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

24 June 1993
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