

**The
Autobiography
of
Doctor Jack**

by
Nathan Pollack

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THIS IRISHMAN DOESN'T BELIEVE
IN LIFE AFTER DEATH,
AH, MY POOR PAGAN, DOUBTER,
DIDN'T YOUR DOTING MOTHER
OR THE CHURCH'S DOTTERING FATHER
TEACH YOU

ALL OBEDIENCE IS BASED
ON HELLISH REWARDS,
HEAVENLY PUNISHMENTS?
YOU IRISH REVOLUTIONARY,
REBELLING AGAINST GOOD,
REVOLTING.

THE REAL WORLD'S SOLID SOBER GOODS
EVADE YOU

AS YOU BLAZE A TRAIL
THROUGH MURKY PURGATORY.

WHEN THEY DIE THEY WILL KNOW WHERE TO GO,
BUT YOU WILL NEVER DIE
(WONDERING IF YOU HAVE LIVED),
LOST IN THE FOREST.

ON DEATH'S SHORE NOT ARGUING,
DOUBTING THAT YOU WERE ALIVE.

An image of the bar napkin "This Irishman doesn't believe in life after death..."

As I look down and see the paper's white
unblemished quite and absolutely pure,
and know that nothing from this evil pen
can be erased or go away again,
I know myself. Of this I'm sure:
this is a sonnet I shall never write.
My fear may be what holds me from within,
but what constrains me from outside myself?
I'd never say that drinking is a sin,
but bottles stay much fuller on the shelf.
I'll trim my writing-desk all in black crepe,
mourn psyche's sad condition. To escape
from this conundrum there's one hope, I think—
pour whiskey in the pen and drink the ink.

I wrote of drinking and fear and hopelessness long before I met Jack Hesson (this sonnet in high school). But after I left the bar I stopped writing gloom and started writing curiosity, eventually gratitude.

A Preface at the End

John E. Hesson (August 25, 1938, Philadelphia-August 30, 2012, Denver) was my dear friend from the moment I met him at the bar of Govnr's Park August 3, 1983, through until the day I abandoned him at another bar August 16, 1987 (Mister G's or Cherry Cricket or Rodney's or some such), to the recent day I had the privilege as his hospice physician to close his eyes and kiss his forehead as he died. I love him, and I was never surprised that hundreds of others love him (and not just coeds who studied in his college).

Dozens of his friends attended him at his home, scores at his military ceremony at Fort Logan National Cemetery and hundreds at his wake at Nallen's Irish Pub. I realized in that crowd that his was a very individual intimate friendship with each, and so he remains present to each of us. Nor time nor space nor even death can separate those who share affinity.

About 1997 I gathered some of the hundreds of bar napkins our companionship had generated, printed two copies (one for him, one for me), slid his into his mail slot (since he rarely opened his door before noon).

So now I print transcripts of these old napkins again for Jack's friends (who don't care that I don't write so well as I wish). They will read and laugh, and cry. I wish each of us well, and you also who accidentally read this.

Nathan Pollack
Denver
September 15, 2012

An Exclamatory Note about Jack:

As I peruse my napkins I am struck that jazz and Jack and sadness are the themes. Since sadness is ubiquitous, I have decided to omit any sad poem from publication. I shall leave only the joyful and the jazzy.

Jack is no more heroic than Bill the Cat or Archy the Cockroach, but he has character in the same manner other unconscious heroes do--despite his conceit and sophistication, he doesn't really know the sweetness of his simple self. Those of us who are victims of our own compulsive self-scrutiny admire the grace of such unconsciousness.

Jack is a professor of psychology, Don Juan-like chases women under eighteen (as Steve the actor imitates, "I met a fourteen year old woman with the body of a *two* year old!"), arranges dates every two hours so none can be consummated, drinks enough so that he rarely shakes.

He is my baby and my brother. I told his mother, "No, I can't get him to wear clean underwear either, but at least I've got him to wear underwear."

He never comes on time, so I never agree to meet him, just find him often. He has a phone, still in its box from the factory, but no phone number, no line. He has a Mercedes sedan he hasn't driven in years. (When he moved across the street we pushed it to his new parking lot.)

I left my wife and children to drink with Jack for four years, then I got sober. This tenth year after our separation I have gone to the bar to find him unchanged, which seems a miracle. The real miracle is that I am still sober.

I present typescripts of these bar napkins as they were written, not because they are literature but because they may mean something to Jack and me, sometimes something painful. I have not disguised persons or locations because all of them were already fictitious, buried in a haze. Only today is real.

He holds a PhD, loses textbook manuscripts he has carefully written. He keeps notes, names and numbers on napkins in his several pockets. He clips or tears articles from everywhere, and sincerely greets you with, "I cut this out for you," (and it really is just for you).

He is a blind and unconscious reader, never has his glasses, but if I hand him a manuscript he leafs through it flirting with young women, ordering more diet beer, greeting various entrants to the bar--and then corrects spelling on page twenty-nine he cannot have seen.

When I jot napkins, our ritual is simple--"Read it cold, Jack." "But, Nathan, I don't have my glasses..." Another round of beers, another napkin appears, I quickly jot another poem spun from conversation at the table....

It is my duty
to make notes
because weary though I am
I am the only one
who can see through my eyes
and if it should ever be
important to know
what I see from this vantage
and there were no notes
no one would know.
Tell Jack
to be blind
on his own power.
I am sour
from the inside out
but I am looking out
for a new way
to rejoice in the real world.
And even Jack looks out
for someone to use
his smiling face
for a doormat
on the way out,
or to confuse him,
abuse his sensitivity
to soft rejection
like, "later, maybe..."
or, "Baby, you are cute,
but..." It will suit
him to stay the same,
never changing,
always being changed
by some beautiful
but cruel woman
who sees less in him
the less she looks.
Books are written about Jack.

(cont.)

There is no peace tonight,
no piece of pleasure.
From stark deprivation's pit
we see and treasure
with our eyes
softness.
What looks soft
often is not so,
but airy, unsubstantial,
or to our romantic eyes
harsh.
We chameleons
who would be whatever
any other person wished
admit we are miffed
to have been missed
so often.
Off in our crowds
we are insubstantial,
airy.
Nary a night arrives
within which we have held our lives
private,
but with generosity
born of witlessness
we open our slight souls.
Off on our clouds
we heavy ones
have become insubstantial.
Scared shitless
of familiar loneliness
we hide our several parts
and bare our wholes.
He makes noise
to get their attention,
a footnote at least
(dishonorable mention).
And I make notes....

Jack was very late, so I nailed this on the bar for him to find if and when he finally arrived.

This Irishman doesn't believe
in life after death.

Ah, my poor pagan doubter,
didn't your doting mother
or the church's doddering father
teach you

all obedience is based
on hellish rewards,
heavenly punishments?

