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Teach what words say now

then go back and savor
some olds that chanced to say
the thing that is so.

Bring the news. Leave the olds
to the army of the almost
who spoil the truth.

The truth is always the next.

Not clamor, not machine,
but quiet, like a man sneaking across a frontier
sneak into tomorrow.

The only clue is the next word,
don’t follow your nose, follow your mouth.

15 October 2003
MOSES CONTENT
with showing the way doubted the words he was given to say?
Is that what kept him out of the promised land?

Or is it that he’s still seeking, his forty years in the desert are still going on, step by step, while his impetuous people brashly rushed over Jordan and took possession of what they thought was the promised land. They have been rushing, we have been rushing, ever since, possessed and possessing, which is why thousands of years seem to have gone by for us while he is still walking. That is why no one has ever seen Moses’s grave.

And why we are not in the promised land. The land of the promise is always before, always it is the simple land illumined only by the light of tomorrow’s sun, it is a place we can never walk in today. If we walk, it is on the way. If we settle down and forget, then the promised land is always close, close as tomorrow, never closer, never further away.

If we rejoin Moses on his prospect rock, we will hear the next thing he says. It bears keenly on the promised land, he is speaking or repeating the promise itself. A true promise avails to the end of the world. If the land promised were given to the people, there would be no more promise. The promise is worth more to us than the land, Moses says, how long it has taken him to learn this. He has had to refuse so much and so many, and the only thing he keeps is the promise.

How can he keep the promise Another made? Do not stop and do not settle. The Sabbath is the promised land, only there and then do you stop. You know it is the Sabbath because all people stand still then and stay where they are. It is the fatal ever-recurring week that brings you to the heaven of the Sabbath, to rest a moment in the wandering made for the life of the people.

15 October 2003
RAPPEL

the rock
walks down itself

across Broadway at 23rd
where big streets

star together
and a park

how can space alone
be so Lucifer?

he caught and saw
the bench was clean

the worshippers of dogs
were leashed to their places

a few brown leaves scuttled
on the Jersey wind

and so on and so on
base of a statue

park bench and he
who called himself me
as you do too
alone on it

a mesa in the Mohave
the solitary

happens
conspicuously here

he arrives at the base
of this thought like sunshine

falling among pigeons
only geometry lasts

he used to think this city
not he lets it talk

the place where he is
is where it falls.

15 October 2003
Abandon feeling

for a moment
and feel better.
Let thinking go
and watch the thinker.

In heavy rainfall overnight
the leaves came down.
Amber ground, wind
in the sky, uneasy sense

of human evidence at work
in natural affairs.
What road leads
away from thinking?

15 October 2003
WEATHER BUREAU

They told me all the while the wind was coming
but I am not concerned with things I can’t pronounce
at least it’s hard to love them. Remember
what what’s her name said about some book —
I can’t love somebody I can’t get into my mouth.
Probably Russian. It wasn’t exactly like that but you
(where did you come from? have you been here
all the while, imported or implied, by the sheer
undertow of talking, are you the animal of language?)
you get the point. In pillowed enstasies
many an adolescent has sobbed out your name
so by now you’d think I’d know it. But who was
listening when they came, not I, I had risen
and gone from the room world to the street world
where things are content with coming and going
and only a fool stands still, like Socrates,
or me now, decades later, on this little hillock
on which the tranquil dead leaves come to rest.

15 October 2003

[Observe how J.G.Hamann, the Beatles, and Paul Valéry all come together in the last lines.]
USES OF WISDOM

The only way to catch tiger cubs is to go into the tiger’s den. Logic and Natural History suggest this proposition is not strictly (“only way”) true, but the fortune cookie insists it is, and print has its own seductions, eat this oracle, a logic for the teeth to chew in the harsh light of the Dragon Buffet with its huge photomurals of Hong Kong by night. These people must know more about tigers than I do, maybe they know tiger cubs never come out to play, stay home and learn fierceness from studying old scrolls, study biting and preening their stripes while their savage mother saunters towards us. So we linger over oolong wondering how to interpret this wisdom, one among so many, how to apply it to the tigerless dimensions of normal life. What can it mean? Buy roses at the florist, keep out of the woods? Maybe it means everything is dangerous, anything you want to catch or buy or have has to be fought for, princess marooned
in shrubbery of fire, that music itself
must be shielded from the cave of silence
where all the diverse tones conspire
to sing one thing? What has that
got to do with tigers? I don’t know.
This pentatonic muzak gets on my nerves.

