

World

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POEMS 1991–2001

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for Paul

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"We cannot stay amid the ruins. Neither will we rely on the new; and so we walk ever with reverted eyes, like those monsters who look backwards."

--RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Part one

Claims for Lost Objects

The slings and arrows,
the bifurcations,
the earnest reader
ripe for a crime.
The clairvoyant uncovers
an ideology of rapture.
The plot turns on
existence, an affinity
for blue. Would I
have told it
to bring you grief?
Would it sleep
inside your patience
like a little branch
of misgivings?
Restored to you,
this backlit saga.
Restored to you,
this alphabet of clouds.

Todorov at Ellis Island

The secret of narrative
in the sight of the lovely
original fixtures,
the false accusations,
the “K” for insanity.
An indigent writer,
specifying the predicate,
fear of fire in ramshackle
buildings, the ghost
of the fantastic looking
across frozen water.
He felt swallowed up
by the the 200 stairs,
by a procedure based on
external criteria,
plot and genre likely
to become a public charge.
While from the mountains
of Northern Italy, refused
admittance, a girl acting
mad, alluding to hermits
and saints. For to destroy
does not mean to ignore,
does not mean to build
the story-machine nor to feel
the grass under foot, but
to turn, as if spoken to,
into what we represent.

The Nature of Evil

"Men don't become very good or very bad in an instant."

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

In an inland city
any autumn
a blameless life,
outside of weather.
Names losing
their limits,
proof
becoming a legendary
absence.
For to oppose
theory to belief
is to let words
tell the story
surviving among
fir trees and macadam,
real or imagined.
Drifting,
as if to fill
the doubled mirror,
the truth in waking,
each moment
a temporary
distance evaporated
by history.
The shadow
in the copy book,
a twinge
of conscience,
wintry as
a swimmer
in sunlit water.
The owner
of ten thousand
dreams and
their interpretations.

Time out of Which

Matter encountered
and charged by the
eye's brittle effacement:
wooden doors, "to the nth power,"
 rings of planets only dust.
While perspective
forms categories
 of knowing
related to
 a startled animal—
hungry fly too small
to see,
 white figment
 on white background.
 Hoping to measure
collisions of passion
 by empirical proof,
 you see
 boundaries as
rehearsals for forgetting.
 Channeled by vowels
 you name a landscape
to stand for believing:
 obvious figures in
 a clumsy story,
 craggy psychology
 of hope.
 Meanwhile,
opening your mouth
 for the unspeaking:
 like an amulet,
your temperate words.