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## ANSWER THE KETTLE

Wondering to hear it will the kettle boil  
the appearance in some strange place  
of the Lady Frances Carfax she's in a coma  
into my coffee cup a corner house in Red Hook  
the pale amazements of morning after  
loving our root. It will boil but will I  
hear it, will the goose cough up its quality blue gem  
into the frightened fingers of the stationmaster?  
A mocking bird on Cuttyhunk o you wisest  
virgins I am Berrot who wades upstream in winter  
so gallantly prevented and a rose. Sparkle  
like spa. Rappel like lunacy with picturesque detail  
down the walls of the actual until.  
Shake head from side to side as if to clear.  
The dying detective. The devil's foot.

22 June 1993

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If I let it get so hard to understand  
poetry  
who will take it home and read  
again

(that magic time when the bird on the tree  
flies despite singing, the curtains fall, the rain  
lashes in from the southwest and you see her face?)

Nothing happens the first time

(except when it does, the one you know  
right off, across the room rampaging  
scarlet, priestesses, doctors, savage cathedrals)

I want it to be like those people you see  
all dressed up the furthest out they can get  
with steel in their noses and blue scribbles on their skin

and clothes made of roadkill and matted blue hair  
and you look at them and know them suddenly  
the same as yourself, with swollen bladders

and tenderness and absolutes and hope,  
that terrible sudden jolt of being who you are.

22 June 1993

## SQUIRRELS

Among our deepest human tragedies we must reckon  
our unfathomable thirst for trivialities.

22 June 1993

## LIEBKOSENDER

Taste of mountain evident fled  
back into culvert dog angles camera  
of orthoclase of cubic cleavage of  
ordinary salt I was a trireme  
on your shameless little ocean  
I slaved like the Nile poured myself out.

22 June 1993

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Barbaric austerity of a bad play—  
a man and his woman friend quarrel about gulls  
while over the sea an enemy corvette comes  
prowling full of spies and pioneers—  
*tell me, how is Dionysus served?*

Surprise among seawrack, flag  
of the lost republic with crabs walking on it,  
surf through the rocks like a lion roaring.  
On and on. Sit there in your cool dress  
he thinks and read about far away,  
the terrace is in shade, the servants sleep.  
No one can know the thought that's in my mind.

23 June 1993

A LITTLE ART OF POETRY

Syntax sparrow-superb a litany  
for breakfast to saints you ain't.  
Shim them closer in your head till  
nothing moves. That's the groove. Your tune.

23 June 1993

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Ill trod the lost passway  
breakbone doorkeep with his saddle  
shoes o this is Newark in the fifties  
there is nothing left to remember  
the trees on Main Street in front of the stawws

Bishop Marchena a subtle utriusjurist and suspicious  
as could be the frown on his countenance  
sidled from the dark solemnity of his eyes  
there are knaves in our midst and we embody them also,  
Pauline privilege, that a man be two men  
and baptism lubricates old vows,

aiheeme, he didn't have much use for women.

23 June 1993

## THE TOCSIN

This is a toxic headache  
a gift from non-believers  
a frame

(*passe-par-tout*, Michel,  
was the earliest French I decoded by ear,  
on Sixth Avenue, in summer, Giselle was speaking,  
in Hungarian dark,  
explaining)

to keep art from the weather  
out front,

that serious business of the eye  
(*everyone who sleeps is beautiful* — Whitman)

(decoding by sound, my first big failure  
was in the Place Maubert, where it runs up  
Lagrange towards Saint-Julien  
and I wanted stamps and couldn't hear  
*timbres*, as a word, couldn't hear it  
at all, just this Parisian bleated nasal *tææææ~*  
like a sheep with a headcold, help)

decode a single world  
the word word  
(weird *wyrd*  
what is spoken is/becomes your fate,

fate follows language,

is its shadow,

on Church's Beach the immense blocks  
of granite  
(is it? granite is a word)

we leap from one to the next  
following the shore  
around to mid-June

where the gaudy  
yellow sea-poppies make their home  
and you are with them,

*pivoine*,  
no, that is peony,  
*pavot* is the word, but I think it's *coquelicot*,  
though that one's red,  
and an old man with no arm  
is selling it,  
paper poppy,

buddy-poppies of November,  
under the el on Fulton,  
frightened of the beery smell,  
the grizzle on their chins  
not so different from mine now  
as I sit in a far country  
(is it?)  
guessing their secret names.

So why does my head ache?

The toxin was the dream  
that woke me,  
drum-beat of the assizes,  
in sleep we fall afoul of the law,  
and waking's freedom.

My head aches  
with liberty,  
that I can go and do and climb and  
fall and read and rest,  
that I can speak,  
and talk my way into tight corners,

cleft of the rock  
where at sunset (or: as sunset)  
the seductive purple shadows

(poppy)  
propagate restless alternatives

to all I am.

Come here  
for cool deliverance,  
we call you home,  
pebble clatter we are your mother  
home for the endless supper of this world  
but I am free

(sounds like a suitor, *der Freier*,  
standing by the fire  
making eyes at her)

my head aches with liberty.

The tocsin woke me  
from some almost fatal dream  
(a bell sent  
ringing in the head

a ball  
that finds the breastbone  
and breaks in

heart's visitor  
a woman's eye  
*drawing a bead*

on the heart  
the way they do,  
the amplitude

or aftershock  
registering  
a fall, I fell)

iron-band around parietals  
(sinus-frequency  
set playing,

inmost radio,  
bell-bone,  
listen!)

inside the walls of you  
I take my case  
will I dare

tell you what I was dreaming?  
not possible  
and widderwill,

the writ of word  
does not run  
so far

into the dark of what only happens.