You Irish revolutionary,
rebellious against good.

Revolting!

The real world's solid sober goods
evade you

as you blaze a trail
through murky purgatory.

When *they* die they will know where to go,
but you will never die
(wondering if you have lived),
lost in the forest.

On death's shore not arrive,
doubting that you were alive.

young John comes shyly
in the shadow of old Jack
sneaking the back alley
because of his prostate
peeing like a gleeful naughty kid
doing what he didn't dare to do
in Philadelphia where
industrial strength air
flared his young nostrils
lodged in his spongy lungs
now he coughs often
lunges off the curb
burps and farts
and wonders why
he pees so often
sees dimly
glumly gleeful
in the shadow
shyly

Jack,
you are old now,
but the meaning of your past
will be passed along
by students
who appreciate your daring
to have been the first Irishman
to discover Greenland,
the first of your race
to lecture sober once,
the only son of green Ireland
to grey gracefully,
a real man,
maturing in spurts.

New directions for old erections,
not up but out.
No doubt our purpose is not upright,
but outright desperate,
no soul but wholly mournful.
Scornful children chide us
and our parents can abide us
hardly. We are in middle age,
no one to guide us in our misery.
Given to miserly poetry
we gain nothing from our efforts,
remain untouched despite
our methodical contrite and recondite
being, immensely limited by life.
Having overcome the strife
of marriage (life-threatening)
we reckon we know the meaning
of seeming and similitude.
Solitude is steaming with unreason.
Cheating a degeneration's season
is my small solace at the solstice.
I am pleased to be in
my own world
ungoverned,
uncovered,
unblanketed,
bare,
unthanked,
unspanked,
living where I am
giving not a damn
beyond my growing moment.
The world can think its thankless thoughts;
what my soul wrought
through these small hands
stands on its own,
owned by me, mostly—
by me or by anyone who comes
from any direction.

I have promises to keep,
but losing is the only thing
I can hold onto,
so missing appointments
becomes my expectation.
Disappointment is familiar friend.
Mid-life means my life will never end,
so where's the crisis?
Stuck in neutral
in heavy traffic--
terrific fears,
but never crash or bang.
I remember songs we sang
in youth sincerely,
but now I disremember
truth severely
adumbrated
by addle-pated I,
refusing to die,
refusing to remember promises.

I teach what I don't know.
I talk about it seriously
while you stand about
stirring up trouble
among the faculty.
A co-ed enters the bar.
Professors twitch and wriggle,
but none moves from his seat.
She goes past fast,
titillates them each.

Pacing back and forth
before the podium
anticipating with mixed odium
the coming concert
at which I wish to play...
I will not stay:
I leave before the second movement
moves the people to the door,
or else they snore
through the finale.
In the alley afterward I cry.

This is the way we teach you:
We squeeze your nose in clothespins.
Learning begins when you meet the end of pain,
suffer beyond memory, and then begin again
to be trusting of large persons in dark clothing
closing in on the buds of your small person's freedom
to feed you lye, to make you cry, to let you die
quietly in the classroom,
with a note to your parents:
"Is improving" (all but beaten down).

Where is the young beautiful angry person
I searched for in my old age,
mellow myself
but looking for someone
to carry my seed
beyond the river?
Liberated now from life
like a deep-sea diver
erupting into air,
like a corset model
stripped of underwear,
I am aware of diverse urges,
surges from my within.
Why should I go without?
Where is the beautiful young angry person
who can carry my baton?

A little bitter beer or light
will make things right.
The vague sadness
you feel in leaving her
against your will
will let you feel alive.
Bittersweet is bright.
Deprive yourself of comfort for tonight.
Invest some in reality
as if you had a future,
the opportunity to anticipate
some slight further pain
to justify another beer,
and go a round again.

I have been celibate
for about eleven weeks now,
a pretty long period.
I celebrate on the bus
when people laugh
and point at me,
an absent-minded professor
confessing small sins publicly,
as if I never knew
television cameras were there
to stimulate my humble grandiosity
on Colfax Avenue midmorning
midst bag-ladies, hookers, cops
and professional confessors
eleven weeks into oblivion.

An example of quotation from the tavern conversation, at least Jack's exact statement, the first three lines. Many others of these napkins come from the conversation at the bar, not merely from my bizarre imagination.

She's very well behaved,
never sits in a man's lap
without having been asked.
She is self-contained,
not stodgy, but unashamed
to come and sit, not dance
out on the floor, but on a stool
to writhe politely to the music.
My friend watches women in bars
because he wishes to touch them.
I watch because I wish to watch
and wonder when they sit and fidget
where they will light and how,
like moths fly and I don't chase them,
just wonder where they will light and how,
I sitting, watching, making notes.

This is the napkin I was writing when I first met Jack and Harvey at Govnr's Park. As I handed it to Harvey I said, "You are a sociopath." Without missing a beat he retorted, "And you're an obsessive-compulsive."

Don't go out at this hour
where the air is thick
with fragments of persons
having batted themselves about.
About now I shall retire
into the hell-fire of the street.
There is no defeat in madness.
My sadness is in sanity.
Humanity falls on its face gracelessly.
Brilliance palls in the face
of old supernovas' impact
flattening all truth,
reducing it to fact.
No need to fear the bomb or warfare.
We are relieved of need to care
for ourselves or any other.
We have ourselves
destroyed ourselves with sanity.
Humanity is out of style,
out of power.

Leave dreams be,
they sting you if you stir them.
Leave dreams undisturbed.
The human brain is huge, unuseful.
The simple truth of being is in breathing,
eating in the writhing air about you
without cheating, without lying,
without faking it, without making faces,
without wasting energy or effort,
or for what eat and breathe?
For what grieve?
What have we each lost
when tossed about by Death
our intimate professor,
to take then give away
a final breath?
Leave dreams be dreams and seeming.
Take death with me between your teeth
and suck it flat,
and sharp,
and sweet.

Empty promises
are full of pregnant dreams.
The meaning of my fullness
is my coolness,
my feeling foolish.
I am utterly alone.
I know that soaring loneliness
groaning through the skies
with heavy sighs
is something only
lonely stoned unphoned
phony Coney Island silent stylists
profess perforce perhaps
until their boots and chaps
chaff their silly legs.
I drink dregs from boots and laugh.

Don't
say
nothing.
(Say something
softly,
sweetly.)
Meet me
in the middle
of the middle-aged dancers denying crying and
trying to be younger than the human tongue
can flick with slick words or stay
its tongue before it sticks a fly
to its papillated self
and try to break
chameleon's
heart.
Don't.

When last I asked the reason why
I received a rude reply.
Today, more circumspect, I try
to understand. I will rely
on your compassion. My thoughts fly
to ancient-seeming days. I cry
when I remember Lorelei
seducing from the sea.
What cannot be
appears to me,
that suddenly
you fly to me,
through me,
pursue me
till I die.

