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NOTES FROM AN ISLAND

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ABSTRACT

NOTES FROM AN ISLAND

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Implicit in the death of a parent or loved one is the bereaved's need to reintegrate or renew an acquaintance with the world based on the fact, the sweeping fact, of his or her mortality. Often the energies released by such an event disperse into a variety of concerns, both coming to focus on the death and reappraising the field of experiences of the world. That is, situations, people, relationships, surroundings take on transient qualities. Contingent upon these qualities comes the reflection of a self with only a tenuous grip on conventional reality, things and people. There arises a variety of confrontations between self and self, self and others, self and surroundings. As never before, the need for retrieving the sense of loss, for its creative possibilities, as well as the need for establishing means of surviving what remains of life, come to be imperative.

The poems for my thesis will investigate both public and private aspects of my own father's death. These poems will follow a chronological order, and in so doing relate the integration of 'death' into my own life, ultimately coming to grips with this unsettling topic, holding its facets long enough to examine and recognize some of its forms, textures and implications before continuing on in the

process of staying alive

Formally, I see the body of poems in three parts:

- 1) the Elegy for my father, 2) Blue Air Travelogue and
- 3) Reveille, using the Elegy as a point of departure from which perceptions integrate and insights evolve toward a wholeness of view.

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ELEGY

- 1) You know Bruegel's painting of Icarus
going down indifferent, into indifferent blue
and farmer, shepherd, fisherman, attending
duties, sun shining as it does
down on the Charles, dirty water flowing
green as a funeral house lawn,
dead end quarry, a green anthracite -
gone out of business, a block from Dave's
Bar and Grill, sitting in this rickety deadhouse
as if nothing happened; the shoes prominently
shine, the beard's no mind of its own growth.

Overnight, a shower, and waiting on the runway,
birds with settled wings sealed, flight
and destination removed, they sit
dust softened to muck; the inflight
volume on the controls raised as if removed,
as if nothing happened, no reality holds.

Children outside under a blue, calling
everything away; a dog pisses on a hydrant,
clank of his licences slides high almost
into colour - the flood of clarity flows into
a universe that probably will go on, right by,
without you or me - his mistress
gives the long line of black cars a glance, gives
him a yank, moving past the view I have

of you, inside, in your everfirst
dark suit, I touch the sharp cold fingertips
like a mountain wind down a slope, stand
in a quick of time, this ceremony of cancellation,
monotony and numberless sins, arranged
like Bruegel's figure, proportion, finger pressure
painting chilling shades.

The day you suffered a partial stroke, listening
to Hoffmann, contemplating the solution
to a spill of coffee: nothing has happened since,
an ancient thing, the sunlight still melts
poorly planned escapes, under pressure
children hold up their love, strong and green
are led deep into penetrable dark, shades
sharp and standing, fresh as always
as a flood of heat breaking across
what seas, what shore there will be,
who will tell you about dream, reality, light,
how beautiful it is from the sun, veering,
flowing together.

- 2) If nothing holds us in place (as these cold blooms
I breathe out, fading, go out beyond the high branch)
not New England cold, not New Haven's
broadest welcome, not even the coffin unflinching
or your hands' wonderful length, freezing
to a touch, or the cross tucked between crossed
fingers in prayer, hooked to know-it-all-silence,
another side of absence, is no resort

yet act as if the world made all the difference.
You did, moonlighter, sleepwalker
as if material could hold you
while giving some time to pulling down on Sundays
prayer's perfect understanding, horns crying
out for essential answers from galactic distances
as stacked ill-tempered beauties you kept meeting
over years, outriding boredom, you said, keeping
flickers of youthful fire active, except
on Sundays, then with nothing attending a human need
you remained, genuflected, and left
the grave no answer to anything, and no answering
other than the proof of emptiness and your breath
holding between words, air,
way, way beyond stars' memory, burning
all places that sought you, and found, found
you like nothing.

- 3) What happens after the celebration files out slowly
from the room, chattering, apologizing, do you remember
me, your cousin, the first you made love to at 12,
the first you took to the zoo, you've changed
and I am married now to an overstuffed no-count
accountant, I didn't notice you cry, I am sorry,
terribly sorry will you meet me for lunch tomorrow
or the next, sometime

they know I will try almost anything to forget
and try to find a way out of this traction
bringing consolations of love and all that
habit thrusting has tied me in
they know love is a way out for now
the flowers stench still burns my nostrils
my stomach a dark ache, the added dark
of your sewed eyes dream deep into the heart
of nothing in shocked recognition I cannot see
but soon will fit me straight off the rack

in a dark suit, absence fills your name,
makes you belong nowhere else, unremembered

4) Your
thoughts spread out over the city
at the hospital window in your outsized smock
covering a city in your scattered fear
prayers came to you with a fervor

there was nothing else left, I am witness
to the arrangements, nothing is missed,
cheques signed, obituaries sent off
nothing remains to be overlooked,
in rapid succession one activity
befalls another, a system fills
your absence, still
words of business culminate in
the last
hole in the ground, dead and gone

