
float corpse-white around you
butterflying through the afterlife

all they ever wanted was
the grace of difference
the grace of being light
in a heavy world, the grace of floating
cheating flirting being
irresponsible, almost the grace
of not being at all,

I love these faggots you dissed so
famously, they tell me
what I love so much in nature, winds, women, gods, grace,

grace,
the feeble tracery of dead leaves
left gothic-gnawed by caterpillars,
the flounce, the flutter, the deep intelligence
of trusting nothing, the suicidal merriment
of choosing pleasure
to rewrite the body’s code of behavior,
to open every door,

can you forgive them now
who die so frail,
because they sell love
you detested them,
but what else is worth buying,
because they are puppets of desire
and have no austerity, no olive trees in their nature,
only cheap things, childish simulations
of some preposterous Hellenic love
that shimmers on the borders of the mind

but they were skin,
mostly they were skin and wine and cigarettes and drugs
and lurid diseases.
they were crime and attitude and insincere,
and in their insincerity a great chivalry
traveled almost for the last
time through the forest of the world,
naked knights, no horses but one another,
making do with who they are,
carrying their battered beautiful bodies —
their wounds are their only weapons,
ready to rescue everything they met
from the monstrous crime of giving no pleasure.

7 April 2003
I’m sorry it’s taken me so long to get back to you about this. And even sorrier that we won’t be able to come to Lithuania this year for the Vilnius Poetry Autumn. It just hasn’t worked out, in terms of other commitments. So please accept my deep thanks for your invitation, and my real feeling of closeness with what’s going on there. I do hope that some other year I’ll be able to attend. Or at least visit a land that’s close to my thought, thanks to the dark splendor of your forest mages (I think of O.Milosz and that great Baltic family), your poetry (I think of Vyt’s translations), and the dear Mekas brothers I have known for so many years. Curiously, as I write, I’m listening to a masterpiece by Ponchielli almost unknown in this country, a massive and magnificent opera called I Lituani, based on the story of the Lithuanian freedom fighters against the Teutonic knights that Mieckiewicz tells. Again, thank you for all.
DEMANDE

The demande in you will drive you to
a woman’s knowledge of woman.

You want to know a woman
the way a man knows them — knowledge
is power.

To taste (even)
the authority of a woman,
the vast certainty of their knowing.

Do you know how much a woman knows?
(How can a woman know how much a woman knows?)

Always susceptible to ‘authority’,
you would find intensely but quietly compelling
the presence, aura and promise of an authoritative woman,
one sure of her work, of her power.

A powerful woman:
you have power, you are power,
your own power.
You love or would love
your own power reflected back at you
from a powerful man or a powerful woman,
it’s the power speaks.

You love that power, a power that seeds a new growth
of authority and energy in you.
You can be like fire; fire takes everything to yourself
and fire gives yourself completely to what you take.

Further: beneath the open secret of a woman and her father
(that whole ancient opera), there is (it seems to me)
the deeper secret of the woman and her (m)other.
You want your m(other) in your arms.

9 April 2003