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THE BOSTON SONNETS

SONNET ONE

The plan is to make it wrong
by me-ing you. Then the identity
(a thing shaped like a Valentine heart
made of sheetmetal, sleeved with crimson)
rises through the phloem of the tree

and your own watery parts endure
the descent of destiny (a $\frac{5}{8}$ " rod
threaded to accept a rubber washer
and a nickel wing-nut). Machines
are potentially serene. But do you
possess off status? Enjoy the sunlight
(shaped like a banana, smells of cinnamon)
crowded with people wearing knitted bonnets.
You are naked as a letter of the alphabet.

1 April 1995

SONNET TWO

Boston is some mighty medicine, to wit, to sea.
When we can come no further, we tend to behave.
Come to origin, that is (Blasket, Mozart, Kishinev)
where the seagulls apparently come from
nibbling the roots of the sky (old proverb
one just made up), baroque is just too busy
—white Bronco, America's apathetic evenings —
to revise the sea.

There, that's what it means,
to reanimate the alphabet, and seize
in each angular or loopy letter the original Beast,
god, or factor that it imagines made us
see in the first place. *Say after me.* The *Globe*
is delivered to the home, I pick it up
on the porch, holding my robe close against the morning.

1 April 1995

SONNET THREE

Pachelbel's *Kanon* tapped out on water glasses,
this is the capital of culture, an over-ripe mango
is the answer to much of the problem of Europe.
And music is our only problem —we begin to grasp—
a device for skinning peels from potatoes
using the power of running water alone —*invenzione*,
not Charles Ives, not Charles Parker, the other kind,
the *marketed centripetal*, each youth screwed
into himself, trapped between the earphones oh
let the world slip off your hips my darling,
this is better than the Gospel of John, this pear.
Colorphoto of an alpine marmot. Postcard
showing the Venetian Villa Pisani in a fall of snow.
All feeders empty, and still blue doves arrive.

1 April 1995

SONNET FOUR

Don't build a new house. Just change the key.
April Fool, quoting Mozart. If it were here
could you taste it, that infamous banana
unpeeled at so many midnights? All nouns
are pretty much the same (tiger, water,
sandpaper, scree); only verbs differ.
Attach righthand flange by way of nut (supplied)
setting it off a fraction with a shim.
Hand tighten only. Leave space for the next page
of your interminable instructions.
Today bring democracy to Haiti.
Review the court's latest infamy: cancelling
a decree by which the taste of postage stamps
differs with denomination so the blind can read.

1 April 1995

SONNET FIVE

Along the Muddy River fed our ducks. Or duck,
one cruising mallardette seized all the offerings
(saltines and goodwishes, the former snatched
by Betty from the museum — Monet, Nolde,
the extraordinary circular expansions
of Jan Dibbets (*natus* 1941) — the latter furnished
by lifelong devotion to the weal of waterfowl,
then just before dark passed Jamaica Plain
(the same water pooling westerer, clearer, clear)
when the pool was full of light under nighttime trees.
Why was I telling you this? Ducks are geese
now, night isn't always subtler than the day,
sometimes just darker. Sometimes full of houses
carpentered against the skyline. Life of Kafka.

2 April 1995

SONNET SIX

The violins of Vienna seem far away in this sunlight
so it's time for a whole new language, featuring
people we meet in the street. Streets leading to more streets
forever. Not Vienna, Vivaldi. Not sunlight, cosmilight—
names of friends, Huntington Avenue, elm trees. Time travel.
The point of going anywhere is getting
what you didn't know you wanted. It is April
now when you read this, whatever your treasonable
window may disclose. It is April and the long desire
uncoils below the soil, speaking green Latin up at us,
meaning Persephone occurs to us again. The beautiful desire
we have to one another, yes, we are married in the world.
So wind up your clocks or whatever you use to wake me,
I am the machine of wanting it and here it comes.

2 April 1995

SONNET SEVEN

As by closure
something opened
the silence of thought

after the thought of music
Sanders Theater
a cold

bright April afternoon
St Matthew Passion

all our loves begin this way
shape of a crowd

I am your mother
a face behind me
I can feel

between my shoulder blades
feeble innervation of this area of skin

tract music
"despised & rejected"
new translation

There is an abominable
scission of departing scufflers

such good
acoustics in so much wood
clack clack

of exiting audients
we love to leave

departing

is a tenet of our liberty
to be free
to come and go

and go noisy through the door
clacking, don't worry
it all

is music
the coughs and sneezes of Leipzig
were no better Bach

a man writes music
to correct the flow of time.

3 April 1995

SONNET EIGHT

On three hills the book of life lies
 open dusty folios
 something
wrong with this city
 the sea is too polite
 no vista of Jerusalem
What is it
 that will not touch me
 what is it that makes me wrong
Someone who is not walking in this street
 has bothered me for thirty years
 a complex absence
the strange feel of things
 here
 something the matter with the women
the sky's asthmatic, jets
 wheeze down to Logan,
 not a bar full of masochists
the sky wants to tell me
 or an animal
 reading in the subway
—too many dogs—
 the skyline round South Station, water
 the friendly
penguins of the aquarium,
 we are ordered by our flowers,
 we are thin with feeding,
old medicine cabinet full of useless
 in the first place remedies
 no, not that it's useless, vista,
vistas,
 I know what it is, they drink coffee
 but there is no smell of coffee,
they see the new moon
 over North Church steeple

and do not sing
like people breaking open
 a loaf of bread and discovering
 Look, the old moon is new.
And when the rain
 finally comes down
 it sounds like Pilate washing his hands.

3 April 1995

SONNET NINE

If by kindness read
our animals
ourselves the bark outside

means damaged flow
inside the stately parlors
wombing

I could not ask
a cleaner thing from dream
but these bare oaks

and those birds
yesterday
blue peacocks
and a brown hammerhead
sacred

by dint of bonny madness
standing near
his eye on us
in the damp enclosure

humid path
the warmth of wanting you
o we wake up to a city just

in time
with all the beasts and bistros
imported from the world

urbi et orbe
the difference counts
into this sweet dialect

sticky-fingered, a bus

stops at a very door
Language is to sleep with you

stream of virtuality
Bloom's faithful shapely kidney
curved
warm in my hand

it all began there
he made the machine
we just plugged it in the wall

no war yet on this island
an absence
we call strangely 'peace'

a zoo a book a lamb a duck
a movie about seals
on these soft rocks

we foundered
glad to drown
in facts
with our last breath
cross-examine starlight
a new moon.

4 April 1995
Boston

Edge by edge the bright cold morning dark'd
and snow sifts down. White roads.

There is a pure land that imagines us.

There is no way to prove a being. Cold
over the blue-eyed grass, birdless held,
a glass full of world.

Suppose
one wakes up before the day. Suppose the animal
one thinks one is
stands at the window
frightened at the increasing light.
To be caught
in this web of secrets! And have no hiding place
but nakedness.

5 April 1995

SONNET TEN

The hills of it or vagrant light,
 the standpipe
from God's ear,
 the whistles,
 Joy Street's hill,
the haberdashers in their cashier cages,
 the zoom
of bills through brown pneumatic tubes.
 And the sea,
always old fashioned,
 always a word
just on the tip of the tongue,
 to speak
 and change all this.
Give back the differences
 in places,
 the love
that goes by contour and by feel,
 by ear
the cunning poptunes of the world.
 When I stand
in even the meekest harbor
 I know a power
over land and sea,
 it is to be between,
 to be me
against the claims of heaven and the gates
of earth,
 to touch the modest hem of vastness
and disappear
 in being here,
 a clock crowing.

6 April 1995