I almost hear your prayers, Hail Marys
full of grace not sure the lord is
with you, not sure, not sure

sounds emerge now and then from outside
jack hammers hollow out the ground
blessed are you, are you only that
blank intimacy of yourself in a run down
condition, translucent as frail skin
as the window heated by sun

you see yourself with an old lover
especially the one who showed you her breasts
powdered by moonlight in an empty graveyard

you become certain of a world that will not miss you
that the emptiness you leave behind
will fill in with the same air you came in
since nothing is for certain

BLUE-AIR TRAVELOGUES

ISLAND EVENINGS PROMISE

I've never been as far south as the islands
where I'm told the blue air scrapes solitude clean
that waves wash under stars, dreams so I'm told

that directions have no dark routes
that weather is a blue hull, a bright keel
that words are a world of light
that cloudless nights pass through the head
that no memories stop them, history a blank

if a man lived there he'd be alive
listening to shorelines breathe waves
driving into the green hills of solitude
so empty he could hear insects hover
over faraway markets, voices

that tell him he would forget
far, far away whose breath it is
who told me

NOTHING IN PARTICULAR

Waves combine in repetitive numbers
there are three dogs on the shoreline
one brown, one black, one coming into view

the motor of a motorboat is being repaired out in the cove

what day is it today? Monday
the sun catches the leaf tips of a shoreline brush
funny, I thought it was Tuesday

there are two other boats in the cove
Miguel's glass bottom boat rides in the waves
a sailboat with an empty mast rides in the waves

the brown dog begins to swim out toward the motorboat
as the motor of the motorboat begins to sputter
the brown dog swims half-way out and returns
to the black dog sprawled in the shade on the shore
the third dog is no longer in view

beside me, you are putting on nail polish and
shooing flies away intermittently
hold your hand at arm's length for better
perspective in which to test the quality of the shade

then bringing your hand back continue the polishing strokes
intent as waves are
as that dog swimming all the way out for the second time
being plucked from the ocean by
the owner of the motorboat; the motorboat, repaired, heads
out to sea, while the other two dogs leave, disappear
from the shore
and you, having finished your nails, go inside
leaving me, and those other two boats out there,
in the sound of unrelinquishing waves, sufficient

IN EXTREMIS

On an island, in an expanse of sun
everything appears perfect, the shade, an innocence
like her unshaved underarms

prehistoric and shocked alive
love bears the brunt of so much more
widows are tanned as unexpected
as the cordial strands of blonde pubic hair
where she neglected to apply beeswax
beyond the bikini line, hot singing
sweat glistens off her dark hips
a passionate aim at eye level, levels the heart
to a naked power spreading
for vehement bullets of guns of love —

the view from the sitting room is impeccable
there is nothing better in the world than love
of a good book the sleep of silence cooled, empty
the soar that clarity instills in solitude
gone are high houses, roofs of suicide, migraines,
anorexic girls drinking herbal tea
here is time arriving in waves ample time
light sways and straightens through the palms
the gulls circle in their cries

but
still a far cry from meaning that subsides
into each moment, hardly paradise
hardly the world the brochure makes it out to be
all that loving, sunning, coming, of natural
solitude, what is taken for granted is

breath, retina, the simple joy they work at all
although the water tastes off-color, constipation
a threat, the sitting room corner shimmers
with a radiant web, dog hairs on my white cotton pants

there is always the coke machine in the lobby

SCARECROW

Not feeling well I went outside
and ventured up the island road
having left behind a managed life
of conditioned needs in solid order

I went out and up the hibiscus
lined path, breathing in sun and scent
that turned the nostrils to cathedrals
I came upon a field, calm

absolutely still, a scarecrow stood
fielding nothing, unhurried, I wondered
about nothing, about having
no sockets of thought to turn to,
no breath for intuition, no mouth,
to strand together entangled
voices, or eyes to lick the tears of brides

then approaching into view, your father
manhandling hours, repairing borders
and his limits, his land, life
that built you, makes you stand,
watches you as he leans against a trunk
having nothing to say, having given you
nothing, watches you,
look over the nothing he has given you

to face edges of light that subside
in dark again and again
until what is expected of you is
natural, actually you hear nothing
not even wind turn in you, not even
feel the sun kindle you

between you and him and the fencepost
there is nothing but meadows of looking
you only tremble in grooves of wind
senseless, you look out to what is left
to be done, nothing
no strategy planned your limits

but unknowing, you become planted
a landmark
on what becomes
the road away from this place

LETTER HOME TO NO ONE

Can living here (excursions
to summits, rain forest gardens,
meanings focussed with cameras
breathless shutters, manual industries
yellow bird sounds
picturesque near the water's edge) sustain me
for long?

Yesterday the air conditioner vent broke,
and the afternoon towered down
in rain between tracts of lightning,
hacking thunder

the place banging alive in stiff winds
buried under the generating water
without ceasing

at ease, in my room
tremors of venetian slats kept on
about the winds, cold air
about bare shoulders

I laid down on the fresh sheets,
hollow damp smell

while the weather built up
rousing certain imperatives
breath, stillness, sounds dangling, darkening
owning nothing, wanting nothing,
yours.

