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ICON

of the permanent underclass
the dirty hair the face
as a blur of meaning
lost in the green smoke
betoken lust paramours a moment
in the sun. Fruit
from the dream tree.

12 March 2001

Thinking is a strange animal
You hear it stirring in the woods
Or feel it there
Watching whatever you are watching
Sniffing whatever scent comes down the wind
And you catch too

But it is there before you, this thinking, this strange
Animal that thinking is,
You feel the earth shake gently when it moves,
You hear it brush against the trees of that forest

And then you suddenly have to know, and you don't know,
What that forest is
Where thinking lives

The trees grow close together there
And hardly move, there is not much wind there, not much wind
And most of the moving there is thinking,

Thinking winding in between the branches, the stepping
Quietly deftly between one tree and another
Never tripping

And that forest is the place referred to
When I say *I am thinking of you now and always will*

This thinking goes on and on
in a place in me that is the shape and texture and geography of you.

12 March 2001

THE ANALYTIC

the subtraction of you
is the element of this
chemistry the molecular
weight of absence

for my hands sank in the basin
either side of the bonsai
impermeable but the little juniper
sucked in water

everywhere there were empty hands
exactly the size of my hands
into which my hands fitted
with all the precision of chemistry

and I knew that they and my hands
must be looking for something
another kind of absence another shape
from which an identity could be inferred

there is no longer any point in naming.

13 March 2001

something free

the number of the beast
is difficult to reckon

start here with the toes
the bruised thigh the smoking cock

and these dull eyes
stare through the half-frozen river

it's still here still ordinary
weather no matter how much it hurts

nothing happened
it's just the other side of anything

13 March 2001

caring is like a caltrop always
pointing up to stab the foot
horse and rider crumble
under thought's impact up

blue veins of coal ride out the snow
and a big lazy turkey swims from tree to tree
over the empty turnpike
think of this and remember 13 degrees

anywhere else and ice pinked along juniper
it did not matter where going was
he came home
a different man always
the map was always wrong

14 March 2001

Soracte. Temple of Apollo.

Silver orpiment parchment gum.
Names off the skin on the palm of the hand.
Write on wrist. The crucified
Bears your inscription in His narrow room.

Stretched on an iron cot in a vague hotel.
People passing under the windows. Loud
Other languages do not disturb
The monolingual heart. Clang of hoof

Hansom cabs on Sunday mornings. Cam.
Shaft. Brake. Shift. Vulcanized
Rubber felloes at your rims or. Ridiculous
Inventions, you can't even tell which war.

His room. His veins. His ulnar nerve.
Things tear when you hang them from the sky.
Lakota. The other side of the coin
Is a book. The other side of a book is the sea.

14 March 2001

Candle snuffer balanced on window ledge
Fell. What vibration it answered
I could not feel.
I thought it was a bird
Falling through the window,
Bronze, an angel
Of interruption. Whatever
I was thinking now I am thinking this.

15 March 2001

ON THE DAY AFTER

Everything is about Africa
where death was invented
on the day after
some god invented life

and sold it to the Souls
the day after they fell
into the sweet water of rivers
Kongo Nile Rhine Mississippi
on the day after they slipped
out of the grey heaven of time
into the blue heaven of space
and were earth

They fell everywhere, the Souls,
but only in Africa did they pay attention
and notice the colors among which they had come
and on the day after that
they began to do things with the colors

and some colors — green especially
and red — turn almost solid
when you touch them or even
think about them a lot, as the Souls did

and when the colors turned solid
they were Things
and the Souls started thinking about things
and then about one another
till you turned solid also
and were someone else
and I was me and we were people
on the day after we were colors

people in Africa
and someone said Let's live
and we did

and on the day after that
we got the idea that living
didn't mean much unless it contrasted
with something else
and that was how death got dreamed up

and we took it all very seriously
serious as flesh and bone and blood and iron
and there's still more of it in Africa than anywhere
we look at pictures of Africa
and all we see is people dying

they are going back behind the colors
to find something
something the dying must have great hunger for.

15 March 2001

SPERL

Sitting in the café he imagined a new planet
with the conventional continents transposed.
Cobalt, not Italy. That's not who he meant.

