

Luteinizing Harmonium

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if only harmony between the sexes were so easy!
a simple release of luteinizing hormone
like hot tea calming the relationship bloodstream
that bathes the couple. a click and a whirr
and all the quirks pop in place
like the chiropractor's snap that either
breaks the neck or adjusts it.

peaches swelling on late August branches
red, yellow rounded
drop at a touch –
would it be like that?

Denial on Denali

denial dangles two dead wolf cubs
about its head
and dances down the hard boneyard,
dances the brittle bonehead dance
of the thousand clacks and slaps
designed to drown all discrimination

the chakras play
their chthonic aerial orchestra
and the great mountain, Denali, rears –
shadow shuddering the barren land
somewhere far to the south where
something lifted its head –
some huge beast
lying exhausted on its side in the sand.

Bethlehem Steel Foundry

from the West Seattle Bridge

a caul of steam late May rain
 blown sideways
boils upward in shards of cloud
scalding molten steel rail
glow exposed: three parallel
clawmarks
 resentful

outside the soggy sullen slag lies
in piles waiting to be transformed —

how like my soul.

Electrical Storm

we dance, an electrical storm above the roof
of our brains, a cloud alive on the feet
of rain, undivided in every part, emerging
in the play of untold billions, leaping as we did
from fish to Form to fern to Form to fawn
leaving as lightning flashes all space

empty.

Wisdom

I bought this wisdom with great banknotes of pain.
I paid with my innocence, and with all my ignorance.
I bought it from life – it wasn't in my books.
I paid with my youth and it cost all my years.
I paid everything I know – not a thing was left
and they were all changed beyond recognition.
I spent all my security and my limits were all reinvested –
dividends slowly accumulating in a life's savings.
I bought it with hands of suffering and dear love.
It cost me all my shame. I dug up the can I had buried
in the garden in which I've saved up things unfaced for years
and spent that too. I had to let go all the seeds
I'd saved to grow next year's food – I dropped them one by one
into the account and around each one a crystal formed.
All these I paid and now it isn't even mine.
It repaid me with questions that in time I came to value
more than rich jewels. I instructed my accountant
to cash in all my beliefs and my broker to buy more pain.
To my surprise I found I had to buy back many clichés,
as they were needed for the down payment;
as were large sums of credulity.

More Easily Than A Chalk Drawing Erases

who would have guessed?
more easily than a chalk drawing
erases
more like a smoke dissolving
as it rises
how thin! how brief!
like a paper covering nothing
pulled away
painless as water sinking into ground
– and the loss that's feared
already paid in full.

Once There Never Was

once there never was
(events change all their histories)
the wind like a big train
blows by high in the treeees
far above, hurrying inland
once there never was a life
once there never was a home
once there never was

To be Lost

is to ask "is there meaning?"

To ask "where?"

is to be as hopelessly confused as the dreamer who starts awake
not knowing he is in his own home.

To push off requires touching bottom.

To breath again, that the surface be broken.

To search under the protection of such questions
damages the seekers own capacity to be answered.

Never to search at all, to be stillborn.

Thought Bleached Out

the thick mat of thinking
bleached away
the senses beneath like weak grass
white from long lack of sun
beneath the black tarp
– beware!

they are not yours
they are no longer yours
they belong to all

an eagle screams from the bare snag
down the snowbound pass

Novelty

With life there's always something extra thrown in,
something unexpected
that changes everything.

The mutant gene raveled from the long skein
of evolution, the cell in symbiosis.

Someone has untied the parcel and slipped in
a postcard from a dear one in another life,
a bonus offer

that for the price of your karma
includes two,

the self-important intruding gabble from the
next table at the café.

Don't expect to complete that comfortable
script on which you are at work.

Encounter Driving Over Blewit Pass

driving over Blewit Pass
pure-voiced Amazing Grace
pouring into me
a momentary inkling
of what Yeats meant.

and then realizing, a little ruefully
there is in me something
that takes delight in arranging my failure
a part of me
that works for my own destruction.

they die trembling like moths

the swept-up bits of tissue-paper blossom
withered on the floor
broken wings that tremble against
the stiff broom
(the broom that is never able
to pluck the sticky spider remnants
from the beams overhead
where they stay, clumped and ruined,
obstinately clinging
just like my own grudges over
forgotten words).