FOR DRUMMOND de ANDRADE

(after Cantos de Aprendiz)

Think of
wilderness to a smooth horizon
forests emerald lush in shafts of light
palisades, young girls breathing through blouses

think of it as yours:
embroideries of languages, real estate dreams,
to your ploughshares

unpaved boulevards, the dust
your Silver Ghost makes, the wind
in your lapels, the leaves that fall
as you move past them

the world is your crew under sun and stars
your air force on the runway
mandalas of all colors cover skins of B52s
jet engines rev, a cantata
to the end of wars you called for —

your countrymen await you on crowded streets,
bow, kissing the air you breathe

you are prince of Turmalinas
everyone waves under the giant shades for you
deep behind leaves of the rain forest
your heart dreams of night

filling with bioluminous paradise birds
colors of every sort, the dead, entangled,
drop behind

only the least wounded make it here
the high refracting diamond-backs,
enriched butterflies, peacocks

think of it as all yours
and at the proper hour, emerge on your balcony,
Juquita, a warm glass of milk in your hand

The sky full of whirring, sounds
of empty white music, colors
that asphyxiate sight

you hardly breathing yourself Juquita

HAGGLING

Complex reductions disintegrate
in the sun to simple ones:

a black woman's transparent beads
for sale, centerless and clear
right through

you get a sense of placement
without direction, haggling down
the price: the vendor's fantasy

of wealth overpriced, of worth
adjusted
in tender management
of words and gestures
of peripheral issues that center
on uselessness (the hidden agenda
being how useful it is

like the broad loops of birds
sweeping through skies in delight
in such blue as blue is

the slim warm smell
of bananas about her smile
a white belt, I smile

as if knowing, but unknowing
an extrusion from nothing
dawns on me, the bead's positive value

a ruffle of nothing, radiates
in a market, imagined
along with the real, together

invisibly clear, beyond expense
taking on another beauty, always
like blue

ON THE WAY BACK.

In flight back:
and so much
for the holiday, it was a glimpse
back into light, idyll, dream
carried out, I

much like an ornithologist in carribea
lost up sunny dusty roads
his binoculars improving slight pangs of rare birds
as he goes, returning over and over
terrain, inspired points for light where thinking he saw
flashes of underbellies of leaves, feathers

looking for the light that flies rarely.
I never felt that way before, funny

(those were his last words, laid out
translucent)

and grass primed and attentive
for each twitch (the floss white scheme
of his teeth) associations
called, named, and identified

springs, into a note, and taking note
of markings, time
fibrillation is enough to react to
the trained eye that brings back to life
the sight and sound of where motions are
wild with sudden leaves recognized (his sucking
breath, mauve lips)

I scan like the ornithologist returning
to the place of a released sound, to make returning
a way of staying away, imperceptible
camouflaged, attentive

part of where light is not choosy to fall
and translucent, remain still to moments
about to move
when

the smoke of the enflight cigar
held in a right hand turns
back against the wrist (his hand

still warm feeling nothing, light)

RETURN

So much for the recovery
so much for wanting to be alone
I take a ghost ship home
it flies like wind, moves
through shanty town's sad features,
takes off
to the outlying ocean. I wrap
the sun in sun and stow it away

of death, I sail into it
there is nothing else I can do
it steals what it must

I save what I saw
said what I had to say

and make a return
out of staying away.

REVEILLE

TROUBLE OF MINE

I begin, not saying anything
I remain at the edge of possible words
a few have already moved, still
back and forth

in revision of each other
setting off what is partially known
what is partially up in the air
I begin to call it
an impossible habit to break
then, a nice wreckage

of lungs and breath
one word like dark emerges
from nowhere a momentary black map
out of directions barely defines
an aim in black air
ascends into itself, full tilt
only to find the light
celebrates its emptiness, descends

that word is dreadful
no one bothers to accept it
as if nothing mattered
another word in its trail resonates
the empty friction after the fact
in the ear, noses down goes
in its headful turn in deep air this one appears
to survive, smoulders in intense wonder
about re-entry

into an atmosphere thick as thought
concerns itself in a resonance
of gravity
about proper angles for coming down to earth, landing
or blown to bits become a language
of stars' utter stillness, seen from years away
or not at all

LIBRARY REVISITED: IN SEARCH OF INSPIRATION

(after M.S.)

Poems and poems
Some lump like stone
in the drain of my throat
others bypass or scorn the heart
others still stroke the brain
plenty brag about a penis reborn

ink dribbles down corners
of my mouth, my eyes mirror
a deep black socket of words
whose whorls I liquefy more
and liquify descend and drink

and a librarian in black
velvet dress, incredulous eyes, views
the carrel I filled with my black
fingerprints, she does not confide
in one so content

shaking her head she goes
closing the lights, I finish
and hear her soft quick rustle
of nylons diminish down the hall
her talc, I pick the scent

and dogs she unhooks after being
all day, from a basement dark
they emerge, bioluminescent eyes, unfed
pinschers, they speed upstairs smelling
the night's light, their tongues taste
the gift of their fangs intent

I hear her sobbing swell
she can see how I'm rewired
how my eyes are beacons as well
how in quiet dark a rare fuse fired

and on all fours I nudge her thighs -
I lick the back of her hand and back
I turn and disappear through stalls alive
fresh, illumined in verbs unsleeping and dark

WHAT MORE THAN

Language, a motion calls
you, reconnaissance
re-knowing, terrain

like a window I walk to
and face, calling the names
of things by proper names
after the fact

of things not having names
not even thinking and thinking
which is a motion
naming, and naming
is as much a risk
as motion

that calls language
a means of getting motion
down exactly more
than it relates
instilled with more
that is