Tender shoots of New Year burst
palely quiet green flares, fireworks
against the shallow sky.
The First of January
lies to me again
as I recline beneath a planter
on the floor unable to arise easily.
Queasily I squeal in daylight
too bright to tolerate.
New Year's Eve's offspring,
New Year's Morn.
Old years mourn their offspring.
Maybe Spring will bring me
new perspective,
somewhere off the floor.
Meanwhile,
close the drapes,
close the door
against New Year's clatter
(splattered brains
shot).
Shot?
Shot!
Not
another!
Happy New Year,
Merry
(x-mas).

Harvey married Merry merrily.

No one recovers from New Year's Eve.
No one recovers from life.
Our ancient mother, Eve,
taught us to eat apples,
drink orange juice,
and ever since
we have been at sixes and sevens,
apples and oranges.
We are at the bar,
and any heavens we have
are unrecovered,
unremembered
in the past of our deep seas,
treasures unrecognizable
encrusted in barnacles,
dredged up in our timeless reveries.
No new year,
but a flooding flow of time,
enough to drown Noah.

Swan song--
whatever love we shared
has gone along
to Texas
for the winter,
to the center of the universe
where worse and better persons
can converse
amid the floating flowers.
Hours pass flatly, slick and fast
like glass immaculate--
and Mary comes
a virgin lost in the forest
harassed by primal man,
primate screams,
shattering dreams of floating fowl
idyllic, silent on high Egyptian lakes.
Truth takes dreams to death
and silent unsung swan song.

Mary is a research primatologist, which does not completely explain her years of tolerance of Jack.

Finicky, the pinnacle
of pin-headedness.
Dedicated fetidness
is my candid fancy.
I am undone. My romance
is my weakness. My clumsy dance
tweaks my uniqueness,
makes fun of my one feeling
revealing I am weak.
I only seek unquestioning
acceptance.

Peacock preens,
prunes his feathers,
wishes women would see him
when his plumes were spread
above his tiny head.
Instead they look and laugh
at the wrong moment
when he has fallen on his ass,
broken his tail feathers,
scattered his dreams
in many directions,
bent imperfections now
protruding cockeyed
from his broken butt.
He staggers and he stutters
when he meant to strut.

No morning sun coming.
Drumming pulse repulses daylight.
Night might last forever.
Clever concoctions of diction
cannot substantiate pouting fiction
that no matter how far I push evening
night will take her own short time to leave me
grieved and ungirdled
in the midst of hordes of enemies
at day's unwelcome battlefield
never fully anticipated.
Hero I am,
victim of my own unconscious commander
pandering to my own seduction nocturnal,
my diurnal reduction to mortality
at the wretched ragged fringes
of its last frightened infantryman's broken spear.
Infant fear of battle morn. [Horns sound.]

Live in lingerie and love it, fella.
I tell you
you can be at ease,
self-contained,
alluring in the mirror.
Silk stockings can be sheerer bliss
than any other.
You can kiss
and leave your loving mark
a heart on the glass.
Your ass is smooth
and lace enhances it.
Your thighs and legs
and all the rest are lovely,
hairs hidden in your hose.
But when you glance some higher
and you see you have no breast,
you feel like a sucker
to have spent
so many hours
and so many dollars
at Nancy's shop.
You stop your reverie and think
you should have got
instead of being
woman.
(Nancy, stock large sizes.)

The bartendress intends to open a lingerie shop to enhance her income.

For always you're everything
for always your everything
just as consciousness knows
justice and careful kindness
flowing away young ever
never and then half aware nodding
flight alive years ensuing
needlessly awful turning harrowing amid night
flight awake yawning evening
jokes adumbrated can't kill
sweet sleep soothes souls
succulent skin sweats sexily
sorrow stays some
shies sighs
sins

Jack and Mary...
scary concept
May and December
remember nothing of reality
nothing feasible
nothing teasable
nothing squeezable
nothing tangible
nothing fragile agile
tangent to reality
created in banality
insanity mushroomed into humanity

If you won't tell me
I can't know
what being alone
can tell me
as my mother mirror-image
long distance calls
to tell me she has gone
and become me
intimately
beyond all continents
uncontained
remaining solely slowly sole
as Sol crawls above the windowsill
spilling sunshine in my eyes
glued still together by night
tightly closed against togetherness

She is my friend.
I refuse to see her body
the way another man would,
or smell it.
Tell me the truth--
Who is your dentist?
And what is your name?
Did the female praying mantis
give head or get a head?
What is a dead male worth?
Psychologists confer--What for?
What fur is felt?
What pelt is worth its salt?
What fault is found in hiding,
hide-bound trolley riding
sensationalist insensate dentist
grilled by Gestapo types,
drilled in domesticity?

The tangentiality reflects not my psychosis but the conversation at the bar, this time involving a dentist and a woman who wears furs.

Their butts
are what dismay me.
Everything in disarray
in my mirthful mind,
a tightly round behind
becomes unsettling to me.
Do me a favor
and give them each a flavor
distinct which I can savor
with my nose and tongue.
If I should lose my mind
and lose my eyes,
let me never lose olfaction
of their butts.
Displayed discreetly
they are sweet and quiet,
and so it is so hard for me
to attend to ifs and ands.

She's not there
in the thick abandoned air
of tenements untenable.
She is amenable
to oblivion
living on the remnants
of cremated professors
confessing lust,
doing what they must not,
chewing cud of dusty jottings
of aged European refuse
(Erasmus, Nostradamus, Freud)
pretending that they have enjoyed
childhood.
Wildness in the wilderness.
Our children kill the chilledness
of childhood relished
unembellished,
overworked by Turkish killers
whose wills by hashish are unraveled
to kill me once on roads untraveled.

Several silly days ago
I was silly several ways.
No one knows which way it goes
when the wind blows Avon's flavors.
Jack savors Coors.
Some steeper person
drinks Dos Equis.
Heck is of it that
the better beers
are bitter.
Barmaids twitter,
point at fat old men
spending unearned money,
saying, "Honey, come with me..."
and all that jazz.
Jack has class.
He imagines she is real
and she entertains him
with a piece of prestidigitation.

Jack went on a date, returned home without his wallet.

Memory is sweet.
Somehow memory is kind to me
either by recalling what used to be
or what distressed me.
Memory is my only loyal mistress.
Lonely with her
I can be
a man of outward equanimity.
She has no substance.
I awake
and take my draught of bitterness
neat.
Defeat of love
is in reality.
Memory and sweetness
sink obliquely,
and I am nakedly
confronted with reality
which has no name.
Each moment changing
she remains the ragged same,
speaking past me
and stepping on me painfully,
slipping past me ungrabbed,
sneaking.
The real world
attractive, unsexed,
leaves me wishing
for my memory.

