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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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[out of the Book of Merlin]

the confusions

at a certain moment Merlin thinks he is Lancelot

the gates change
the Blizzard comes

the great comet hangs in the sky over their heads

weave it in
weave it all in, Lady, Authority, your hands
braid the long histories the words

And the gates change
north turns west the east
pours southern storm into the porches
of our attention
I fear the roof will fall I fear the fire

the gates
change

Golgonooza Wagadugu

both come from the Old Language,
reconstructed form *Wolkonduzhu,
the City of Wolkonda,
the Gondwana (Wolkonduana) Land
of the speculative geologists

o other Christs o other Calvaries,

the short transmission to William Blake in vision
the long transmission via the *Dausi* of Black Atlantis

the comet the wind
at Sea Gate battering the Brooklyn shore

the hurricane of snow
Gondwana
the rift is Africa, the narrow valley
from which the information rose

we are.

Merlin looks at the embroideries of the Queen.
He imagines his own thick fingers touching
into place each ornament each *flos et animal et deitas*
that prettifies the silk

he who has known in some detail
the body of so many women
now feels shy at the touch of her cloth

whereas her skin would ease him and no pother.
the abstract reifications of the silk confuse him,

am I myself or am I another? Why is she naked
before me and her clothing in my hand?

She turns back and watches from the window
he sees the blades of her back stiffen in the chill
he sees the gooseflesh pucker minutely on her hip
Get dressed he wants to tell her, don't you know I'm here,
is my desire so pervasive that I have become
finally invisible, as if I were no more than the wind
that walks along your skin raising such delicate affray?

And now the first time he understands the Lancelots,
the giant lubbers who must make the woman speak.

But beneath the stone of his desire he is silent.
Or if he speaks she cannot hear him. This
is the vanishing of Merlin
into the urgency of feeling

lost what had been speaking.

Blake watches Catherine in the summerhouse
at the end of the garden. He undresses

and joins her. She is placid
in the Sussex afternoon. If someone comes
Blake knows the gates will change,

the intruder will snuffle all around the house and wall
and never find the garden
hidden so deeply in behavior

When the gates of Wagadugu shift
the sands of Niger sweep along like snow.
I look out into the confusion of anxieties
that passes for our local weather,

I am lost in forecast and a woman's cry.

13 March 1993

[more of the confusions of Merlin, from the *Book of Merlin*]

what would vex him so
the silence
or fear the telephone
ringing or dead

the churchbells over the storm
imagined

the handbell, drilbu, in his hand, **{}#v-d\$**
marvelling
at all the aftermaths,
and space itself a rigor to his hand,
a tool against silence.

Rock language.
It is important to hold onto the names of places
before we get to walk in sunlight again.
Once again.

The ground is rising white against my house.

Hear this,
the mindful wind
leaves nothing unconsidered,

hear this, the conversation
is permanent,
there will come a time again
when man and women wish
and wish the words would answer them
and want to hear
the word of this time spoken

not the coasts of money fashionably mum
too louche to utter
or allow out loud
the least expensive tidbit of its thought,

they will want to hear the ordinary, the oratory
of the quietest,
the passionate stammer of this love
against the failure to connect,

I howl connection and I am made of it
and nothing matters that does not matter
to another

and in my white words also hear Africa roar.

Moor's coast. A sandstorm winter this,
a pilgrimage of rice.

Then Merlin understood
—it all meant marriage
and he hid his head in case she turned around.

13 March 1993

SONG

Who will take the name I give them
the bramble and the flood
who will take the silken necktie
I tie around their naked throat

who will eat the pie I bake
with cherries still warm from Eden
who will wear my roughspun jersey
dyed in the juice of poppy and pansy

who will borrow my old brass clock
that tells a story different from time
who will swallow a single swallow
of water from my empty glass

who will I leave my fire to
and who will I leave my shadow
who will remember the song I hummed
and the dog that came at my call

who will trust my hands to touch
and who will trust my wool to spin
and who will trust my knife to cut
and who will trust my cup to drink

and who will listen when I talk
and who will answer when I'm still
who will catch me the morning sun
and lay it down tenderly under the hill?

