

SELECT

Stephen Ellis

The imagining is easy enough.
It's the proportioning of it is where the
difficulty lies.

Trying to walk through this snow storm,
for instance. The wind whipping the pure
stinging white right through your eyes.

Blindly you form steps.
Moving as much through error as
anything.

Tribute

Cauterize a wound
with the blade
that made it, as

proof that iron
can be made into
fire. Low cloud

can always feel
the burn of iris
opening, yet even

the widest field
is too brief to
yield acreage to

experience, just
as to innocence,
the illusion is

solid, as mica
gleaming from
granitite, for

the heart is large
and miniscule
at the same time.

To the interlace
of famine with finite
resonance, rage

calls always down
to spark, to set ablaze
its unknown measure.

Assumption thickens and distorts
attention.

Think of what this does to the quickness
of exchange.

It is like sparks struck against ice,
making an attempt at fire.

Black Market

for Heriberto Yepes

Cycles of days
pass intact, as
assailed by them

is arrival back
to the first level,
at last bestowed

with obliquity
and torque, passing
more what you

could not have
but gorging upon
what you did not

get, transported
by deductions
from how pleasure

will still brim
over, and how
poverty is the only

facility of reception,
not by choice, from
which you suffer

by displacement,
the precinct in which
work can be only

the ethical dilemma
of living actively within
a timeless dimension.

I'm dreaming of a variety of possible languages, yet remain somehow unaware of any of them in full sense.

They look like sequences of flying birds.

Dream

Car Je est un autre. - Rimbaud, letter to
Paul Demeny, 15 May 1871

The garment of light
Borne of the heat of

Absorbing into my own
Inner conduits the soul

Of my abuser, that his
Be mine, thus to

Reveal himself to me, I
Take off my own skin, now

Come to be this inherited
Shirt, the radiance

Of which has glued me
To myself through it, so I

Hear the tear and feel
The pain of separation,

Seeing below my chin
As it opens deeply at the neck,

The bare breastbone
First of Herakles,

And as it falls away from
My shoulders and slithers

Down my arms, the beautiful
Thinness at waist, and mild

Breasts of Athena, borne out
Beyond hindrance, as by

Incarnation I am
Paradoxically given myself

Birth and passage out of
A skin, inherited by act,

To a skin mine own, achieved
By the stillness of finally

And simply ceasing to avoid
Deserving and so having it.

On the way to the store, the coldness of the wind makes me think of a sort of vague lamentation, though the loss - of warmth - is not my own.

Emperor of the Black Slab

for Abu'l-Husayn al-Nuri

So overwhelming is my
love for the beloved

as it brims out upon
the night, that I would

remember the object
of it perpetually, too

wondrous to tell, but
that the telling, as in

the result of some
hermaphroditic

bingo game I did not
know I was playing,

disappears into pure
ecstasy that, believing

I could keep to
myself and enjoy for

eternity, also is
vanquished in the heat

whose flame is
the heart's sublimation

of the love that continues
to annihilate me.

An awe through which a closeness
of attention,

actually a kind of love, has a way
of making itself felt
as inarticulation.

Simultaneous

Strange, to be
always so far
from the body

others suppose
you are in, yet
so rarely stray

from the home
you're too aware
you don't have.

The bare essentials Are bare - vulnerable -
and that's why they hurt.

Even seemingly simple plans send down
deep roots, transmit deep twinges, deliver
you to the fucking confounding present,
which - try for all you're worth (and that's
precisely what brings you back to it, what
holds you to it) - you can never leave.

Learning to Listen

Human circulation,
celestial movement

and earthly river
paradise: These

constitute the many
paradoxes of human

perception, through
which, alone, human

thought can "be": Water
is the tongue that

licks the flame. These
reflect one another

as we do, that I
experience the Infinite

in you, just as you
experience the Absolute

in me, that this
androgynic wholeness

is bliss, ecstasy,
exhaustion and pain.

Grace flows
through the arteries of

the universe, as we have it
metaphorically as eros

toward full realization
of the gradients of

being rapt and entwined
in a totality separated as

each of us and recombined
in the ways of beauty,

the ways of even life,
in the way of realizing

tragedy, humor
and imagination.

Sexual union invariably
leads to both ecstasy

and annihilation. We
cannot be selfless

in love, and you and I
both, in the extremity of

our affection, are reflections
of the Cosmic story,

the tragedy then, that I,
like Qays, would sacrifice

anything to be near you,
not at some distance rendered

to me as deep anguish, the point
at which I become *Majnun*,

another lover gone mad, who
can recognize neither

his love, nor the madness
it has become, but for

the stars I wish upon,
that tell me to return

to you with desire, thrice
as strong as my madness,

for you are everywhere
within me, and evident

in every place I look,
and you make me see myself

"at it" with unusual
intensity through which I

realize I have made
the error of thinking to ascend

heights that do not exist,
that there may be balance.

But no: No balance is
possible: The stars belong

to you. I want only to ride
their stream back to the earth

I have left in order to
raise myself to the level

of your notice. Let me
instead praise your moist

eyes, the murmur of
your parted lips, feel

your streaming body
and hear with close listening

your being combine
with modesty and proper

proportion, my appreciation
and love of feeling

your heart regulate and throb
deep in my inner ear.

Relations of object to object.

One crow on a tree branch, three gulls
on a telephone wire, all within focus of
my two eyes.

Along with everything else between:
Stone to flesh to air.

Je Descend

The boy, the boy
who trained her

flowers to follow
his desire in her

name through tall
grass, some field

of sunken diamonds,
Berlin, the Rhine,

why not the Rialto
where god sings

best, or Tehran
or in the northern

fields of my youth
where lust was always

fresh and rich girls
painted nails and eyelids

or left these bare
for love. The fires

crackled. It was
summer and we

waited as they waited
for us to rush in

and bring life to those
desperate and alone,

the young girls, ourselves,
singing as a lantern does,

not to a lover, but
to life that love may

find her there, and so,
a young girl above a river

on a bridge, or the young
man searching, where?

The desperate woman
at the bridge and finally

the bridge alone,
the woman left desperately

alone, left alone, and the man,
and the girl painted

but no longer singing
saying farewell to a bridge,

and the lover who never
arrived, in the realization

ecstasy has died
and never more torture be,

or want to comb your hair,
wash herself, or ever speak again.

In the window, a baby is walking.
He falls down.

The mother picks him up.
A big black dog sticks out its tongue.

The mother carries the baby away.

The big black dog lies down at the edge
of the pavement to chew some grass.

I just went to get a fresh sheet of paper.
Now the big black dog is gone, too.
There's no one there now.

Except me.

Seduction

Why is it that
you elicit from me
feelings I do not

have for you,
and in the aftermath
of your charming

theft, and, to
add despair to my
disappointment

in myself for
letting you do this,
have the nerve to ask

why what you have
taken from me is not
good enough for you?

Why, we ask, won't she just sit still and be beautiful all the time?

The lust of clutching, finally, at straws. Trying to chase her down, something to capture, to make a showpiece of. Something to lie down in, or on, or with, and bask in the glory of.

That it isn't constant or reliable is what makes beauty so offensive. Something to count on never catching.

But dreaming of the furthestmost penetration of. The hollow release of air from deep within your gut sounding in that imagined consummation. The deeply reverberating air initiating the despair of ever getting her to make a move toward you.

Desire, and its attendant wooing. The whole fucking world. You've got to want it, but you've also got to not want to keep it.

But you can't not want. And "can't not wanting" is the beginning of knowing loss. And of coming more truly, if disproportionately, alive.

Journal Entries from 1982 and Poems
selected from *Lovely by Way of Infection*