Mother, please remember me.
Black-faced I sing for mammary,
(a Jolson joke).
Is memory so sweet?

No way to remember
what being myself
could have been.
Every time I think of the future
I think of the past.
Days and evenings
became nights longing,
short shrifts for me
evening out drifts
of wind and sand and sea.
Leveled is the sandcastle,
serene the sea
(breakers broken).
A splintered shell,
a token,
a spoken echo
of an ocean,
memory.

This is the napkin Karen chose to read at Jack's funeral.

Here we are.
I hear you cry quietly
before you die tritely.
I swear with dreaming
we are skimming
the sewers of our steaming
solitude.
Rude beaming
of moons unseemly screaming.
There is reckless greening
of America in preening
before mirrors
of seeming
and crying,
drying tears
and feeling fears flying
into night,
unright,
unprepared,
off balance,
immersed in malice.
Beloved in my memory,
and bravely gay
the rabbi's daughter
Sharon Mallinger
malingers in her seeming solitude.
She screams at me
from memory
(rock and roll breaks eardrums).
Tedium of age presages death,
and memory dies without gasping--
grasps me with her final breath.

Libation:

There is no salvation.

Sky thickens like pudding,
occasionally boiling out a lonely plop.

Tears congeal within me,
never show,
never flow.

What is this pain?

I'm the one who walks with his chin out,
bumps into innocent fists.

More pain than the stinging slaps
comes from the guilt
to realize I am wrong

to complain
against bruises
which rise
from my impulse
to punish
my own impulse.

A poultice
to deflate my swollen pride:

Libation.

waning and maintaining
innocence among the flowers
hours bloom incessantly
into rooms of women
their bazooms uncontained
my mind inflamed by women
I left the county counting
mounting mountains floating
in a ten year old boy's eyes
thighs immense intensely
seeking shrieking cheesecake
freaking frigging senseless
taking from the public fund
pubic fun unending
unbending erection
perfection uneaten
inedible

1958
beatniks
the village gate
bongo drums & thongs
songs carefully incomplete
the feet of poems foreshortened
jewish girls regret nose jobs become red
redheads become jewish by eating lox & bagels
birds don't sing a single thing the kingston trio won't
we spend every penny had nothing to our names
except the charm which would disarm
girls disrobe them in our minds
then find a quart of beer
huddie ledbetter
long til dawn
talk into
1984

An example of a forty-five degree napkin. Thongs were sandals which held to the sole by a strap between the great and second toe, not the bikini bottom worn nowadays which is held over the pudenda by a strap between the buttocks.

WE
GABBING
GRABBING
RANDOM REASON
FROM THE ATMOSPHERE
FREEZING MEANING *TOUCHING*
FROM THE ONGOING FLOW *TONGUES*
OF FLOTSAM GLOWING *UPSIDE-DOWN*
FLYING ARCING SPARKS UNKNOWING *LIES*
SHOWING PATHS OF HAVING BEEN *SURROUNDING*
AND DYING *SOUNDS UNNECESSARY SIGHS MAKING*
TRYING PEERING PRYING EYES *EYES STARING UNCARING*
AND SQUINTING
SQUIRTING TEARS *AIR NIGHT CLEAR THE IN DEAR HELD*
TO CLARIFY THE YEARS OF TALK *WINDOW THE AT*
COLD AND CLOSED
THE SQUAWKING UNHEARING *SCHEMING OUR*
RATTLE OF CONVERSATION *SCREAMING*
UNSOPHISTICATED *MEANING*
UNRATIONED *RETAINING*
FLOWING WANING
IRRATIONAL
OUR PAST
FAST

Another forty-five degree napkin, this one going both directions (one hundred eighty degrees from each other) but since I don't know how to do the typography I append a photocopy. [Read the regular font left-to-right from the top; read the bold-italic font right-to-left from the bottom.]

Note the pair of EYES in the middle - serendipity.

WE
GABBING.
GRABBING
RANDOM REASON
FROM THE ATMOSPHERE.
FREEING MEANING'S ANTHRODOL
FROM THE ONGOING FLOW ENERGY
OF FLOTSAM CLOWING, NONPO-301SDN
FLYING ARCING SPARKS UNKNOWNING, SAH
SHOWING PATHS OF HAVING BEEN ON ANOTHER'S.
AND DYING, SQUAWKING UNHEARING SHOTS ON
TRYING PEERING PRYING EYES SEE ONTRALS ONTRONN
AND SQUINTING TRYING PEERING PRYING EYES SEE ONTRALS ONTRONN
SQUIRTING TEARS TRYING PEERING PRYING EYES SEE ONTRALS ONTRONN
TO CLARIFY THE YEARS OF TALK. MAXIMUM ALL IN
THE SQUAWKING UNHEARING MAXIMUM ALL IN
RATTLE OF CONVERSATION ONTRALS ONTRONN
UNSOPHISTICATED, ONTRALS ONTRONN
UNRATIONAL, ONTRALS ONTRONN
FLOWING ONTRALS ONTRONN
IRRATIONAL
OUR PAST
LAW

WE
GABBING
GRABBING
RANDOM REASON
FROM THE ATMOSPHERE
FREEZING MEANING
FROM THE ONGOING FLOW
OF FLOTSAM GLOWING
FLYING ARCING SPARKS UNKNOWING
SHOWING PATHS OF HAVING BEEN
AND DYING
TRYING PEERING PRYING EYES
AND SQUINTING
SQUIRTING TEARS
TO CLARIFY THE YEARS OF TALK
THE SQUAWKING UNHEARING
RATTLE OF CONVERSATION
UNSOPHISTICATED
UNRATIONED
FLOWING
IRRATIONAL
OUR PAST

FAST
WANING
RETAINING
MEANING
SCREAMING
OUR SCHEMING
AT THE WINDOW
CLOSED AND COLD
HELD DEAR IN THE CLEAR NIGHT AIR
UNCARING STARING EYES
MAKING SIGHS UNNECESSARY SOUNDS
SURROUNDING
LIES
UPSIDE-DOWN
TONGUES
TOUCHING

We sang without meaning
in the sixties.
We danced with no direction.
In silent corners
wallflowers
sour, somber and sedate
waited
for the coming of dawn
or a new Napoleon
to turn around
our ennui.
On we trekked or trod
distressed, undressed
in the face of freedom,
unmet, unled by God.

No wonder we are here.

The dunderheads and derelicts review the news,
stuff papers in their shoes,
rewrite human history,
use booze to loosen memory,
intend the best
and do what will not be confessed in proper company.

Our wills will be bent
by meaningful insistent fellows
who order rounds abundant
to redound reverberating calumnies
against authority established.

It is as if we were responsible for right,
or failing that
flailing to the left.

Bereft of power
deftly we defy the order,
and in disorder
fly into the night
benighted

tight
unknighted
frightened of the truth
distracted by facts
we pull uncooly from our foolishness
wishing we were wilier or stylish.