Tick the Tock Clock

tick, the tock clock
makes the feet walk
 ways of end
branches that depend
 pinched-out days
stages that were play
through eyes of storm
and arms of warm

the body warm the length of the bed
and the sun the length of the body
the rain walks back
crosses summer's dusty track

the light of days and eyes blows out
incommensurable in all beauty
irredeemable to all purchase
irreducible to all fact
lost to all hands, lost at last to all lips

snow that night, that all night falls
face that turns to no more walls

Trespass

I trespass softly across the populated valleys
of my own life, stretched somnolent in the sleeping house –
the sound of rain on the roof and the dog's bark,
echoing far across the Shinglemill like some exotic crane;
the barely perceptible breath of my sleeping wife
that breaks into a moment's surf on no shore subsiding –
and follow the still-phosphorescing footsteps
of Saint John of the Cross, who stole out of the house
many centuries ago. Follow the ancestral memory
to Sweden, trespassing across the lives of others
whom I do not know; watch a moment from the outside,
from the train, from the windows of rooms I occupy
only a few days; see the landscape, the frozen lake,
the scarves, the Santa Maria Day gingerbread, the painted
tolling on the furniture, the Taiga woods, the bogs
through which the train runs endless days,
the clothes drying on a rack, the showers so feeble
one must flatten oneself against the wall to catch a trickle.
Trespassing in my own life, a traveller who does not yet know
the language, no part of the web of human affairs that defines
the meaning of each gesture, face, event – slowly drawing
a fine silk imperceptibly across each mouth, eye, mind.

O Say An Us Do Own

with apologies to Wallace Stevens, Shakespeare, Nostradamus, Homer, Jung, and Gurdjieff

now that I, own Prospero,
studious as old Nostradamus,
 with bravissimo
of small command
over Ariel and Caliban,
vertiginous as old Odysseus,

have sailed the archipelago
of anima and animus,
 voyeur à Calypso –
and in Bukhara and Samarkand
met remarkable men
as barbarous as beauteous,

and today, a faded generalissimo,
come to daughters of old Hesperus,
 an impresario in calico
who's played a master hand
no better than orangutan,
am avaricious, before I pass to Erebus,

 to know
what more can then be made
of this I own mine?

Two Impressions

i

She has a face given to expression, and she places so much energy behind it, opening her eyes wide, raising her eyebrows and leaning forward slightly as she sings to her Vashon preschool audience that she seems to be forcing her indelible impression into every small mind. It is not a Pollyanna bright face given to false cheer, but an unfortunately humorless countenance, rather thin-lipped and controlling. She has raised her eyebrows so often that the furrows etched on her forehead give the appearance of miniblinds, and she raises them so high that one becomes afraid for the integrity of her face, as if she might, like a windowshade pulled too far, suddenly snap back, leaving her face flapping around its spindle over and over.

ii

He rides the 7:10 morning bus from Vashon without fail, Dickensian, tall, rail-thin, erect, the image of probity and decorum – and indeed carries himself as though he had an example to set. Gray tweed or black raincoat (alternately), black leather gloves – one could easily picture him in a stovepipe hat. Salt and pepper hair, thickly wound and closely cut, a brushy stand of coiled wire. Shoulders pulled perpendicular to his neck do not slope. And yet a ruddy, round-cheeked face that appears to smile, for all the sharp, angular demeanor of his bearing – but as if an attitude adopted, not an inner joy but an amusement as carefully selected and kept up as the rest of his appearance. We are presented with the person; we do not encounter a soul. And yet not unkindly; not even unfriendly. A hint, possibly, of pomposity, but perhaps that is a side-effect of self-protection. Certainly an air of correctness, even a bit pedantic, a bit of the old-maid schoolmarm. One can't help but feel that upholding this image is a burden as much as it is a pride. Not unsympathetic, not one who would do any sort of wrong, but not one from whom the dancing human spirit leaps.

Sea Fronds

long-necked leggy women
fallopian tubes floating like fronds
of seaweed swaying in intertidal flows
that lift and recede in their inner
saltwater sealifes, unimpregnated,
ostrich-hipped, doggy-lipped
or gliding like condors
tall over mountain wonders
far beneath their notice,
graceful in flight, unfortunate afoot,
ordering double lattes from sidewalk
baristas, poised atop their stilted
strides like cans set on a fence
for small boys to throw stones at,
seething to be seen and desperate
to draw away attention to girlfriends
whom they are too large to hide behind
and too small to accept.

Those People You Saw on the Bus

those people seen on buses as a young man
with their ingrown histories, small and bitter,
their reach truncated and their faces clenched
on hard disappointment – biting down on
what their life has become, their withered relationships,
their knowledge of what was forfeited,
how much was squandered, misspent, fumbled, unclaimed –
those whom age has soured, seen on any bus
in any city – have you become one?