GALILEO'S LOVER

'I discover myself
like a telescope
recording your complexion

of bruised light
for posterity, darken
pages of proof that dictate
what I apprehend, I must not omit
without certain wonder
over your prominences,
as to light and shade
offering relief

I think of myself
like you, indifferent to a world
and luminous
rugged, tracts lumped
in an origin no one is sure of
never dreamed
that immaterial light

along your lips that are
so white, shadows
slope and rise, ranges
over your shape
looking over you

asleep in a dark, luminescent

which would mean nothing otherwise
had I not seen you in
a different light'

GALILEO NOTICES SOMETHING HAS BEEN STOLEN
after Basho

'I discover a thief has come
grabbing a few things:
telescope, chalice, etc..

he must have returned to the night
wrapped in its darkness
endless scent of the dead
stealing through back alleys
abandoned among stars.
voices of Paduans covering
his footsteps out

the fragrance of escape
smelling sweet down the highway
heading south
his solitary breathing
just wanting to live his own life
counting the waves off Syracuse
counting the shooting stars
as he goes
beyond his own reach

envious of how they have no tracks
that's freedom he thinks
of the moon
he left behind
priceless'

NASA

'I discover myself
in the night, no streets
are dampened by light rain
no palms hang over hard green grasses
in fact no landscape at all

occasionally I look out the window
there is a gyrating silver that whizzes past
there are no winds this far north, airless
I breathe artificially on measured air
my mind floats in its black
I will reach the other half of the orbit soon

the signs of life are minimal
my breath, for one, always begins
as long as the sun appears, reappears
as long as the organs work
as long as lines of long distance
are kept open, I hold this pattern
elliptical, moving
from horizon to horizon

breath is all I have, I see
a blue sphere spin in emptiness
a transmission monitors vital signs
my outside is in here
light seeps from the bottom of dark, I see
out there from behind a blue substantial cloud of earth
the colour of arrival implicit as departure
I hang further from everything
I sleep to awake, awake to sleep
I fade into the light
I fade into the dark
I say hello to the black of everything
'holding the promise of light, like breath'

EINSTEIN

'I discover myself
without having done all
what remains of my life
I manage to turn back the clocks
but decades and decades have gone
no intensity or formula can apprehend
their textures gone

what good is it
I lose myself in time
the hours have done a number on me
theoretically, should I start
I go on forever with what I do
I rise in electron clouds, I mushroom
out with possibilities that are immortal
yet I never sing
how can I, even time tells me what I am
I change more and more into less and less
I forget mankind, a rush
of a bird, wild in shaken leaves
and looking up from my blueprints

I see time,
how stubbed it is, curves
in all dimensions intangible
I see what sufficiency it has
I do, honestly, I do'

PLANT

Days stream past
waiting for light and water
to transform the motions
by which I remain

still
I live in my own shade
perfect to all extremities, a waxy glint
to my skin as it moors on air
I live at light's speed
and feel the dark tropism move
through illumined branches
I grow in its complications
and bound only by light and dark
that falls over leaves
I hold space and fit perfect
in its days

when she comes to water
this earth, instinct absorbs
elements, I live on its dark
dependency, without bothering to question
the way I go on, standing
for centre and peripheries

though today, I hear her voice
speaking next to me, when she speaks
she says everything
is everything in love

but I sense she is thinking of death
thinking of her lover's absence without her

the sun falls through the glass
I sit in a light of facts
what else can I do
I wait and watch

I see the green bones of relatives
laid out in the ground

she talks and I bathe in promises
that die, of light taking arduous root

THERE IS NO LIFE LIKE MINE

A mole, scholar of dirt
clanging out tunnels

a shovel (brand name: Black
and Blacker digs deep and deeper)

people wait outside on streets
for the end of something
meetings are called to order
I continue to dig for something still
to be heard

I speak through tunnels like a megaphone
a voice that fades past echoes
to no one hearing or caring

I must walk back home further each night
I quit earlier each night
until all I do indefinitely
is spill out stories to the studios dark

I remember T-shirts emblazoned with sentiments
I remember her at the trap door in our cellar wearing one
I remember at first how I whispered at length
about my large member into her excited ear
I remember how we had no idea what got into us

but lately I find myself talking to glints
of what I think is moonlight off the shovel in a deep tunnel
lately I find myself thinking of dinners that went cold
of her waiting for me to come, to come home
all earth and desire, all ways with hoarse love

lately I am unable to comprehend the shift the roar
of time that tunnels magnify, that my life arrives in
that my life leaves in
I picture the snow on the screen left unclosed in her bedroom

I see the tunnel home was nicer then
how I had wished something would come of it
I would have more trouble remembering
and your forgetting would help as well
as if I freeze and tuck my knees
under my chin, close my eyes for good
and not see you beside me, illumined
carrying in your arms a vacuum cleaner
darker than the one I have