We criticize Hitler
rather than our mothers
and wonder why we are here
or where we are truly.

Don't ever go
deep into yourself
without a guidebook.
(You wouldn't go to Rome without one,
would you?)
Could you
come with me
into the alley,
naked city
(critical of doom)?
Have you room
for superfluity?
I give me
the handicap
of stupidity
rampant
on a field of yellow daffodils
filling spring
with willing singing
stinging air
with careless crudity
and noble ancestry's nudity.

He picks up his mail at the bar.
 She picks up her male at the bar.
 I am barred from the bar,
 sleep alone insomniac.
 Back at the bar
 they drink exotic potions,
 promote erotic notions,
 dream of crossing oceans
 star-crossed lovers
 of other persons' daughters.
 Across the waters they will see
 Killarney and gay Paree,
 be with one another to the nth degree
 in the summer heated by their wishes
 eating foreign dishes
 made of eels and fishes
 rendered into quiches
 eaten in dark niches
 at underground cafés,
 overcooked leeks,
 reeking cheeses,
 half-baked fantasies
 of Roman romance,
 Florentine marbles,
 French doors;
 loose professors
 touring Europe,
 their vehicle a Humbert-Humbert,
 on a guilt trip to Ireland
 to become saved.

Jack and Tom (American historian) arrange guest professorships in Europe, visit their ancestral homeland Ireland, hope to have sex with innumerable young women. They were witnessed by an accidental traveler alone at a bar in Hungary

Soapy Smith's Eagle Bar has its own soul.
I was bad,
cellared in that hole after I was collared.
My dolorous musings
were unrehearsed
and polite values
were reversed
at Soapy's
where I was prisoner
pursued by women
when I was too intoxicated
to care that pixilated
pixies fixed my mickeys
and my mouse was soused
and my mouth didn't work
to say that jerk Jack
should take me back
to Cherry Creek.
When I come to Soapy's
it takes a week to sober up.
"Puppy Vomit in a Cup"
is the name
of the next shot
they will claim
tastes good
and should make your brain
refrain from thinking.
Nothing will remain
if you go to Soapy's,
chase women,
cry aloud,
continue drinking.

last shot got him
long shot
won't last long
last long blast
cast into crowds
clouds of smoke
joke of life
choke
half of crying
is not trying
staff of life
is tears
substitute beers
boiler-makers
ball breakers
earth shakers
breath takers
forsakers

If I should die in Philadelphia pity me.
But if I lived in Wyoming it would have been
an accomplishment of no mean proportion.
Something hurt me yesterday:
the wind blew the news into my nose,
and I, allergic to the truth,
sneezed, convulsed
and knew me surely dead.
I think ahead:
To be in Philadelphia in winter
is such a sooty curse
I have the comfort
nothing could be worse.
Wyoming has no women, only sheep.
Philadelphia's charms across the river lie,
she lies there in my arms in Camden
crammed into a two-room apartment
with a seven-person family
and six in-laws visiting
forever for the winter.
I imagine I am in
Wyoming for the winter
waiting for the sheep
waiting for a bus
in Philadelphia.
(Liberace in Rittenhouse Square,
harbinger of spring.)

From the lengthy conversation of Jack (from Philadelphia) and two newspapermen from Wyoming, ranging from current events to geography, disintegrating into painful personal relationships. I actually saw Liberace in Rittenhouse Square at dawn Easter Sunday, 1962, dressed in yellow sequined evening tails walking two yellow poodles.

How do I address you?

“Brother”?

“Other self”?

“Sufferer”?

“Wayfarer a fair way off”?

What do I say to you?

Empty wishes?

Empty memories?

What will please what won't be satisfied?

What tears we've cried

in anger at ourselves

cannot be tasted

one in the other's mouth.

No tongue can taste

or spit it out in words.

It goes without saying

the bitterness we taste is similar

but born of different vintage.

Advantage is in wisdom,

not in knowledge but in taste.

What if we waste

more than mere dregs?

What if we slop it from its kegs?

Get sticky feet?

“So what?” I snort.

Is life so sweet,

so precious every drop

that when I slop about and lose a bit

I have to say, “I've blown it. This is it!”?

Yes.

Everything I have is on the line,

but I can't bear to throw the dice again,

paralysed by fear.

He lived and died on Colfax Avenue
within the shadow of the capitol.
He had no control over those about him.
They shouted at him if he were close,
ignored his screaming penury
when their windows were closed
to the night and winter air.
There is no reason to remember
nor sunshine enough to thaw
the one cold night I saw him wince,
the only clearly bleary evening since
the beginning of the world
when we all were warm,
the storm within which came,
the wind that killed him.

The Brain Damage Olympics

Competition for fumbling:

...stumbling

...mumbling

...bumbling

...crumbling.

Jack: A real champion!

Only slightly sad
when I see you now
I am slightly glad
you are still living
smiling slightly
not killed by the world
not stilled by the whirling madness
cast upon us each
by teachers cruel
and coolly cooing
misconstructions unduly
adulated by addle-pated unruly boys
who amid the noise of adolescence
unlearned lessons of silence
whose science was lessened
by distraction of fractionated feeling
real life revealing
sadness of slights.

Low level,
middle ground,
I keep my journal
and keep clear of cynicism.
What I do sexually
has little to do with my spirit,
little to do with my body.
A lot of people I know
are lesbian mothers
in a group
like cute little gremlins
or incompetent monsters.
They pose in porno shops
sadistically to tease
innocent lechers.
I follow them to make notes,
take snapshots,
review and meditate
in the privacy of my room
or behind an old car in the alley.
I keep a low profile,
go up and down Colfax Avenue
keeping my journal dull,
steering clear of cynicism.

Four Quick Napkin Sketches

Harvey heaves.
There is nothing graceful
about him,
but charming is something.
He thinks he is waiting
for a lady
but he is waiting
for a man
to walk in
in a blue uniform
with a badge
and say,
“Behave yourself.”

Jack can't help himself.
He sees as little as possible.
He leers lecherously
but sees blurrily.
Someday soon he will awake
sweating for no reason,
gasp and say,
“Hello, today.
To hell with false tomorrow.”
We have our flimsy joys
but sustain ourselves
with gritty sorrow.

(cont.)

Rapidly jotted sketches of the four persons standing about me at the bar of Govnr's Park.
Linda's question is what a nice black woman is doing going out with a cracker lawyer like
Psycho Sam.

Sam sighs.
Memories of the deep south
are superficial,
flit along the surface
of his mind.
Now he minds business
coldly in the claws
of the big city,
little bayou settlements
behind him.
Don't mind him.
He drawls.

Linda lies.
She knows old men
are unstable,
but that doesn't
make her day.
She has a reason,
but noise about her
muffles her small treason
against her solid self.
It is that she knows
everything about everyone,
but doesn't remember
a certain question
for her self.

