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THE WORD

**You set your body free
by doing this,
 a word
spoken to the thigh alone
by some book you far
are reading on your lap.**

**But the skin hears
and tells the bone
to explain it to the brain,
for the bone is naught if not
a Roman highway to the capital,
an aqueduct of living water,
a cathedral on the march.**

**Little by little all the body hears
and smiles, I swear it, the body smiles
in an all-forgiving way, but you,
you're too busy reading to notice anything.**

**So it takes matters into its own hands,
the book slips from your fingers,
 sleep**

**knows you and time passes
undisturbed by busybody consciousness.**

**This is the law of skin, an old word
that once meant shine, the beauty
of us gleaming out on all sides.**

12 November 2014

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for C

**Anybody can understand
what I'm saying.**

**Only you
understand why I'm saying it.**

12 November 2014

AURUM

**When gold was still a metal
a princess knew her job:
impersonate the prince and drive
the paynim from the land.
But who were they?**

**Paynim meant pagans, pagans meant
the people of the land, who lived
believing in the power and sanctity
of everything they touched, lived
glad under the dome of the sky
no man had ever touched or ever will.
They worshipped everything they saw
and some few things they never could
except sometimes on autumn evenings
something pale through wheat fields
or passing through the changing trees.**

**If there were no pagans
there would be no land, no harvest, so why
would anyone want to get rid of them?**

**So she impersonated a priest instead
and baptized them all**

with some special water that she knew
and she alone, baptized them
in the name of some idea that
at that moment happened to her mind.
So now all the people were still people,
her people, smiling and making love and dying
the way honest people should.

Now she
could go back to being princess
and use the prince instead
for some of the few things princes
sometimes are good for,
it all depends,

but they sat too, at evening,
drinking that same water
from a cup of gold—
a bright,
yellowish, massive metal
that keeps its nature even when alloyed,
a color that resists corrosion.

13 November 2014

[for *Traubenritter* n.s.]

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I watched an albatross once. A stuffed bird, huge wings spread wide, it hung on wires from the shadowy ceiling of a museum far from any southern ocean, cleverly suspended as if in flight. Am I like this bird, a presentable replica of some self I pretend to be? Or once was?

13 November 2014

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**When you've come to the middle
you're done. Or home. Or who
are you when you travel
if not the destination itself, on your soft
wounded feet making its long
journey to itself? That's what pilgrimage is,
the holy places coming back to themselves,
using all your striving to renew themselves
again and remember what they mean.**

14 November 2014

TRAVELER

**Only your shadow moves.
You are still home
dreading of the cold
altars of Rome, the blood
soaked altars of Yucatan.
There is no way to
leave where you are.**

**14 November 2014
[15.XI.14]**

AVIAN

1.

**No fruit on any tree
just birds
they console the empty spaces
leaves left—
they cheer the cold sky.**

2.

**Why does every bird
alone or in company
remind me of myself
sitting still, moveless, slow?**

3.

**Its existence is swift
absolute ardent,
gone. We too
elapse in perpetuity.
The paradox
of leaving names behind.**

4.

**Or are they too
waiting for the sky to open
waiting for something
something else?**

14 November 2014

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**And if a cloud fell
and if a man rose
or a rose in the snow
melted all the winter
and the earth answered?**

14 November 2014

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**Brown paper bag
soon be are thing
or sack they call it
in Montana, brown
paper brown paper
you make me a kid
again watching
watching the grocery man
adding up numbers
fast on the bag, so black
his pencil, bill and
parcel all at once.
How can there even
be numbers without
brown paper bags?**

14 November 2014

ENDANGER'D PASTORAL

Be as often as it could and still be mine
it went asunder in the fractured storm,
for lightning breaks the scheme apart
that had been planning at us all the while
till the Discharge spoke, and for a second
earth was heaven. Then the rain came by.

Channels grow evident. Misfired kingdoms
sweltering sultanates abaft dull tropic gulfs
gasping for more oil. *Kokospalme*, he said,
this tree imagines me. Bougainvillea scarlet,
bougainvillea purple, two adolescents found
merciful hiding place behind the flowers.

Could you be mine too, each asked the shadow
and the darkness answered each of them
the sun is the darkest thing there ever is —
so be afraid. They clutched each other
like nursery rhymes, tongues in each other's
lips for safe keeping. Fear is what loves you

best, of all your trivial anxieties, this greedy
explanation takes most of the world away,
all those captivating differences and only one
fear to handle all of them. Breath stuck in throat,
heart trying one more time to escape from out

the prison of your ribcage. Relax now, let me.

**Let me. Let me. And then you will be you
all over again and I'll be you too, nowhere
any me to be found in all that wilderness
of beaver and Beethoven, in the forest of names
every child is lost forever. An adult tumbles
out, grappling for breath. A glass of silence.**

An architecture of pure air. The skin of elsewhere.

14 November 2014

AMONG SUCH SPARROWS

**At some moment turn back
bitter-gourd and none besides,
leach the sugar out of sweetest blood
o Isles of Langerhans fat children dread
menaced with that pox jejune anxiety,**

**eat a banana! The only thing that kills you
is your fate. Do angels ever eat?
I rest my case. Raunchy specimens
those smaller birds, can't ever tell
what they're really up to, or even me.**

15 November 2014

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**I too am exiled among daydreams
far-away consonants, pagodas slipping by,
the oily world of doing grinds to a halt
clogged with the grit of Being here—
but I crave a number different from you ten.**

**How many syllables to spell your will?
Go off to a planet with thirteen fingers,
dynamics of an asteroid don't make a better man,
sea foam and appetite, though, all love from them—
a young woman at a neap hour impersonates the sea.**

**Is that far enough or even true, or is
there a curse on this mere number?
In France white numerals on blue tin
mark each house that eats its mail,
consumer, fireplace, lilac barren as November**

**but then we came home, no need to know
no place I want to go, don't let them come here
with their doorbells and godless telephones—
thus he spake, and sailed to Ithaca yet again
to test the curing waters of the narrow lake.**

**Frankly I'm glad he was gone, the likes of me
need truer dreams to stand all smiles beneath
the garlic tree, the stairs go nowhere but up!
The stars suspend their influence, a needle
teases out a vein and the youngest nurse cries Yes!**

**They test the eye by staring at a distant E
so test the mind by thinking of the furthest thing
and what is that, my love? The E at Delphi
Plutarch puzzled over and Kelly solved?
Not at all. The furthest thing, a moment just past?**

**Past and future just sad imaginings — you need
an actual object on which to fix the mind.
Then it must be the mind itself, the E
on the eye-chart stands for Eye, the mind
beholds itself remotely and only for an instant**

but in that moment it understands.

15 November 2014

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**Exaggerate the obvious
till it incandescences with strange light**

**like a woman walking her dog
across the parking lot**

**but there is no dog but you can see
in her heart her need for a dog**

**and that has to be enough, one more
quarry in an endless hunt**

**for what we think we need.
We want things. And are prepared**

**to be grateful to the ones that love us
even to the point of loving them back.**

**She gets younger as she comes closer,
a girl with no dog in a lot with no cars.**

[15 November 2014]

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**Clueless we prosper.
So be warm to me as weather
or of all forms be wheel.
The sun is getting ready to set
slowly, like an aged aunt
packing her steamer trunk
for a questionable vacation.
Iguaçu. Istanbul. Please.
Take me with you. I am praying
like a child. Like sunshine.
Like a wheel.**

[15 November 2014]