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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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THE AMAZEMENTS

1.

An old catalog. Sunshine.
Decca Records. Blue Note. Race.
The polygon of desire
opens its vertex at your feet.

Tatterdemalion leaves by sloop
we approach the peak, cock-crest October
ludic intervale of almost sense
a patient and his doctor all at nonce.

I am preparing for the end of the world
what are you doing about it Red
with your hawser and your rain gauge
and an old map of Hopi Land before the Terror?

2.

Egypt comes back into my hands.
Through you the causeway to the noble city
empty stockyards and busy piazzas strung
out in late sunlight along the central thoroughfare
haussmanning its way from west to meet
the Moon at Her lordly rising
Huzzah, are we yours? they cry in the streets
every night She rises above the Gate of Schemes.

5 October 1992

Coming down Overlook
we see the glad sun in our faces
and I notice it's just about
to drop into the mountain over the meadows
like a penny into a piggy bank.
Instantly the risen never daunted spirit body of William Blake
stands before us with a reproach
denouncing the comparison of the Unparalleled the Sun Itself
to anything at all, but especially to money.

Quickly I make shift to explain:
Not the golden guinea your imagined greedsters saw
the rising sun as in the first Age of Money,
but a penny, a good red penny,
penny bright and coppery and full of praise
and transformation, the coin which is the mirror
of Madame Venus, who is first red then green
and every autumn coaxes back to life,
even this one on the mountain.

5 October 1992

DAY'S CANT ON AVERRING

Averaging what can the remarkable
more than presence of a morning
31° at last the winter edge Orion's blade
slipt in between our irksome summer

have to do with Christ's resurrection
and a rhododendron leaf
new-curved against the frost?
Slept in between her thighs my hand

and all is summoning. To go a mountain!
The tilt of the day towards assertion
is all our pottery, slash shard in midden
trove, our poetry is made of haughty spells

wrapped snug in innocent sentences
that seem to talk of love or old philosophy
or human liberty and all those terms
that old men with chains on their brains

delight to torture youth with. But o the green
soup please let them also eat and the blue smoke
of accurate words ascending past the gods
into the compassionate silences of light!

This speak when glum, or mum to remind.

6 October 1992

AVERROIST BEGINNINGS

for Charlotte

were no more than lilacs
wonderful in front of the two houses
where the bad dog lives

caught like us in the mutual angers of the well-fed—
caution, always, to walk by,
caution and the smell of lilacs—

houses with their secret insides
hiding god presences, in shrines the ancestors
hover in the fitful light of what is holy,

scarlet closets where one makes love, gets born,
pleads with godhead, figures out one's taxes,
passes unforgiven from life to life

trying to become the sacred text and not just read it.
Try not to notice the dog. It speaks
its own language, the vowels of fear

and the consonants of trying to come home.
To live in this world and make love a little
while he tracks you from life to life, sometimes muzzled,

sometimes free to overtake you at the cliffs of winter
scentless of everything but terror. You face the wind
standing your ground one last time you think.

You think it's the wind, a dog, a house, some flowers.
You think it is a god you pray to, every hour
you pay your taxes and the mountain smiles.

Were they never more than lilacs?
Weren't they always your own divided houses,
fractured hours, weren't you the dog,

and isn't this your father, this moment
that comes only once in every lifetime, you walk by
and then another, a spring full of them, forever?

7 October 1992

INDIAN SUMMER SONNET

Mirroring the cars fast obliquely up the street
the window lets us out. We sit in the muffin place
the coffee place the dry sliced turkey sandwich
and the local paper full of universal grief.
The street. Fajitas in my fingers, salsa on my breath,
there is the silence of the sports page
we bend to imagine in the roaring dark of the body
how it moves in light and thousands howl
to see it excellent. To move. And the politics
of it, Hesus Maria what a mess we made
of this old Vinland map, with Greenland pleasant
on the borders of the incorrigible ice.
Skraelings bothered us, and we had our vengeance.
I look into the mirror and see the unspeakable Cortez.

7 October 1992

THE FAULT

Coasting close to it
whatever touches
the flag furls off the colors
on it

into the shadow at the base of the presidio
where the quick cars
negotiate blonde businesses in the sweet light of Drake's
California still there beneath the mars red bridge

there is an animal that eats anything
and we put it in as our Symbol our furry
enterprise to exhaust the kindness of the Earthlords
in all their languages, the Ones
who the Earth has learned best to forgive—

what can it do for us but shake
the speculative foundations we have tried to pretend
in the face of what we surely know

a holy mountain with a deer on it
and the skeleton of a dog

get close to the bones and you hear the Buddha
telling yet again what even we ought to have remembered.

7 October 1992

THE FRIEND

for Charlotte

And then we were talking. The night
is always full, as if a day
were only getting ready and then the thing.
The thing of it.

We have to be made to understand.
So the seasons come and linger too long
and go and the market is full of different fruits,
orient cucumbers and scandalous mangos

and we come back to the silent wood
where the thing is. It sings to us.
We heard it in the Alps, the green lake
where you stood smiling at me

and the glaciers were dissolving into mild air
and the camera remembered for us
and the thing was waiting. It spoke
even last night, the house,

it lives in a house but doesn't stay there,
luck it is, la suerte, but can't lock it in,
it sings. Our business is to hear it,
we hear it, mostly in our bones, our soft

miraculous attentions of the flesh.
We came home and it was talking,
it told while we fell asleep at last
and was still telling this morning.