13 March 1993
for Charlotte

This is what I would write if I had a pencil in my hand

the mistakes overwhelm the fingers with names
so I hold firmly with the Arthurian Onomasticon
till I have looked in Bronwen's eyes
and seen Pryderi stun a Wicking with a shadow

because these are the memories that made me
I think and there too I am mistaken. Why?
Nothing made me. I am the consequence
of the entire world. And you are too. The rainforest.
The confluence of the Xingu and the Amazonas
is where a phantom capital is to be built
where the honest dead with interview the living
sending for them in the embassy of dream.

I will meet my pals there and my false lovers and the sages,
we all will sit around waiting for Time to tell

quand on verra and all the ions spin in colors
cyan magenta vertigo
the names of men
forgetting their faces

I will not stir till I have seen Blodeuwedd's face & heard her cry
soft as moss in the night of gamblers

alas I am a man I fear the candles more than I fear the wind.

13 March 1993

THIS POSTAGE STAMP CELEBRATES JOHN
HARRISON'S 1759 NAVIGATIONAL
TIMEPIECE

Great sun disk of the xviiith dynasty when
the sun returned to its proper employment
brass heart keeping all our gears in motion
—all that counts is compassion.

Nigerian exiles line up in the Strand for visas
angry foes of apartheid mill around St Martin's
roar of crowded buses roar of empty news
—all that matters is compassion.

Money is just there for men to steal
the swimming pool is empty blue cement
the sun is accurate eight minutes off
—all that matters is compassion.

The winds are still howling the sun
comes out a little through a busy sky
color drifts back to the world woodpecker
on high snow right at my window

—all that counts is compassion.

14 March 1993

TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

Debt hurrier sum, den some hooting kill-cub
sway to mirror you a fall bricks' end,
bay or lore to achieve, hell lay on height
veer some buried stone. Nowhere but you.

Near me he sent her. Have a like or lake
a minnow knowing many meaners
as if a fish-trim understood the fowler!
Not a hawk in a hurry, as I said.

Turn trundle, chest full of mint, sea-bracken,
colts hoofing spray inside the very surf
imagine green stone some dolor dealer
near star break apparatus mixed with stem.

14 March 1993

POLITICS

As anyone can tell

a mask
addressing other masks
a congress
of peers our masters

maskers
peering out with frightened eyes
at the hurt they do us
will us without will

15 March 1993

MY FATHER WORKED IN SUGAR

I mean in it, a mountain of it,
with a shovel in his hand
and his brother with him.
A brother and a shovel and
a dock full of sugar. White
refined sugar. Unloaded
from the river. God knows where
it comes from. Somewhere south.

They hated the smell. For years
he hated the smell of sugar.
He spoke ill of sugar. When I lift
snow I think of him in the sugar,
shovel in his hand, brother
at his side. The rest of his life put
only the smallest sugar in his coffee
with a drop of cream only. Dark.

My Uncle Owen worked in cotton
but not that way. Just numbers of it
and books that had to be kept.
And books he gave away to me
the only one who did, the blessing
of those white pages full of grit,
the wounds of reading I gladly bore
all night in the chivalric chapel.
The Knight with Sore Eyes woke
and rubbed the sugar out of his eyes.

But my father worked in
the sugar, hated me to read, why,
he only worked in sugar a year or less
a little job, a few weeks, the Depression,
my Uncle Joe worked in potatoes,
mountains of them, sorting, baling,
came home with a hundredweight of them
in burlap over his shoulders

food for our two families
and the neighbors.

They told me.

I never saw a potato, never saw sugar,
never saw anything bigger than a book.
Or a loaf of bread or a lump of sugar,
how exciting it was in France on white
metal tables the lumps of rough grey sugar
not white at all, looked stained
with coffee already, beet sugar they said,
not cane, *betterave* they said, smashed
all over the roads, sugar from blood,
sugar from books. The wounds
of reading, of knowing words and lifting
pages, no shovels, no brothers,
the light sifting down over the broken lines
making sense. No sugar. No father. No son.

