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SONATA

In the heart of measure
lies a wild surmise

1.
to have something to say about things at last!
to say at least how many of them there are
or how big one of them is or how much
another one weighs or how much
water it displaces when it drowns

it makes me feel superior to a rock
that can’t ever get out of its dream

yet it makes me feel I can stand firm
while squadrons of blackbirds are driven far and wide
eternally repelled by the enemy sky

2.
now here I want to put my hand inside you
whenever you look at me just like that
so I won’t miss a single gesture on the landscape of your face
whatever the rest of us might be doing down in there
in the lost geology of our feelings
where nothing lasts, where sierras of orgasm
subside to abyssal plains next morning
and fog horns sob among snickering gulls
3.
put yourself in my shoes,
            things whimper
inside when the toe’s too tight,
            in Carnival
also the streets are hard the sea is wet
nothing changes but the blood forgets

all these smiling people signify an enormous villainy
the many practice on the few
            you do this to me,
you bitch, except there’s only one of you

4.
have you ever felt surrounded by a stare?
well I have and it’s like living in the wrong part of France
oil refineries and housing projects and people
think La Vache Qui Rit is cheese

            the names are right
and everything else is a bad movie, to put it mildly
in terms I can understand

            sure I love the wind
even if it’s not the mistral
            but I’m suspicious of the sun
which has peeked into one too many windows
before it gets to me
            poor me is what I mean
out of gas and no car to put it in

5.
People break laws to keep from having feelings,
always hoping for firecrackers and parades
of samba dancers prancing from the mirrors
through the ruins of the public library
tigers in the tennis court
culture packs its bags
and flees by night across the borders of the obvious
into whatever is up there where Canada used to be
and you could frolic in the built-in skepticism
of a bi-lingual society, if you call that society.
My Uncle Owen wouldn’t have gone there on a bet,
Schenley’s was good enough for him, *Begin the Beguine.*
FANTASIE IN C MAJOR

We have always been here. Rhineland not long ago, Vienna the winter before that, I licked your stone, rode beside the trolley car, all the music turns into words here, how can I change, all the commodities winter in sweat somewhere in the Everglades. We need a whole new fucking alphabet so many beer bottles on the wall. I don’t know what’s wrong with Schumann but love has something to do with it, that ruin, color of brass, a river, a bridge, Cain and Abel, snowstorm in a crystal ball. I see the final end of everything. It is a city south from here, a girl has a fantasy she rehearses nightly St Peter’s Dome the obelisk a cat prowling through a poem’s lines deep inside the shadows of a book.

22 February 2002
Skeleton bushes ruddy already with spring
telegrams used to be great universities
say what you know in ten words or less
they can figure the rest out for themselves
that’s what culture means you don’t have
to say everything but here I’m doing it again

I love you for your obsessions, you’re bad as springtime
dependably coming back to that dog bone we love
lick and somehow forget until a stupid leaf reminds
by uncurling in chilly sunshine then I love you again

who cares who I mean by you, I don’t even know
who you mean by me, all my authority is what one
word does to another in this endless nightmare
we’re in by the nature of language

— a mouth is part of the head isn’t it — that’s what’s
so boring about these parties, everybody
has to question everything, we should all go down
to the Bad Dog Café and watch the strippers
the last people on the planet with something to say.

23 February 2002
CONTRA NATURAM

Don’t you ever get tired of teasing the trumpeter shoving your sunlight down his bell? And the sailors with such white ankles sprawling drunk on sidewalks hauled home by shipmates, isn’t it sad that time and weather (one word in French, that tells you something) are like a bully older brother who won’t let one day go by without a punch, pinch, pratfall, preacher come to supper and all your books get thrown away? And things, things keep rhyming with one another (sun and trumpet calls, wet ankles and the moon), isn’t it time for time to let the actual go free from the prison of the natural? I’ll drink to that and sleep till then. Wake me when the last resemblance fades from shady thinking.

23 February 2002
FROM BEATNIK SLEEP AROUS’D

Watching it go by before it wakes —
dream’s undercoat protects me
still a little bit from the day.

