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PERMISSIONS

Can it be what I wasn’t thinking,  
the fur of the monkey crouching  
in the Shiva shrine  
along the road up from Pathankot  
into the high meadows  
where the purple trees  
Californians would call jacaranda  
bloomed in all that heat  
under the snow peaks so close  
on the handheld horizon,

not so small, but crouching small,  
same color as the stone, same stone  
Tilopa crushed sesame seeds on  
inside, at right angles to  
the little silver snake, the little  
polished lingam made  
from what looks like meteorite,

God’s phallus fallen from heaven,  
now let me think  
about that fur, how hot it must be  
in there, the monkey moveless  
in the siesta heat, the parasites,  
the dandruff, the rights of man  
suspended for the whole  
afternoon of his life,
how far they are, how far
we have fallen
down from those mountains
we see so clear
as if they were the strange
white fruit these blue acacias grow.

23 June 2003
Cuttyhunk
How much of the sea is evidence?
Drake, Coronado, Alvarado,
Vasco, Xavier, Slocum, who
can find their furrows in the waves,
look at water and stop remembering,
that would be an art,
a celebration of a comedy
written by everyone,
the play that no one’s ever seen
and everyone has been.

23 June 2003
The flagpole, the yacht club burgee,
the sun after days of rain,
you know people are happy and for once
you don’t want to take their joy away.
Even a devil gets a day off,
and we are devils who have opinions,
attitudes, feelings, hell is having feelings.
No, hell is believing what you feel.

Con or trick, red satin
lapels to your cloak,
scarlet lining, the mercy
of color eases a hard world,

for lo! I was bathed in color and
then the man’s arms started to wave
and the princess demanded her dinner,
the spring freshets gushed down the fell
and they slept early on the moors
dreaming of skeletons
who spoke to them gently in French,
soft wet words in such dry mouths.

23 June 2003
MELISANDE

But what did I dream,

a blue woman, a French poet

who hated me and scorned me

and why I could not tell,

I assured her Mary Garden

sang the first Mélisande

in 1902, she said no, she didn’t,

she wasn’t the first, and looked at me

balefully as if it mattered,

and it mattered, to me, not Mary,

but this angry, why, French poet

why did she hate me so?

A man who asks Why about his dreams

will probably believe anything you tell him,

so tell me, Or do you hate me too?

23 June 2003
DAWN OVER THE VINEYARD

Spill from that first hour
sound glad in rain

23 VI 03
Things we are close to
cool wind out of the hot sun glare
remembers someone’s name
turns from the window
to face the dark room.

24 June 2003
Cuttyhunk
SEMAPHORES

I keep wanting to say that word,
semaphores, over and over
and I don’t know why, don’t know
which faces of its meanings
face me now,

    sign-bearers, is it, or a trim
young sailor in white
waving his arms orderly, his flags
dIPPING alphabets on a distant ship,

a telling body
outlined against the light

or is it the sound,
semaphores and nenuphars,
the sound of flowers
easing in the sea wind,

an old smell
from a fragrant century,
breathless, the smell of words

everything we do
is a sign to someone
if they can read it
a sign begins when it gets read,
walk through the long streets
making signs to me
with all your body
I learn to read

languages
easy, book
are easy,
it’s reading that is hard.
reading in the streets
the woods the dark café

words on the page
are just practice marks

signs of signs, the real signs
are elsewhere and other, ever,

stars, shepherds, babies, sheep,
the wind shifts, a wave lifts,

listen.

24 June 2003
Cuttyhunk
CHIAN BUSINESS

in all this hot glare off the sea
a cold wind plays around my knees

get dressed already
this planet is not perfect

is perfect.

24 June 2003
Gnostalgia

the Island where I knew
she is waiting
to wipe the salt off my knees
with her intelligent linens

the Island where I came
is on the other side of knowing
the pain of waiting
is like the pain of being there

when you know you have to leave,
you know so much
on these islands, the wind
is always bringing news,

all news is bad, everything new
is good, the difference blurs
what you used to think
was your brain, now not sure,

it’s changeable and white,
surf beating in, seagulls iceskating against the sky
who knows what’s happening,
you know, that’s the trouble,
you know you have to leave
this island, every island,
everything is rapt
in the article of going,

the greater the pleasure the
greater the pain, that’s the way
it works, and everything
follows you down the shore,

stumbles, feels the cold
surge around the ankles,
decides, decides otherwise,
*I will not leave this island*

you cry, and then you’re gone.

24 June 2003
AN EPISODE FROM THE SAGAS

a horse a man a stumble
an acceptance of this place
as the only place

an island
means I’m here
and cannot be elsewhere
by the nature of some fact

built into the stones of the shore
I stumble on

the way all thoughts
come back to the same old
thinking that all my life
has been thinking me.

24 June 2003
FINDING THE GROUND

So much space
so few words

the nation
to insist

a revolution’s
timeless

a piston
answering

all that means
a word is a tone of voice

you spend the summer
of your life

figuring whose.

I have to tell you what I meant to dare
a blue exhaustion round your perfect hair
I had to answer when the cardinal sang
its martinet objurgations, the phone rang
in my head there is no one to answer is there
no one to complain to about the broken pattern
the death of order, the slacking of a lover’s care
because all we are is one another
doesn’t that mean I am you, and we
some species of shorthand democracy
birds on the roof in vulgar sunshine
owning nothing but what happens to us

so few words
to follow
what the words
are saying

they will lead
everywhere
fill up all space
with revelation

disclose
the act inside
the actual
beyond the screen

of seems.

25 June 2003
Cuttyhunk
PRAYERS

1.
Almost nude
the gladiator
sets the lions loose —

Extreme us, o Lord!
the Christians cry
and from the neighbor in the sky

a sudden cloudburst comes
that chills the cats
drenches them, away

they slink, the martyrs
pray O rescue our
poor pious meat!

The emperor, empress,
the aediles fierce
all scurry under cover —

hail now, and swirls
of snow, all thronged
with lightning flashes

while happy Christians shiver in the sand.
2.
It’s a Mormon name
a kind of mercy
to have something new to say
in all that old rock

sandstone sutras
start with a name

a new name, Nephi,
Jared, I forget the others,
they sound like Lamech,

like a Hebrew king
spoken sideways,
like a river in Pentecost

between rows of chestnut trees
in flower, sound
like nothing I ever heard,

give me, Lord, a new new name
a name so true so new
I don’t have to remember

I just know.

25 June 2003
Cuttyhunk
MEASUREMENT

Measure me and find
there’s not so much
for all my size

informed, not wise,
impassioned, not inspired,
all about touch

the skin of mind,
not the one that tired
bodies tell their lies.

25 June 2003
Cuttyhunk
IMPROVEMENTS

For example the poll tax
the water fountain, there are
a few improvements but how long
it takes to get there, homo
hominí lupus still, kill
as many as they can
and then. Then what.
Let somebody else take
responsibility. The seed
of politics in our dumb wind.

Don’t think about it.
Think about God. Think
what God thinks, even better.

How long before Evolution
lets us turn off our ears?

26 June 2003
Boston
THE WANDERER

Not have to know
what has to need

need and know
know and need

how many queens
to sit upon one throne

all the touches
abdicate control

let happen now
what no one knows

no one will
ever know what happened

past or happens still
or happen will

nobody’s need
erases what you know

no know no need
all those queens

my lonely throne.

26 June 2003, Boston