16 October 2003
EXAMINE THESE THINGS

the least

the limber, the escapes
from matter or into it again
from northern magic
where there is no fire, pyre.

Long ago it left off perceiving
and was just there,
a page of glass
to slip between a seeing and a seen.

2.
I wear my sentences too long
I should let them linger for a little
space between the t-shirt and the waist
to bare the belly of the matter
the gentle harmless world
ideas are coming from,
navel of names, soft
origins of our hard words.

3.
Proportions of what I’d call a trolley car
and a cashier kissed in a close-up dream
dissect my city map — parks, churches, places
of no interest — to lift out just the subway lines
like the skeleton of a fish in a cartoon,
dangled by a cat, les grattes, and waft them,
all the pretty colored network lines
and think you know how to get home,
jamais, as I was saying, or hardly ever.

4.
Because home too is a prisoner escaped
and a cell you have to levant from in your day
to meet your good hour (translate in French,
do not be idiomatic, be literal, my darling,
as a lip is, reading a lover’s lip the only way it can,
press against the obvious) so don’t go home.
Stay here with me and the pigeons, and count buses.
Why do people passing look so afraid?

17 October 2003
A rock and lime tree bracts

each bears four
dust-grey beige seeds.
A lawn and Fall, leaf
arithmetic. The leaf book
reads a tale or two,
the light’s adventures
on its way to me,
hear them slice through air,
find me, find me,
make me one of those who know.

17 October 2003
rent this space

from space and have
borrowed the sunlight
from the sun and never
pay anything back

will they be waiting
for me when I die
with their bills and claims
and hands outstretched
their mouths or
is there anybody
there after all

after all is said
and done is there none?

17 October 2003
OCTOBER

Walk out early past the empty
houses love used to live in
all the empty houses filled
with people I don’t know

but I know the brook and the heron
the steam in front of my face
is my own breath
and that knows me

I am not all of me a stranger
waking in October
mist gossiping in the trees
and one blue jay cries.

18 October 2003
Lap dance

put all my feeling
in my knees

underwater weather

animals fall out of dream
and run away
you hurry to stand by sheep tomorrow

into the closed petting zoo
through the peremptory pig’s pen
bothersome grunt

it is alarming to be close to what
has no shared language except fear

in the gazebo
sit waiting for spring.

18 October 2003
THE NEW

Breaking the thing and making more
making by breaking the way a knife

plant root be vague be vine
the teacher hides below the stairs

waits for you to disappear
the blood is in your shoes

you can’t run away or churches do
so you were born a muscle man

a girl who said o-re in public
separatist flame they still write Latin

in the jungles of Oblivia the rocks
spirit duplicator loco motives

don’t you see they’ve always been alive
they’re waiting for us to detect their imposture

see through the rock and every one’s a door.

19 October 2003
BASTARD FRISBEES

cosmic scale I rant
against the dogs of catch
or comic book dream caresses
pronged lonelinesses

make him feel good about himself
a boring dream with nobody in it
like a bottle of Königsberg philosophy
just objects in relation without the objects

actually being there, fall on a mound
of shadow a tall pile of lines
will never make a tree

World Series ’03 New York vs Florida
mediaeval allegory the Striving
of Summer against Winter when
everybody knows winter wins

the dogs run through the street

and I’m the bare red beach north of Daytona
where a man can be alone with his pelican
and smite his breast with compassion for
what he is not sure
    but sure he is how much it hurts
and all intellectuals are traitors anyhow
only poets are loyal to the fact of place

or is it summer wins and stuff
happens green again, no sports or politics
drive it, if drive is the word
get my hands on a big van
roar down Jack Highway past the pink motels

can still remember what whiskey tastes like
after a thousand years of my marvelous Koran.

19 October 2003
THE ATTACK ON TIME

Oublier est obéir
— Alain Finkielkraut

The attack on time
begins. I adore you
for the cloth you bear
and the brain behind it

learn Spanish this one afternoon
and rip the fabric of our sweet encounter
dying together into a new adventure
where we walk out against the dragon

hands sticky with each other
clasp the scary pommel of our single weapon
against the politics of ignorance
to free the slaves down in the shadows

trapped in the cobwebs of forgetting.

19 October 2003
AUGURY

you are most
of the things I could mean
but there is more

more to you and more of me
so we must be free
to not be we

a tarot card permitting change
a sly
skeleton reaping red wheat.

19 October 2003
rainy day

rainy day
no shadows

unless the rain falling
itself is shadow

of some arising
bright elsewhere

is it wet there too?

19 October 2003