An unremembered dream works best,
a pneumatic sort of hush between
what was and what is. Both of them
look pretty sketchy now.
Don’t be here, don’t be now.
Be between.

24 February 2002
CREPUSCULE DU JOUR

I take it that’s the comfortable
vegetable velvet sort of masturbation
tide D’Annunzio was after
in his famous *Dawn shears off*
shadow poem that Bjoerling sang
brighter than the sunrise it deplored,
contradiction on contradiction.
Gin with diet tonic. Be ashamed
to live among so many secrets
like rain always looking for some dark
yielding dusty place to hide.
Hence planets round their suns,
hence phantom matter cruising in the sky
or watching itself go by, the way you sit
with binoculars trying to hypnotize
bare locust trees to fill up with birds,
in scopic lust. I watch your movie till I go blind.

24 February 2002
THE SUN AND A VIOLIN

Threaded together
weaving helical
ascensions every
glimpse a challenge

the Green Knight
stands before me
in the sky
Die if you dare

tenderness
I am crying now
of a young man’s neck
I used to know.

25 February 2002

(This is what John Henry Smelter’s first sonata did to me.)
ON MY WAY

On my way to eternity I went through time
it took a while
to understand
what all the standing meant

waiting for miracles
waiting for explanations
that would fit observation and comprehension
together firmly and raptly

as two bodies know each other
and all this waiting all this wanting was
itself the explanation

by the time I was timeless again
I knew everything I was capable of understanding
nobody taught me everybody did.

25 February 2002
On my way to eternity I was timeless a long time
then I was old. Being young was an alternative
I hadn’t considered till now — being young
is like a smooth shiny book that lies in your lap
you can’t or wont keep your fingertips from stroking.

25 February 2002
A MAN NAMED EVERYBODY

A man named everybody came walking through the door
he led a horse behind him and his shoulders were broad
he was talking fast as a toiletflushes and his shoes
looked like they just came out of the store, seemed to me
the horse was in control, kept nudging his senator
along with his big dry nose till they stood at the bar.
Dante for me and Hell for the horse he said or seemed to
I’m not good at these Near Western accents Ohio
West Virginia up the holler it might have been Hell for my
house and I have no horse, there is this animal no man can ride,
he walks behind me he walks at my side he is me but not mine
I can do nothing with myself and there’s nobody else.
I think he said that but I’m really not sure, my eyesight is poor,
I always love talking to strangers so I asked how his tricks were
and he bought me a glass of something I’d never tasted before,
friendship is as rare as a rabbit with horns, he said, a word
spoke in kindness goes further than Galveston, I could barely
hold onto the rim of his meaning if he actually meant anything,
it didn’t matter, words are nice all by themselves, probably
I got everything wrong, I love making mistakes with strangers
where else would tomorrow come from, o please take advantage of me.

25 February 2002
Remembering the full moonlight last night,
be the moon. I had to go out and feed
the birds this morning. Be the birds.
Surround my life with your particulars
until my skin is Maori’d with your shadows
and you are utterly inscribed in me. He prayed
like the ghost of a drowned sailor still
trying to sweet-talk the sea.

26 February 2002
SAGES OF CONTRADICTION

Be against everything

lean against everything

be everything you used to hate

be everything.

26 February 2002
Call as you pass by
mountebanks of harmony
trick me at two a.m.
make me think this music’s mine

because I hear it, almost
it hears itself inside me
song of the world sad as it really is
sad as mirrors sad as doors

friendship governments disease
all spoken by an intelligent violin.
Then the busker shifts off down the street
but I am the street and nothing ends.

26 February 2002
paltry, on the way to
back
whatever side that is
the bearer
of all our tidings

sunlast pressed down
into the adam yield

a mark in dirt
someone walked by

2.
said to be cool of the evening
when this hearthope
was the heat of the night

marl pit digger
whitehand shapes
all the divinities you could

see try remember
dress them in your silks
when nobody’s listening

27 February 2002
The private transaction of revelation.

To witness is sharing
strip club scope
solemn high mass

I know you go to mass because the music
because you look through the mirror

make fun of me I believe in your body

the suddenness of being someone
all at once who was never before

theogony. You marry my eyes.