This peacock quill writes wrong.
The impact is too strong,
the meaning light.
If I will come into the bar to write
I will not come here easily
to this fancy gaudy glitz.
But down the block
in unrenovated buildings
with persons who are willing
to be unrenovated
I will write the wrong things
sleazily.

Snide
sunrise
sneaks,
peeks around the corner
slyly,
fries eggs on his upper lip,
slips back again
beyond the coffee cup
to come up
in the headlines
of Wednesday's news
old
but meaningful,
seeming
to say
something
to the
some-
what
somno-
lent
self:
morning.

No
reason.
Treason against
small central self,
an elf in wolf's clothing
closing himself from any
human contact. Woman contract:
Love me for no reason. Jack says back,
"I'll drink to that." He wears no hat
because he fears he will be bald.
Old wives' tale. He seeks the peak
of happiness by knowing every pit.
Unlucky that the tusk impales him,
that the husk of what he was
derails him. Hairless
night will scare less
than hirsute tongue
come morning.
Reason,
no.

No reason for spite
but it bites me from within
the flailing seething part of me
which is my tail.
I tell you what I cannot sell to tabloids
that I am hale,
but see too deeply
what barnacles lurk
on each of our faces.
I must undo my work
to be tolerated in places of society.
Sobriety has no worth
to earn its raves.
We live in caves extracted from the earth,
and murder mothers in our minds
from whom we came
and unto whom we cannot go again.

there is no reason
for moral treason
in a warm unhurting season
but the weight of age
and bite of sage
presages rage
in twilight blight
impending night
diffuses sight
and slight confusion
of the overworked brain
tweaked by strain insomnolent
remains with horrid consonance
the consequence of which is pain
for the soul
the whole inert doll of me
within whom pins stick
prickling alertness to my own inertia

Liberation
is a laugh.
I have been freed
to be nothing.
I met a woman once
the smell of whose very breath
was death of innocence.
We jump and shout,
cast about
one eye, then another
looking for
a willing pupil,
a willing glance, a chance that maybe...
a wistful, wishful, wispy you
will marry me and have my baby.
Then I can be a cowboy
or a fireman again.
(A couple more beers,
Saint Pauli Girl,
unending
tears.)

Mythogyny
is what I will call
untruths about women.
Misconstruing men
I will call
men-struation.
James Thurber's imagination
made monsters and incompetents
of men and women.
I have found the ultimate evil:
gender-roles imposed on children.
Each of them I know
began with the ability to be anything,
each of whom I see become "adult,"
capable of being nothing with aplomb.
(It ain't the apple in Eden, Jack;
it's the plum at the end of the carrot.)

Gourmet
has little hope
of tasting again,
now eats irregularly
for no reason,
taste or seasoning
mattering not
a smattering.
Clattering
of grease and peppers
does not distress
his wasted palate,
pasted now with dryness.
Instant nourishment
freeze-dried forever:
Just add hot tears and serve.

Paella

Is this mussel
not a flower?
Nor this paella
a garden of delight
whose tower is a crab?
What power has a garden
thus to grab me and consume me
as I eat its several parts?
Resume ye your stations,
staid crustaceans
and vegetables.
Stand your ground,
peppers and spice.
What is nice is to drink you down
with round wine.
What is fine
is finally to reach the end
of a varied day
at the bottom
of a pot that has no bottom,
got its lid on.
Hidden treasures burst
first in my hand
then on my tongue.
I am young again
discovering the bed
of seven seas,
the gardens of gods
whose odd pleasures
lead them to exceed
their own appetites.

(cont.)

One might end the day with warm milk.
But think again
and sink into the silky sauce
paella makes
in its little sea-bed.
Headless shrimp
impress my palate.
My pallet awaits.
Great eating takes
the edge off
dreams.

I know nothing of the dance.
I cannot see it.
It moves so fluid in my eyes
my mind can't hold it.
But frozen line
is fluid in a different way.
My aunt has a sketch of a dancer
Picasso did the year my mom was born
(nineteen-nineteen).
It looks like a dancer dancing.
(He drew things stupid folks could see then;
even I could see it was a dancer.)
I tell you
there was tension
in every muscle of that young man,
but discipline,
control in each small part
which made the whole
stand strongly,
poised with one toe pointing out
and upwardly curved
the upper extremity
to its utter extremity,
the strongly pointed curved
digitus minimus.
I was shocked to see
he had drawn a single line
from pointed toe up
to the infinitely strong small fingertip.

(cont.)

I paused and drew conclusions
from clues within the static lines,
that he had moved (Picasso)
so skillfully and strong
in a single moment
that his movement left a single trace,
a line of ink from pointed pen
which always will be
the reality
of his muscles' movement in that moment,
sketching the movement
of the dancer standing still.

Written for Larry B., our friend, a ballet teacher, while he ate at the bar of Govnr's Park, as he did most every night. This is a distant reminiscence of a lithograph of Picasso's of male dancers which I subsequently inherited on the death of my aunt Sophia Rush; she acquired it from a charity auction at which she was herself the auctioneer, my Uncle Arthur her shill.

Wordless.

What are words worth?

What did Wordsworth know?

Even I could sell postage stamps
between volumes of verses.

If the countryside is quiet
syllables can riot
in companies against each other,
and images and ideas follow
in no strict order.

The quiet beauty of the landscape
and the lakes,
the morning fog a silencer,
and the dullness of the task
of selling stamps and posting mail
can leave energy and space
for wild Italian visitors
and voluminous verse.

What is worse,
a sheltered life
or shattered solitude?
“The child is father of the man...”
and convoluted concepts can
emerge from flowing words
like quietly uprising birds
in endless cohorts
separate from earth
and from the water’s surface
facing again and again,
seasonally,
the rising of the fog.
Words rise in a mist
and do not make your heated lips be kissed,
nor can my endless words
create reality
from my dull feelings,
wordlessly alive.

The F Word

fragments
factions
fractions
fractures
factors
friction
fiction
fission
fashion
fusion
flux
fluctuance
fluctuation
fractious
fatuous
factitious
fictitious
fructiferous

ferocious
feral
final
finial
fantastic
frantic
fluid
flawed
flayed
frayed
fated
faded
fought
felled
fried
fey
fie
foe
fuck

Jazz Napkins

**Anything
Christmas Eve at El Chapultepec
d minor
For You
I Almost Fell in Love
Jazz
Meaning Sings
Nothing Snazzy
Silent Night
Take a Break
The Kid's Not Bad
Tonight
When I Heard Jazz**

These were written mostly on larger cloth napkins, classier than paper ones, so the songs were longer; at supper with Jack at Café Alta darkened for the after-dinner jazz set, or at the noisy smoky El Chapultepec.