It said the day again and I heard it
waking before you, the mist thickening
towards sunrise, the pond
shivering with listening. Only a duck

far away, and that too was part of what it said.

8 October 1992

EVERY FOUR YEARS IN AUTUMN

The temper of justness
startles the scholar sometimes
into swoons of commentary.

Sunlight oranges the leaves
and he reasons "Maples.
Alginates are from sea weed.

Ducks thrive on pond green."
The president meanwhile far away
dines from nice gold-rim china

on the hearts of young men.
His spokespersons stand all round
dabbing the blood from his lips

with napkins printed the next day
on every continent. The news.
The scholar divides each fact

by three and solves for silence.
Nothing can be done
except the endless explanation.

8 October 1992

"Canberra, a town
the other side of the earth,
is that it?" No. It is an orange
waiting to be peeled.

"Antarctica?" And not that either.
Every destination
has something to say.
Or every single one but this.

It is the capital of despair.
Young men pretend it is nowhere
when they take young women
softly by the hand and lead them there.

8 October 1992

THE TRUCE

Suddenly it is something I do not know
I thought the word was waiting in my mouth
I spread my lips to get it said
it was something hard and something easy
the name of something or when it comes
snow or Samothrace or just forgive me

but nothing was there that I could tell you
except the tuneful habits of my guesswork
a world made by talking too much
too many mouths to feed a rich man
eating his pudding in a stone house
and we still don't know the open door

granary full of eyes muskrat in reeds
all these we understand so fitfully
the mountain spilled of famous glass
between peace and waking the factory
where no one works the burning car in traffic
that's more like what I meant the flames

tall as a man and explosion coming
and all the empty eyes ride by entranced
by the private miracles they
hurry through to get home before the night.
I don't know what I meant. The ducks land
and sail in somber twilight through the reeds.

I watched them move and told myself I could be still.

9 October 1992

BEING ARMED WITH A FACE

she spoke
into my dream

I am a post-visual
generation
I don't know how to see
at all, only to read
those cues that mean me
into act,
I am meant into significant action,

can read only the moving images,
can see only the speed between the images,
not the images themselves,
land of the, I am the, blind, the neo-blind,

is this the luminous landfall
hispaniola of what we've been after all these renaissances,
finally horizontal
to their necessary sail?

But what would we do
without the world?

Why is these such a love of penetration
as if the air, itself, to move inside the air
itself is not deep enough,

l'aura amara,
there is a prison
where a feeling's fettered,
there is an engine in the leaf
that runs the world

I want to get down there and crack that cherished pot
and pour into mystery the clear chaste hidden ancient
water of my wanting

that chained one in lakeside palaces,

to break the air even

free

of its fluidity,

time's frequency,

the Change.

Here endeth the Lesson.

We see that triflingest Desire
is fact to wrap the whole world
in a single text of destroying,

lust lumbering gun,

the Pale Crowned One screaming.

10 October 1992

Lakeside. Needment. Hunger grass.
Specify. Spillway. Night
coming over the reservoir.
Argent manners in the lower sky

but blacker high. The numbering.
Fortress of a privileged elder class
ratty old tax forms filling
heart. The chains slip spry

cold around your wrists.
This also is an energy of bliss,
dry encumbering rules of art
scribbled on the world's margin,

to be brief. To keep. To let them sleep.

10 October 1992

BOSNIA

I have tried to rescue or protect it here
where the sparrows constantly demur
out loud and the red finches steal
what they are given but steal in peace.

Human actions in a world we steadily
mistake. The heart always shifts
its place of torment, new courthouses
of unending dread. The answer

does not fit in lines. Smudges the horizon
like a motorboat's fast retrofoam, or fire.
This fire that drives a hand and twists the tendons
until the word grows out of the pain of writing it.

Bewildered in the glut we greed for more.
Inflammation of the identity, I hurt,
load of selfhood carried in an angry world
and I'm the only villain I can apprehend.

Start with me. And end this fake necessity.

11 October 1992

THE AUDIENCE

Having nothing to say
the preachers assembled at the Studios of Prophecy
and broadcast their despair to the empty world
which thank God was only listening only listening

a woman doesn't do anything do anything when the water's
warm on her hands and the lavender soap reminds her of this same
summer that has just been, the goldfinches and rooftops in soft rain

and a man doesn't do anything as he stares in the mirror the mirror
is a man's love letter from the world this is the only
one he believes the lips move he sees his teeth he wonders
at all the impassioned treachery of dentists the war is coming the war
is going and he is still there in front of the Palace of Mercury
wondering who that is looking back looking back

and the child has no mirror and no soap a child is all hands
all hands and the child is listening to the preposterous lies of Desire
unfurling inside him precisely like purple irises in soft rain
back by the garbage cans beside the house he used to love
when he still had a quiet hour to love things to love things

and the preachers were howling about money and abstinence
the preachers were sniveling about responsible love
and the child who has nothing but his hands
is staring at the long lines that cross his palms the lines
that swoop past the drumlin of his thumb and vanish in his wrist
he bends his wrist I am who I am will I grow up to be a man
or a woman or is there a hope in the nature of things
will I rust like a bridge will I carry heavy traffic
will I be something that lives at the top of the sky
and only comes down at midnight to where the empty bottles lie
diamond glinting in the dangerous parks
will I grow to be anyone or anything or will it always be like this
a moment of nowhere and my head full of going and nothing to come?

11 October 1992
On the night of the Presidential "Debate"