27 February 2002
Why can’t I remember what you wore
the day nothing happened, the blue mountain
wore a wooden church, the car wore white,
it was a wedding in Austria we still are married,
and then I do remember, remember a snapshot
of the scene and all the colors chevron together
like an animal waking up and running away.
Everything goes into the woods. The woods
wear us to distract the sky, we mill around
preaching and repenting fast as water flows
repenting of every touch. Nobody loves today
me enough. And the woods, the open
secret of the planet, forever from the north.
But your eyes are the cities on the plain
opening doors here and there in all that seen.
You wore the habit of my thought, I sinned,
I wanted to make sin my special tree.

28 February 2002
So here’s the problem. There is a space. It is represented on a piece of white paper as a black rectangle of the same proportions as the paper on which it rests, though somewhat smaller. That is to say, everything we say or see is nested in something just like it but a little bigger, a little paler. Where is the edge of anything?

In the black — which, now that we look close and hold the paper still against the shivering of wind, windows open, cars passing, might just be very dark — there are two smaller rectangles, differently proportioned, differently disposed: upright or erect. Windows, they are windows. We see that at once, two of them. Illuminated. One window inhabited by people, one void of apparent person. The disposition of these smaller rectangles — at center and right of the dark oblong, the primary mark they inhabit — suggests, by ease of symmetry, a third window we can’t see. Lightless, it might still be there.

Or there may be no window there at all, just uninterrupted busywork of brick or block.

We are fascinated by what we see. What are those people doing? The ones in the window to the right, the ones with most light. How are they using their light?

What is going on in the dimly lit middle of the dark, what we take to be the middle window? Visible enough to see that no one is there. Why is there no one in the room? Because it comes to that. Windows are not just holes in walls, not at all. Windows are the eyes of rooms, the eye the wind comes through, yes, but the eye the room sees out through. The room is looking at us. Why is there nobody in it?
An illuminated room (it must be a room) is looking out at us. It makes us uneasy, this eye that sees us when we’re trying to look into that other room and see what those people are up to, when we’re trying to decide if all that dark over to the left of the picture conceals yet another window, another room in which something really interesting is going on, something that happens only in the most severe dark.

Uneasy as we may be, we are still compelled (that is not too strong a word for the way we are moved), under all, before all, after all, compelled to gaze hard as we can against that third window, which may not even exist as such. It may just be wall. But what are they doing in there? A dark window is as bad as a wall. What are they doing?

Now the passion play begins, the eternal pantomime of what our minds know to be going on, always be going on, in the dark. There is no mercy in the dark, no suspension of narrative or image. The story plunges on harder than ever, we are stuck with what we remember, we are stuck with everything we ever thought. That is the hard thing about dark windows. Black glass through which we cannot see, which we cannot break, because this is a picture, picture of a glossy smooth black surface from which we cannot successfully detach our thoughts or dissuade them from knowing what they know, can’t stop thinking they know, from what must, must, be going on. In there.

28 February 2002
Amtrak
Dog under ground. Under
earth a dig is running,
my fear tracks him realer than radar
trots below me, waits his hour.
Our hour. The minute when I meet
the dog under the ground.

Dark fur
his dusty fur, black teeth
his dusty mouth, his closed
cruel dusty eyes.
Only his hunger
is wet with desire, I feel him pacing
always with me, undistracted,
no place for him to go
but where I go,
the dog
beneath the ground.

28 February 2002
NYC
If you write words over words
you enshrine essences
of what they mean. What they said
says you now, essences
in other words declare.

The cathedral called me. You also have one. As to say this stone loves you too.

We have built so many churches in France, our churches here unseen, they vanish in trees, stores, endless boulevards of apartment houses, nobody needs spires, nobody needs shapely spaces, we have hips that don’t believe in God. Are God. The streets are the only heaven ever.

We all know that, we have only what we are, one another sometimes, a wind almost always, the rich answers in the hands of a thing. It was strangely quiet when I crossed Fifth, I listened and all the people
passing seemed to listen too.
To hear the echoes
of what no one said
while the dying sun
still hammered on the glass.

28 February 2002
NYC