ENDING THE CONTRACT THAT BEGINS WITH I

I, being in the sound
of noises next door of people making love
take to heart this erasable bond

to bathe in the empty wake of years
the blank passion I left unrecognized
figuring it would not add up to much
week-ends emptied writing epitaphs
in retreat as if the present were mine

all the indications point to life elsewhere
the present is black, it does not move
the present is dark
I leave it to its absence
to its pointless distribution of thoughts
about family life, and the few
furtive sexual stirs for others

I leave them to themselves
and to those others who phoned and found the line dead
to those beautiful women with blonde blonde voices
wanting me to perpetuate their families
I leave them with lies, recorded poems
that praise their need to be beautiful

to analysts whose relationships were never clear
I leave unsayable truths in unspeakable situations
I leave the insurance of my absence, its premium
where words can make nothing out
of especially nothing

I leave nothing more for you
whom I could never figure out
but it is yours to do with
as you want

ELEGY (M. SANTATERESA
1950-)

What ever errors were made were made
out of yearning to be warmer, more human
if that is humanly possible, and not
for the sloth of cash, the beauty who
promised nights of fearless flying
nor did the errors go scot free
that would make the end of my life empty

crimes of a little fear, yes
but to see old age loud and stupid
lounging in silence passive to nothing
on a Florida beach or to become
a brass-knuckler tearing out blood
avulsing eyes or someone insane
with bits of change in his pocket
like pieces of a world, unable to fit
things together, or a cruel doctor
drunk on worldly possessions
doing nothing more for pain

never

although I am not sure since nothing is certain
I see myself a little clearer now, lenses
closer to the prescription
of a more competent optician
everything goes: man-made, natural
and at any moment

if you are coming to see me, hurry up
this moment too, is so dark
and perfect
it will never even last this long

FINAL BRIEF ELEGY

I want to say simply
for the last time
that his cheek was torn
and that there will be no healing

and that is that
what my ritual good-bye kiss did
out of duty and love

and may there be nothing to remind you
of blood
in a first morning light
looking out the kitchen window
my father's death in phantom limbs

of your arms' embrace

his unkempt appearance as if alive
when he wore your lipstick and makeup
of celebration, mother

I want to say simply for the first
and last time, father

hello and good-bye

SINS OF OMISSION

What I've left out these years
I've left out of yearning
and now long after I hear a hum
a proof of nothing in particular

Only the empty music of absence I left out
of what I thought had weight, turns out
and remains to be heard, hangs around
the end of evenings
a thought that never occurs

HOMAGE TO S. FREUD

Father,
I notice your shut lids
the empty engagement
you always wanted
opening forever behind them

on to a landscape
of perfect quiet
is what mourners
really come for
to admire,
Freud said, a difficult
task completed,
the dead have
no burden to negotiate
in breathless grace

as the rigorous peripheries
of your dying contract

toward resolution: tracings, brief
histories are saints in homes, hospitals
whose incentive for nothing is chronic,
whose lives, interruptions between years
desire grave epitaphs, embedded names
in stone, simmering, dreaming

in weathers, undiminished
while walking down, hungry
with plenty of time, between the promise
and profundity of graves, visitors

bringing flowers, confessing over the buried
the aches that living owes, the absence
living makes without them

niggle, being shallow, unknowing
so Freud said, that no coward

rests in peace, only
the living malinger, paying no attention
to nature's direct calls
until taking nothing in, assume too much:

Father,
bless me
I waver, I yearn with incestuous love
for the limelight of summer places,
passions taking hold, without
an everlasting thought

NOBODY CONFESSES A LIFE LIKE THIS WITHOUT A REASON

Like a dead thing
I watch the sky hang up towels

I dally to and fro
My wife's not a wife yet, but a love

over the trees, or a boulevard of green
or a loose light in a ceiling I turn to

I can say the wind cuffs me
unexpected, tosses, and exposes

a bald spot, as I open
a poem, catching an unsettling glimpse

of myself in a bookstore window

and the poem in progress leaves
slumbers under breath.

But at the park today
in a fracas, a child

who frisked on a bicycle
seat, cheek to cheek

light as a thought
of apples, chatted afterward

on my knee, about men
who wear purses, as she fondled

my member like a Woolworth's doll

I lost my erection
I have lost something else
somewhere along the line

ELEGY, 1969

Sometimes when I answer the phone
it goes dead
around your breath in the receiver
and when I sleep, the hairs fall out
of my head like yours did
and in the morning I gather them
for you

I put them beside your portrait;
foot up on the running board of a black
'48 Buick, in a long winter wealth
its venerable engine purred home

into your sleep, not before holding
the baby in the air, contracts
springing like guitar strings
from your outsized coat pockets

awake, the wheels of routine emerged
fulfilled in technique, lost in love-making
I am in the same morass

at times you slaved to fasten loopholes
to fill time in a small band
of gold of rubber of music

circled your life, even your last confession
was for a band of saints, for the Big Band
which after all you could not be in all alone

GOING AND COMING

A moment, a glance
a Pulsar watch infuses its crystal clear notion
into nothing, instant after instant
forgetfulness goes forward
dumbest aphorism going on
time honoured law, a false language

but what's the option? Nothing
is on time
not even you, coming
into sexual stirrings, yearnings
brimming with the music they don't want
willing to risk your littleness, continue
the foreplay, studious like Icarus
intent on flying and later the Wright Brothers
further countries, moon, stars with a lesser idea
of time, or none at all

on a himalayan mountain, a Sherpa
discovers a frozen body, later
to be a prepubescent girl once
who broke her leg, fell off a bicycle
grew up to become a mother, married
a mountain climber, devoted to her husband
sent all her three children to ballet classes

claps a camera, hoary exposures

ravelled in a synthetic passion
that emanates from cigar store magazines
Variations, Pillow Talk, in order not to starve

a moment burns ignorant on my wrist
to whatever tenth of a second, coming, goes.