My father worked in sugar or
did he only know a man who did?
Is it me, now lifting now casting now resting
shovel in my hand, no one at my side?

15 March 1993
[finished 16 III 93]

INSTRUCTIONS

Imagine the moon.
Imagine not being able to imagine the moon.

15 March 1993

LANGUAGE

Suppose I said uu before some bison came
and then I saw them — nervous-hoofed for all their size
bulking slowly around a fall of scree and come in range—

what better sound to call them with than what I said?
Next time when I need them I'll call it too
and again and again until they come

and slowly the world and the word accommodate,
arrange themselves to intersect.

Whatever made me say uu made them come too.
Explore the intersection.

Language
is the sound of what happened when it happened
later woven together like the fingers of two hands
interlocking. Strengthening. Holding. Lovers' hands.

15 March 1993

THINKING TO YOU

for Charlotte

Will this fit a wire a message
trying to become sense? Blueblack the tropic night
the closest that I know
Oahu. Be with me.
Fields out Ewa way under the flat moon
whose sap you taste risen through the canes
high into the mind the rum of it.

15 March 1993

DODONA

for Charlotte

Not likely to be difficult.
To be different.
The oak leaves rustle clear
but my ears stammer them

the sounds of sense.
I hold this hour
to my heart
only in this

salvation. Now.
A stork's nest
used for a thousand years.
The weight of springtimes.

Germany. Or now.
Listen.
Memory lasts
longer than the moon

but it is not done
by remembering. Listen.
It is likely
to be different.

16 March 1993

But there are merchants who release it
pearl fury over lacquered straits
and the world is calm again in greed's long dream
and we never understand the ruby.

16 March 1993

PARADISE OF CROWS

for Charlotte

the balanced
animal the beak
harmonious with its wings
fore-pinioned into high
dwelling while it needs

flies not too far. Stays
with us all winter.
Waits. It walks around
us like us.
It eats what we don't need.

There is little worse than not feeding crows
or not listening to them. They tell most of folklore.
What they don't know is hard to tell.
For three winters I followed them through the woods
and never once failed to find the spring.

16 March 1993

A year of winters
the treacherous design

how to keep a profile
out of your dreams

that black Mt Rushmore
bleak cliché obsessions of desire

16 March 1993

ST PATRICK'S DAY 1993

Well I knelt in your chapel in Glastonbury
on your day 1985 about
as cold as today and chisel tips of snow
sifting west about
a millennium and a half after your visit
about a week after we saw daffodils
tumbling in spring breeze over the magdalene's wall in Cambridge
about the first time I had knelt down in a church for years

I was kneeling in your little chapel
it was cold and old and stone and God and gone and cold
I glanced at my mind and found it was St Patrick's
Day and here I was in his own chapel
ancient as can be the comfortable hurt of kneecaps on old stone

why was this English chapel built in his name
here in Avalon of the Brythons? later I learned how
he some way stayed a little while in Glastonbury
this chapel built on the site of his oratory I suppose

his day his era
when did he rest in Avalon?

was it as a young Welsh slave of Roman parentage
with his derisive nickname *Patricius* the well-born
the man with a Father if you know what I mean

was it as a runaway wounded runagates on the lam
trying for the continent and civil states the Empire or was it later
high and mighty a bishop all consecrated
to go back to Ireland and to shoot through the heart
of those pagan and Goidelic splendors
a certain mortal somber shaft of Papal gloom
dread of samsara and remember well to die?

or was it (this is me talking) after all after all
when everything was said and done (as we say
as we do) when Bishop Patricius Agent of a Foreign
Power turned his face to the light to die

and found himself
back in the lakeless Isle of Avalon tower and Tor
green fields between the gorges and the dykes
sealevel or lower a lake of air?
And did they minister to him there these fancy
ladies of our dearest description Morgan
the Welsh and her Three Queens of Rapture?
did even Lancelot find him sleeping
and bend to kiss his crozier
a thousand years before I kissed the empty stone?

17 March 1993