Events, yes, are intersections, yes?  
And we know that best,  
yes, when the wind  
comes out and blows us down

or blows down my spine  
this hollow word  
shaped like a life

when a word  
dazes.

A word  
is the visible

intersection  
of events.

Timeless sum  
of what's entrained.

The pain's less now,  
o weaver  
have I talked it out

on paper,

devious, dividing  
the mind  
this way that way  
like a farmer

seeding his seminary  
with noble wheat  
or Greek, a giant  
storing his heart

safe in oak  
cleft of a tree  
the wind sings  
over it

to silence  
all that waking  
the leaves  
so busy with,

for an erection  
out of language,  
*high tree*  
*in the ear*

a word is a pain in the head?

*Tengo dolor de cabeza*  
said my father one day,  
had to be Saturday with his luck

and the radio blaring in my doze  
Hank Williams giving way to Vaughan Monroe  
the car lurched north,

sir, I didn't know you spoke the pain  
so easily, the pain hidden as language,  
even as another language—

the axiom: a[ny] word

can be analyzed  
into its human history.  
(A fancy word for pain.)

This analysis (called poetry,  
from *poetria*, from *poiein*, "making"  
the best of it)

(look what Louis  
did with *a*)

opens the two doors of the dead house  
(the one the sacred  
talking head said never  
open, never look to the headland  
you once heard,

a word once spoken  
does no good,  
open)  
and a great wind comes in

we look back through the wattled door  
to all it's been  
and forward into the Avoidable Desire  
and Unavoidable Consequences  
of this Decaying Base,

word —*wyrd*— wired to us,  
the shadow louder than the man.

So the pain's almost free now—

and from me  
it goes nowhere (a feeling  
needs a feeler

carnival atmosphere, sequined  
semaphores, men at the bar  
finches at the feeder

—only the misbehavior of my own species  
seems deplorable,

why is that?  
should we know better, maybe?

And who would tell us, asked  
the eunuch pleasantly.

A man woke up and told his dream.  
It took all the gods and dragons pleading  
to coax him to do so, say so, along with who  
know what planetary power and galactic bureaucrats  
pleading with him for the liberating word

(an it please you) *to be spoken,*

for he spoke, taught,  
wandered through the north  
telling it plainly  
to those who had an appetite for waking

(or just for hearing,  
the story like a headache  
lingering long after,  
something you know you don't know,

a room of your house you never knew was there)

The headache, undreamt, spontaneously  
arose with waking. Analysis (language)  
has dispelled it. Now there is just  
being awake. Leaving this residue  
(*caput mortuum*) black on the page.

Look at it  
it isn't only there.

So where is it? Where  
is a mother waiting  
in all this male?

Having taken some deep breaths, some Extra Strong Pain Reliever, having sat on the porch drinking a cup of strong coffee for a few minutes, the man felt better. But what did the words feel?

Cyclone cellar,  
hummingbirds  
in azure wind

wound up from  
Inca fairways  
bombarding

comes memory  
scattering lascivious  
details—

a glass of waking shattered into just being awake?

We are thronged with differences  
(*bondé*, Michel, or *noire de monde*)

as our friend says  
of streets  
jostling with non-Jews

fifty years ago  
with boots and banners.  
We lived through

even the words.

You can't see a thing up the streets in our head.  
Grand Concourse jammed with who are they  
and the Yankees won again

and Justine goes out for chopped beef  
and I gaze past her satin breast  
to the endless streets into the unknown city

she's worried that her husband will come home

the avenue goes on I know  
I'll have to follow it to the end

to find the one I thought was here.  
But here is far,  
far, the furthest of all our places,

sometimes the blue sky's the only forgiveness,  
a single-letter sutra of its own.

So the word lasts  
as long as you have energy

(not to speak it, it speaks  
itself, its weird, it does)

as you have energy to hear it

(that's hard, that's heard).

24 June 1993

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Shouts if distant  
workmen  
however meant  
heard  
hard to be anything  
but poetry.

24 June 1993

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Failing to see  
one is condemned to looking

saith St Sermio of Waterface,  
face-of-the-sea  
sunk in which countenance  
the scholars begin counting again.

Geometry of words, by natural  
inference decode  
the slopes and weathers of this mountain, us  
talked (= persuaded) into being.

Kingston, 24 June 1993

## THE CAROUSEL

1

Would it be true  
it's true if it turns

and what do you find?  
Would it be true

the simplistic pleasures  
uphill from Catskill

by 23A a view  
(common to all races)

of Inspiration Point?  
The fascism of memory.

Axiom: When money is not mentioned  
the text is or wants to be upper class.

The Establishment does not speak of what makes it so.

The wealth of nations and the poverty of people.

2.

I want to understand Windham again  
the master race, art of swimming,  
better memory, play the piano

Mercy is a freemason's lodge  
lit up on Thursday night but shuttered

What can you see when you look in  
but thousands of shifting planes of polished metals  
that shimmer like salt water in the sun  
though you must not utter that comparison

You see a face looking back out at you  
familiar and terrible, like a dentist—  
that comparison you may express, later,  
when you're hiding with your friends under the yew hedge

out of breath and wondering what it is you've seen  
and your clothes are wet from the earth and the soaked  
branches and fooling around and somebody says  
look, they turned out the lights

3

And Priam kneels in vain before the altar  
and down the street kids are throwing cherry bombs  
and lovers are struggling in hypothecated Mustangs

Go back to your childhood  
you will find nothing there but some women  
and a crack in the wall and the noise of crying in the dark.

24 June 1993