ELEGY FOR NO ONE

For who never was
opening a few doors, connecting
one foot after another, one room
to the next, not knowing if you left
or are leaving

who stands at the window
with the empty chambers of trees
whose life is no life at all
who just bought a gun, saying
bon voyage to bon voyage

only to return from your absence
to find nothing changed, nothing
remains the same to anybody
you know, knowing you were
already gone before asking anyone
to keep you here
until you got back, at least

unrecognized, already gone

A JILTED LOVER'S VISION OF HIS FRUSTRATED DEATH
after T. Gunn

I enhance this fine day
with objectives in mind
having given up broad managements
single-minded, focus
to perpetrate your absence
in the vicinity

of mind, love that turns
to anger to blue death
eerie, how I think

of each step broken down
pieced together, picked
the aztec lock, jiggled
the dials free

ignite the burst
with ice cold will, rise
bright, I

am your knife, sharp
tongue, turbulent lover gone
going headlong, headlight

up into your sky, your son
of a bitch, ancient warrior
who rides his spear

my helmet glints at you
your white roof below, and Blue
I see him yawn, his canines part

blood, is my cargo, this Aztec
always written in blood
painted in red near the engine

propels me to picture you
in your vogue room
like clockwork, home, to the left
of your shelves of washable doll's
eyes, focus a mirror
fill with your clamorous gifts

the seventy-seventh stroke down
your blonde blonde hair

and I, having strafed low
enough to scatter neighbour's
weak hearts, rise

one last time
wings, light, to five thousand
and bank, let the throttle go

the Aztec smells your ripe heart
the knife recognizes its kin
the spear its target.
the bird out of hiding from the sun
drops

neighbours begin to look away
into the drone from nowhere
and you, the ninetieth stroke
entranced

all the light in the world
does not penetrate this darkness
the satisfaction of love fiercer

than earth, for this plane beelines
from higher and higher descends, receives light
of no regret, sees past your last

breath, toward the commodious
room in stillness grows
past worms and roots

that hold my service, entangled there
tooled metal and sod, flesh

a guest to its ignorant guise
I violate, eaten bone and passion
receding from life I grow closer
into my death, accepting
what I cannot see, no light
dances in this grave, and broken

shivered, fly, damp earth
against my neck, your neck gone
broken, too, your throat
gargles no less, the earth

my dying tongue tastes

the dark room
locked in steel
I keep inside my head

HOLDING PATTERN

- 1) A cigarette's violet plume rises
the flame goes out, succumbing to boredom
rhythms of solemn trees twinge

immersed in a landscape
of words, people, and things, not mine
but a moment, hold, as if from a fever
survive a moments loss a little deeper
the afterimage of flame goes out

and alongside things come to light
serving a loss as well as enlivening
the dead in the telling of how

its occurrence spread in a world
a hinge so oiled, so right
no one escaped its turning
without thinking

- 2) When thinking is there to turn to
patterns form, possibility troublesho^{ts}
the nearest skirmish, grapples
limit against limit

when thinking fails, circling results
when the short-circuitry is repaired
and love lands once again
in the last word, thoughts of departure
lines the gymnastic joy of te^{ed}ons
glad that thinking is there to turn to
glad to have landed at all

when thinking extends beyond itself
no limit is unmanageable
no luggage, light enough.

ICARUS

after Bruegel

Icarus is having a hard time, hoisting
in the brunt of sea breath after breath
scissory legs, poise of ripples emanate
loss, no one hears, no one cares
nature is indifferent, art

a bowlful of ironies, antonyms
and such
gravity, delight hangs
on a page, the colored photograph
asleep, appetite, knowledge
arouses its power, vision

a dream, finding ourselves alone
like the gruesome threesome:
farmer, shepherd, fisherman
each a lasting look
at nothing, delightful and grave

but then again our nature
is to fight nature
even as the sun rolls crazy and free
Daedalus flying, no dead heat
subverts his wings, a piece of candy
to him
the view is fine, nice isn't it
his son, a buoy throbbing in the inlet
going under for good, has to believe in death
a sweeping fact, after the screams
go into strangers' ears like silence

have I missed the point?
to scream against the print, cut off
look look at Icarus, what pain
would change the wilful brush.