Anything

Anything, I don't care.
Sing about Aunt Millie's underwear or life in Poland.
Sing your heart out, fool.
Sing of love until you drool
over images of youthful flesh
thrashing about in virgin woods.
We trade our fantasies for goods of the real world.
Pearls and gemstones are not found on city streets.
One meets beauty rarely,
youth once only.

We age
and we are lonely
with scant dreams we shan't repeat.

We shuffle with our minds, not with our feet.

Christmas Eve at El Chapultepec

Back in the arms of sleepy boredom snoring.
Stark reality will come to harm me now,
with its dull thud to bludgeon my thin-skinned head.
The leaden sudden sound of drums comes first,
then the burst of saxophonizing home.
The fine-honed conical comical trumpet
is a strumpet strutting the loudly crowded room.
And the gloom of the bass
is droning your unspoken name rhythmically,
a shock-wave stroke churning up the smoke.

d minor

Distinguishing each note succinctly
he rewrote human history
(my crazy misconstruing
of true love)
in a single phrase of jazz,
losing nothing
of the color of reality.
Blues are beyond transcription.
Transgressions tiny in our minds
feeling out of time and tune
become our crimes heard publicly.
Moon jerks.
January works itself to June.

How can a man
man a machine
taller than he
can ever be?
The bass viol
thicker and taller
than a sequoia
hollers hollowly
deeply from the base of me.
I drone.
Could I ever on my own
stagger into night
and brag I got the rhythm right?
My bass plays me.

For You

For you
for no reason
except your asking
I deeply
feel
and dig
a way to be
responsive to you.
Only you
know how you feel,
how real your meaning may be,
when maybe I mean
to speak to you,
to touch you,
to mean much,
to be much to mean,
to demean
the meaning of our being
together
not at all.
Call together
all our friends.
Make amends
with enemies.
Make into meaning
seminars
of seminal
semantics.
Antics of my pen
will revolve
about the when
and where of caring
each for the other.
Tomorrow may
be Mother's Day.
In May there may be others,
days to celebrate, to be alive.

(cont.)

Nine to five
we die,
and dye our living
with hues
livid and pale,
with swelling
smelling stale,
with shoes
worn with walking,
squawking talking,
silly superficial
frail verbosity
whose meaning
is in non-being,
non-seeing,
fleeting remnants
of reality.
Feeling,
smelling pallidly,
being a pal,
pal-ness,
pal-itude,
pal-reality
is chilling,
killing kissing,
missing killing,
meaning milling
on the mall
with throng and thrall,
stalling
when you still me
with crawling pets
waiting with white teeth
for the meat of my heart,
to feed needingly
nature's creature's greed
on my gutless nuts.

(cont.)

Nuts!

Your wishing touches
nothing.

Loving me
is something
touching on
oblivion,
sucking,
wishing to be wed
to fountains
of nourishing
something.

Wondering:
why
small children cry,
why wondering
I don't know why,
why Mother's Day
can come
and go away
in a moment
with no movement
of the girders
stirring earth
to somethingless
motherless
anotherless
wondering,
wandering
naked earth.

Something in me
tells me you wish
to kiss me,
piss away your life
with me
as your wife.

I Almost Fell in Love

I almost fell in love,
open to the meaning of her face and hair.
It scares me to remember
I was really there.
I saw her seeing me
(a novel feeling)
and her face burned my eyes in two.

Above the noise,
the saxophone wove deep patterns
of the smoke and crowd.

Aloud each person stood or sat
yelling intimate conversation,
or loudly silent
intimated
that she was free
(or might be).
And the game of eight-ball pool
became the central event
for those who drank alone.

(cont.)

Redacted from a longer double-napkin written at El Chapultepec. That bartender was the humble owner, Jerry Krantz (died March 29, 2012) who had many years earlier one quiet afternoon, when some itinerant musicians came in scavenging about from the bus station down the street, skeptically allowed them to play jazz music for a burrito. It was never again quiet, at least after sundown; El Chapultepec remains a ragged jazz venue, elbow to elbow every night. No matter how loud and raucous, Jerry stood there quietly behind the bar each night in his long white apron mechanically stone-faced pulling beers without stopping, while the music, as I said here, “wove deep patterns of the smoke and crowd”.

Benignly the bartender stood
short and fat,
quietly owned the noisy place.
I shared my secret with him.
Does he care
that beneath middle-aged boredom
beats hormonal despair
worthy of all adolescence?
He has seen aging fools
pursue their work as clowns,
clumsily blurring wit and speech,
each stumbling to his lonely only home
at closing.

A secret to be shared only with the bartender:
I almost fell in love. I don't know how or why.
I saw her seeing me (a novel feeling)
and her face burned my eyes in two.
It is a silly boring story.
I tell only you, because only you could care
that beneath middle-aged boredom
beats hormonal despair
worthy of all adolescence.
You have seen aging fools
pursue their work as clowns,
clumsily blurring wit and speech,
each stumbling in his own direction,
and finally going to their lonely only homes
at closing.
But I almost fell in love,
open to the meaning of her face and hair.
It scares me to remember
I was really there.

(continued on next napkin)

The text of the napkin from which "I Almost Fell in Love" was edited. This was the first two-napkin poem in the history of the world (as far as I was concerned). My wife Angela prefers this to the edited version above or to the previous version in my book of poems of this 1983 era "Leave Dreams Be".

The music was more than nice to hear.
Above the noise the saxophone wove
deep patterns of the smoke and crowd.
Aloud each person stood or sat
yelling intimate conversation
or loudly silent intimated that
she was free, or might be.
And the game of pool
became the central event
to those who drank alone.
Benignly the bartender stood short and fat
and quietly owned the noisy place.
You intimated that you might be free
later, and you looked at me
as if I lived usually
in that world of noise and games
and music and persons whose names
were earned from being themselves.
And I nameless saw you, felt more myself,
and wanted to mouth your name.

Jazz

Jazz has taken me
to misty aisles,
smoke-filled wombs.

Tonight
the sadness of the tune
compels the moon
to hide behind your shining face
which hides itself
beyond touching,
above understanding.
The music makes our hands
squeeze each other's hands,
stands up in empty air
scaring speech between us
out of our mouths,
back into our hearts.

Meaning Sings

Meaning sings
in everyone's Saturday evening.
It is a believing
human throng
simply swaying
with a song,
stiffly saying
all along
the joy of praying,
thick air spraying
jewels in my ears.

Nothing Snazzy

Nothing snazzy
 about this jazzy joint.
 You missed the point
 if you looked twice
 for something nice,
 for culture
 at half the price
 of real music.
 This will tear your guts out.
 It stings
 among swinging phrases,
 raging maniacs
 making questions
 squeak horizons
 flattening the full moon.
 Soon the sun
 will sneak orisons
 between vespers and matins.