Walking Downtown Seattle

Walking quickly to work, passing the coffee
houses, gathering in turbulent knots
at bus stops,
streaming by me in the street,
each one sparking, trailing light like a comet
though they do not know it –
I look in their eyes and see they do not know it –
So many human beings!
 Each lit from within
and avoiding my eyes on the crowded street
in a light rain that falls like Grace.

We live here, where space and time appear.
Inward, outward, quantum,
astronomical
vast emptiness –
the structure of the middle ground
vanishes.
Even more confusing, the light-spel –
all our familiar structures breaking down
and disappearing.

Only here in the middle
human beings wander by me
on morning streets, in crowds.
Not like clouds of stars
not clouds of electrons –
Living beings!
A marvel –
intelligent, conscious, heartfelt.
And close-guarded,
as though what is published abroad
were kept secret from the population at home.

Strategies

my strategy is to ride the 10-million-to-one pony.
my strategy is to be struck by lightning.
my strategy is to climb to the top of the anthill and complain
to the wind of my fame
while huge feet darken the sky overhead.
my strategy is to club moss into submission
and lie in the dark, breathing.
my strategy is to outsource all the big questions
and monopolize the small ones.
my hope is to throw strategy to the winds
and damn the short straws.

Ego to Self: I'm Your Man

"You have a project?"
"I'm your man."

You can't think this thing through.
It can't be done by trying.
That's all an act to keep
a going concern,
created in the guise
of self-elimination.

Promise to the Ego on its Abdication

there will still be books to read
and we'll visit Sundays
and even though you will no longer be emperor
you may keep your cardboard crown
and plastic sword
and we will read your poems, like now.

Involuntary Materiality; Immaterial Evidence

The dental estimate says three new crowns
each costing more than a new computer;
the computers clash together when I eat.
The car is too hungry, I can't seem
to keep it filled. The furniture
and décor are hungry too –
devour any company that may come.
Something is swallowing all the heat
every night from the rooms.
I sit in all-night diners, ordering continuously
through the wee hours, but can't
keep the household fed. Something is gluttoned
on my life. My gut wakes me stuffed
with the wreckage the household
could not eat. Online shopping
sucks arms, sucks legs of the unwary
into the black monitor.
The propane wheezes and sighs all night
with the galloping consumption.
It's clogging my vanity, the doctor says,
the arterials to heaven all traffic-jammed.

New Age Gaian Ecological Cooking

I am not your most compatible lover.
I do not love butterflies or flowering plants
or small mammals so much
as to be willing to sacrifice the highest human
capacities to their determination.
I am not willing to reduce to the elegant
winter ecology of the golden-crowned kinglet
That which it is, but not All.
I am not prepared to surrender grace
to the most primitive rhythms of the old tribes.
It has all been overdone again. Like
too much wine in the cooking
too much of any spice, it galls the tongue.
Or did you really believe that were cooking
without wine, without spice?

M&M's

To spread them out is almost to eat them,
set down from the unsoiled hand
in all their colors – chocolate, cobalt blue,
cherry red, lemon yellow,
apple green, pumpkin orange.
Six colors –
no two side by side, except
two yellows like eyes at the bottom of the array.
Two red frame orange and blue – the only green
immediately to their northeast,
three brown around the rim.

Cancer

perhaps the only way left open to me
to relearn gratitude.
dark mass in a bloody bed
swept by rumors
fears and the undefiable
certainty that nothing much
will change
even as everything changes
and this brilliant sunlight
pours over me.

all the dark points of myself
return to myself
calming this metastasis
of misinformation
teaching its own disharmony
slowly halted through
reoccupying the undisturbed
equanimity of which
its ripples
are a part.

Death

we die
when nothing changes
old age hardens
time no more rearranges.
blindsided by an instant
that freezes us forever

the breath is stopped
the heart is stopped
the mind is stopped
the eyes see no more
the ears hear no sound

a faint breath of wind lies upon the skin
and stirs no sense
the sex on no account is stirred
the mouth takes no food
and gives no mothlike kiss

the body does not move.

Exit

Exit, ausgang, sortie, salida.

You are here.

No Exit. You are here.

No matter what Sarte has posted
on the door,

this hotel has

no safe escape

and the charges easily

exceed your life.

Don't use the elevators,

Hegel or Augustine.

Unquiet Grave

inner turmoil,
unquiet grave
fragments of ego
ghosts that cannot die
through whose eyes
the incredible brilliant real
is only the pallid vision
spoken by the countless
ceaseless incessant
reiterations of thought
I see, I see.