am I a curiosity seeker? who
peers into mangled wrecks, finds
a corollary warmth in insult
to what is dead

and gone, then what better way
than to recognize fact and let it go
believe in death and get on with it

grief doesn't last for long
at any rate
oils, ink, clay is where the trouble starts
a private hell to make
the profane sacred, then sacred profane
and so on
for metaphors of freedom, independence
art aches unflinching
remains an enigma drawn to light
yet quite shadowy, more and more
about less and less

where levels of thought meet dark and light
to carry on a dialogue that subsides
into silence, after all the rest exists

in a joy of a perfectly depicted day
there are faint smiles on the figures
decisive in their labours, the composition
contingent on the retina's miracle, sun
shade

it is a perfect day, nothing could be
clearer, the sails of a ship headed out
to sea, lighter, abler in fair weather

tomorrow, someone said, will be the same

BLUE FACTORIAL

after Mallarmé

Hours' silence fingers empty pages,
aquarium fish navigate quiet tones
whisper past blue's serene irony.
How much time it has, nothing
improves it; meditations flow
and it stays, no mind
to match its cold miles, to think

eyes closed, running
from its stone-age remorse
from cerulean estuaries, anything blue.
I call in marsh gas, its swells
of contempt, its backed up sewers, taking
its hand to fill those blue holes
birds keep making

let industry smoke up
long barrelled stacks, asphyxiate
the sun, lulling
in yellow fusions on horizons

I'll take Punta Norta, deadland
beyond the Carribean circuit, back
past mothers' milk to hard brocades
of slate where happy beasts lie drying

the lost idyllic, lost,
emptied in windy straits
where no art is cosmetic
there, depleted, I yawn to death.

But blue survives - as always.
There churches spire constantly
up as if in ancient song, holler
and haunt, periphery and focus alike,
indispensable voices, blue, push us
into the ground, frightening through mist
and absence in living skin, heart
and thoughts slightest turn, smack
up against

blue, blue, blue, blue, blue.

REVEILLE

- 1) Rise and shine in the morning view
light lies aired in the leaves green
the grass shaken, the clouds smoke

a moldy steeple scans the sky for hope
an engine in the distance turns
over in a grave of oil
an armature of sparrows pivot on air

rinsing a coffee cup out

- 2) The window was open all night
a north wind comes through the venetians
a habit of airing out sleep with cold
like a shock of rubbing alcohol
that loosens an unflinching ache
and leads to sleep

she is still asleep, the venetians fibrillate
a cold music through slats unwinds
chatters into dark for nothing

- 3) You awoke in a motel
in the custody of cock crows
and a cockroach's eyes

where the travel clock wheeled
knowing you would not stay

when it rained you stayed in bed
listening to rain's one syllable
on the thin wood roof

wondering who fathered the air
and listening to your own breath
thinking it was no one's.

- 4) There you thought of snow,
of days up north, hills like blank
pages that forget us

the numerous strangers we grow into
and sometimes we step so far out
of ourselves, that there is nothing left

except the motel in rain
the snow mile after mile
the extinct stillness that breathes
under the cockroach's belly

the prayers you never said
over absent years the shadows
pulling on their gloves one by one
leaving you alone to breathe

SELF-PORTRAIT

I emerge alone in a white room
a solitary window and no furniture
I am still covered in dirt
and a song of stone struck by metal
rings in my ears from digging
through tunnels and tunnels

and though my deep love of depths
should end here
I still moon over the inevitable
looking out the sleep of window

that will close down about the trees
like radar I hear night approach
the incoming casualty of leaves
turning purple, wind that slips
like the sound of rain over surfaces

but I sense you in the room as well
a faint whisper of a stain in the corner
of my eye, I have no reason to fully acknowledge
you, I preserve your absence
as I stay alive to your close-quartered moves

and wonder about your lack of gravity
like the one small insects have
using us for names, you cockroach, for instance
having such gifts as standing on a wall or ceiling
or feeding in dark plumbing, blueprints
of our greed, evolving through rejections and so on

so don't reproach my love, cockroach
for periphery, since if I snapped a picture
of this room with you in it
you'd be the moon, (I'd be invisible
in the upper left hand corner
of the negative proof, liking to think

you are partially stunned in a flash of recognition
and partially indifferent

SORT OF IDYLL

In my mind I listen, like a native,
ear and nose to the musty ground,
to hear the line scoot out ahead
of its source,

instead, the urban noise
lifts above verandas, turning
over above the worn map of streets,

but somehow the wonder is never lost,
even now, in waves of sunlight,
a wing swoops, brushing a leaf alive,
and across the street, a big-eyed lover
takes her in a caliper embrace, all smiles

and breathing, strolling further, the wind
rising from back lanes, gathers
the hot smells of leavings;

sebaceous juices, catpiss and dead blooms,
left broken open, spilling back into the world

like stained perfections, emptying out
in a slow burn, downwind scattering
no place, silent, restorative in fathoms
of air, beyond surprise, dispel to where
they appeared to begin.

AFTERLIFE

Our music continues, insufferable
never going far enough, fades
out, of earshot

disappears into love, loving
what fades like dark that takes
the longest time to darken

a level of thought in the body
placing sound that still remains
to be heard, the sound of the place
that resonates

dwelling there, call it memory
call it art, or both, or what you like
exiled from exile

is all that sound can place
flowing for an instant, dilate
and subside, dangles, darkens

somewhere between home and the corner
grocery store or where in approaching
the light, you are

up in the dark, carrying on a monologue
of unnamed clichés pacing in the house where
you live alone on an upper floor

curtains drawn, breath succeeding breath
rising through occasions, after life
low moments a taking to
sound, words that rescue pain

then sleep, being tired then dream
in the place where nothing is clear
in a lasting look after life
the sound of nothing arrives, undisguised