He wanted a pen to draw or write it down,
spilled coffee, moved the spill around the table
with the tip of his ring finger admiring his hands

their grace their veins the world they were leaving.

15 March 2001

it is the imaginary that matters
flow from that blue tiled mosque
which is the real meaning of
what you carry around inside your head

dome of the dark

a dumb woman signing by the wall
blind men are fingering to tell

I smell your hair just where it rests
sunup sullen on the smooth of nape

and opening your eyes is the first prayer.

16 March 2001

isn't there something he could say or do here
to take the oxygen out of the air and hold it
suddenly cold solid in his hands never

take a city and slice it along the lines of streets
take a pirate ship and shove it into the sun
take an ax to the wine barrel and forget the smaller measures

the night fell apart around him
a stone in the campfire turned white and crumbled

isn't there anything he can remember that does any good?

16 March 2001

The silence now.

What keeps me from saying anything
Is wanting not to say it to you.

I am tired of talking to you.
Tired of you.

I want to talk to language or to them,
To talk for them,
The ones I never pay any attention to
Because I'm always talking to you

Because I care only about what you think
How you respond to my hands
And I'm tired of that at last

I want to talk to them.

And I want the words to talk to me
For their sake and my sake and for nobody,

You've heard enough already.
You don't need any more language from me.
Now it's time for all the others
Never yet touched with my telling.

And I am silent, abashed by the magnitude of them,
The beauty of them I have just begun to consider.

16 March 2001

BATAAN

He woke up thinking why.
A place in the war a march there a dying.
Woke up with it why.

What is dying in him.
What is marching
To the end of itself and why.

Bataan or Bata'an.
A spot where they column of dying men
Stops marching and lets some of them actually die.

What is dying. What is a man or men in him and they are dying.
Where is Bataan. The Philippines.
He was that when he was eight, in school, in a pageant,

He was all the islands.
A peninsula is an almost-island.
A penis is an almost man.

The man is dying. Bata'an, with a glottal
Stop along the way to dying.
A sob or such a noise. A sob.

It is a matter of difference. A matter
Also of indifference. How can one thing
Be the same. How can dying be so alive.

It lasts all his life. Like a war.
Like an old leather bag full of mildewed books.
Smell sweet and weird. Like water.

17 March 2001

WINTER

Death march of rivers. Pewter
they look, are poisonous
the way metal is. Metals are.

Something I can't read
spelt by snow trace down the bluff
across. Words are no match for rivers.

Twigs they seem that must close up be branches.

Dante said. I have dug down
into the hollow place beneath each acre,

you own this land, did you know that,
all the way down to the center of the earth?

17 March 2001

BY HEEL

recalcitrant, that is the heels
dug in and scraping
against the tug of war

a rope holds us
and draws us to the work

fated to begin

2
it is when you come down to it
a species of migration

against the lares and penates carried
insolent to foreign foyers

where no good fire lights

18 March 2001

PRESQUE PRINTEMPS

spring to me, puppy thought
and gnaw my principles
until a decent idea
can chase me, wolf, over your hills

18 March 2001

come back from the races blue in the shadow the tree
ready to fall you see the white wood of the branch break
you hear what you hear

dowry the crow pays to the sky
a shadow
sprawling quick quick on the ground

see it again before it's here it's gone
the face of what happens
pretends not to recognize you as you pass

18 March 2001

Trying to escape from a book
We fell into the world
We remember everything we need
Because we have come
Into the world where need is everything.

19 March 2001

Elegant train
Over the imaginary trestle
Crosses the luminous lagoon
Between us. You are the light.

19 March 2001

a hundred feet ahead
a red fox crosses pauses goes

in a moment I catch up
with the fine rank reek of him

then it's gone too
into the underbrush

second growth moonlight
some snow left a shadow

maybe moving
virgin of the world.

19 March 2001

NAMES

the ones we pray to day by day
their lights are intelligent and calm
over the brazen bridges the ecstatic subways
flooded with the theology of flesh

when the natural eloquence of disaster
has silenced travelers. Cars roll by like tanks
every street is an invasion.
Hands scramble to unscroll the sky.

All things shine in borrowed light.

19 March 2001