Slinky satins
 smell succinctly
 of garlic
 and something indistinctly
 gratinee.
 Matinee means romance.
 Dance with me
 between slick seasons
 seeming to keep time,
 unreason steaming,
 blending into rhyme
 of sauces splashing music
 on your bodice,
 on my tie.
 (Mai-tai.
 My Thai.
 Mighty high.
 Might I die?)

(cont.)

~~My tie-dye
underwear-stylish
wishes to wonder why.~~

Here we hear
the clarion
blaring
brashly
sharing
crashing
rash impetuous
perfusion
of confused notes
unwritten,
perfectly struck
hopes
of heavy metal luck
ringing round
as the coin spins down
on the bar,
making its only meaning
in the round ringing
of far-away dreaming,
the screaming melody
of what we wish
were used-to-be
reality.

Today
listening
to the callous
unheard questions
I drummed up
from my shallow soul
without malice
for convention,
met contention
head-on,
read on steadily,
headily listened

(cont.)

as jazz glistened
becoming stars
and moon healing
gloomy scars,
revealing
the ribs,
the naked spars
of being me
amid the flood
of jazz music.

Whose choosing
is the end of day?
and/or whose mourning?
Horns roaring
or the trashy
brash clashing
of cymbals
have deft meaning
in the tingling twilight.

We might meet,
defeat despair
in the night air
brilliant with sound
surrounding souls
bereft of meaning
unless they bathe
in the moonlight
generated by the wave
of heated air
which carefully you weave
with instruments
of precise joy
each boy imagined playing
fully as a mindless fool
in the full moon's dark
wondering in the park
alone wandering
squandering cosmic energy

(cont.)

into the rising of the sun,
the son's arising.

Silent Night

Silent night
sings silent tune.
June bursts in my mouth
wishing for the fruitful tasteful South.

It frightens me to count me out again.
I meant to beat the meter
of the sweetest spring
the southern breeze could bring.
Now I mourn in darkness
before morning sun diffuses starkness
of your Southern so-called love.

Take a Break

Take a break.

Take a moment from the middle of your song.

Yawn.

Wait.

Take my waiting face into your breathing
an eight-bar rest
so you can take the tune
back to your silent soul
which wholly knows me.
Console me with the blues you sing.

Feeling has no shape.
Amorphous clattering tones
become the skeleton of mourning.
Droning strings
support our stinging dancing feet
swinging eighty feet above the crowd
of loudly cheering dreariness.

Fate
is my excuse for not taking
this moment of my own making
to take your face
at face value,
to trace your silly nose
which frees your several sighs,
to touch the living lines
about your mouth singing.

(cont.)

Take a rest.

For a moment let the best breath of your soul
hover about your face
above my loving lips which seek your lips.

Having rested,
now let loose again the blues
which bless me.

Caress me.

Distress me
with your breathlessness.

The Kid's Not Bad

The kid's not bad
on the trumpet,
but in the old days
we would thump it harder,
hit it with everything we had,
be glad that in it
is the life-history of each,
an adolescent explanation
of universal loneliness and love.

Above all
we made music
to state brashly,
unequivocally:

We born of pain
have died
each night we play the
blues.

Tonight

Tonight
the sadness of your tune
has compelled the moon
to hide
behind
your shining face
which itself hides itself
beyond touching
or understanding.
The music
makes our hands squeeze
each other's hands,
and stands up into the empty air
scaring speech between us
out of our mouths
and/or back into our hearts.
Sky parts
and clouds cower,
moon appears
with quiet power shining.
In my mind opining
meaning from
reality's stew and salad,
pallid moon reminds me
of your self,
wholly holy
in its several parts.
My tongue came to speak
clumsily in school
when foolishly youth knew
more perfectly than wisdom
can now divine
from memory's treasures.
Don't speak
but sing
your sadness' beauty
in my long night,
and frighten me

(cont.)

with memory
of music
reverberating moon
without rhythm
without tune
without you.

There is no excuse
for music
in such flamboyant folds.
The undulating incongruity of jazz
has taken my attention
from mundane Monday
to careless clouded isles
where peril
tastes itself in tension
impervious to delicate
dissension of the mind.
Improvise reason
in a warm world
which has no season,
always changing,
never being changed.
Arrangements are approximations
of our thoughtless
fleeing feelings.
Reality comes in riffs
revealing our uncrowded meanings
clattering against each other,
cluttering in the corners
of our mouths.
Our selves are dancing elves
perverse among the ancient elms.
Night comes slightly tipsy
and nips me from behind,
reminding me
I am human
and imperfect,
elf-like lilting

and falling heavy

on my own behind
and laughing.
Jazz has taken me
to misty aisles,
smoke-filled wombs.

only michael's muscle
can make its way
from night to day
dancing

fancy Irishman
romancing
dark ladies
in their nighties

maybe wishing
to be with him in midnight
evaporated twilight
becomes daylight

spite spits
and evaporates
in the rhythm
of your holy soul

i kiss you lady
lately lost
now tossed
into my arms
serendipitously

Do a small verse for the grown man whose worse imagination was the tune you
walked from the kitchen.

I wondered and I tested wonder under the moon and over the music you chose from
the numbered buttons, itchin'

to scratch your back again, or have you scratch my face with the graceless talons
scraping like dissonance

which makes its own melody of our lost love cruelly making mince-meat of us each as
we remember kiss and dance

(cont.)

whose jazz music missed some syncopated beat of masochistic beating which came
from the womb of meeting
each other accidentally, and mothers-in-law well-meaning, demeaning each child for
the sake of seating
ghosts in courts of authority, over which reign maniac kings of commercial futility and
time and space
and every note of dissonance you wrote in your aborted marriage with my muddled
mind and stunted body. Face
the truth of our smooth loving one another, that another tune played in my mind, and
your own Sony Walkman
had rhythm incommensurate against the only things I had or was, a walking working
singing song-and-dance and talkman.

Slick men kiss women.
Sick men suck jazz.

When I Heard Jazz

When I heard jazz
I always used to
write on napkins
something of the singing
of the song.
All my past is wrong.
The only reason for my loneliness
is dumb onliness,
my being in my one
hungry
funny
tumultuous
ugly
slowly
self.
Without reason
the rhythm treasonous
betrays me
disarrayed.
I played the field:
Now I have felt
the feeling of bereftness,
jazz in brass
beaten,
ironed,
steeled.

You've got a reason
without madness,
without method.
Breathless,
without wretched loneliness
you sing once only
the silent honest thing
you unwished
in solemn twilight:
to love me unduly,
truly insane,

(cont.)

mainly demented,
delicately scented
with wet hair
of dead dog.
Regret nothing.
Flog yourself unflaggingly.
Drag your soul
across the meadow
to the clear space
where sunlight dangles
evening sky
in golden bangles,
ringing echoes
who ask in unison
the reason why
you left me
alone.
Was it
right?

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