UP NORTH

Up north, loitering among ampersands
of trees that give way to an edge
of field, parenthetically, past
the lights of hotels, traffic
of urban love and hate

toward families on a beach
far enough away to hear only
a fray of shouts, that leave
on wind to fade, an afterthought

the sounds, years away, actually
I left each step to itself, and only
took notes after, loving what fades

a habit, like long walks
and like all habits yearns
to be still

and it's just too bad
the summer ends, longer darks
sweaters, snow, soundless
the vital born to stop, ironies

continue, the last note I have
observes, on a July evening, how
bathing trunks are hung
on branches, how the wind leaves
through them, as if the dead are
trying on the ones that appear to fit

A FINAL SEQUENCE

1) Today you forgave me
the felony went unmentioned
of having a little fear
of breathing your air, earlier

I am no longer the same person
I sit and smoke and change
and think I am the smoke
drifting over the seat, above my head
Montreal, as smoke does

past the furniture sales
past the invisible view of the cemetery
and the trees up north in fading light

and it no longer matters, that for instance
I am something ordinary, a chair
or the cold gleam of rain on his lawn
as he showers, that's okay

I only say this to the guardian
of my absence who naps
on a king size bed under the hum
of a summer fan

and still she sits testing ampoules
of perfume which recall many times
leafing through old associations and new

each cell feeling its way out
depths of various light

2) Waking today, my body a white thing

is not ashamed of itself anymore
since this morning is the morning
after my death

what is there to say, and what's more
what desire to say anything

and these flies buried asleep in sun
against the screen, and the janitor's
child running past after seeing me
in undershorts through the window
knows instinctively the weight
of a dead man

what can children do except laugh
what can that fan do but hum, fierce
sun what can it do but shine

despite the loss of everything I need
everything exists, maybe a little older
looking the way the dead look
suddenly older, yet abler
to do nothing, moved by air

3) What is a poem anyway

but recognition of a darkness
that, say, resides inside a horn
(how many of us blow our own)

as if trying with sharps and flats
to dislodge that darkness
though knowing it cannot be displaced

into the air, and after shaking
out the spittle, receiving the pats
our backs implore for such solos

ends, it will still
remain, as if a high note
no one can reach or play

as if the dried blood in the sleeve
of the dead throat that mourners
bend over to listen for

nothing but this poem is left of that
and even then, when you are gone
when the mourners leave

the poem will be crumpled
and thrown into the dark street

around it, sparrows will feed
on discarded bits of food

a man will awaken from his deathbed
hardly cured and ask where his son
has gone

the words which point out to him
the direction will not be mine
nor the dark he arises in

but I will be that silence that slips
out of sight around a corner, a note
of silence in which a motor turns over, starts in a dark
and fades away down the street
and father of that silence

A FRAGMENT FROM A LITANY
adapted after M. Strand

"This is the hole I dig and must lie in"

I have no way around it, I climb in
and celebrate the mail that passes as if clouds
in deep blue light above my head

I celebrate the south, the solitude of its weather

I celebrate the dogs that laze who will never
be their own masters

I celebrate the voices of families that look over
the acres of sand on a beachhead

I celebrate the small crabs of the beach
that are shy with considerate hiding

I celebrate the lovers tanned to perfection
I celebrate the coral chambers that form
exotic households

I celebrate the hum of a conditioner
the cold front of its noise

I celebrate the quiet white breakers on Martinique afternoons

I celebrate the motel room; its house-cleaned view
of waves and sun, fresh as new linen

I celebrate the ruins left by war, the motives
I share with a mirror, to go on

I celebrate the locked-in air of empty suitcases
the promise of renewals, the air sadness has

I celebrate the landscapers who talk of
spirits among the various trees

I celebrate the north that lives indoors
in depths of dark rooms

I celebrate the wares of my arrivals, the wares
of my departure the wind that carries
them in all directions

I celebrate the center of peach, oyster, cherry
brain and heart, the various
paths to their core

I celebrate the air in unborn lungs, beginning

I celebrate infinitesimal dark,
those I have abbreviated, those that remain

I celebrate the wings of approaching birds, the speck
of a gull in the distance, wings of an
embryo

I celebrate the apples of Rougemont, the open
market of Jean Talon, the cold light of fall

I celebrate the electronic watch that blinks on my wrist
telling my pulse what it already knows

I celebrate the stores that I pass speeding into
a future

I celebrate all manner of guile that accommodates
a mistress

I celebrate the loyal who accentuate the wind
with their love

I celebrate the roofs of mouths, the slanted stucco
roof of the Bambou Hotel

I celebrate the bodies that self-immolate,
that burn for no reason or many reasons

I celebrate the owners' hearts of corner stores who stay open
all night

I celebrate mistakes, revisions, miscalculations
for what they are not

I celebrate the yawn that gapes like a cave of nothing

I celebrate the man in the moon for his vigilance

I celebrate the sun for its courage, over and over

I celebrate nothing that dreams me

I celebrate myself for whatever knack I have
and the source of all knacks

I celebrate the incentive to celebrate
the hope it promises for revival

I celebrate the pain of progress, the joy of setbacks
the strategic ways we have
of saying I am dying

I celebrate the breath of who reads this
and makes it much clearer than my own