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Albert Uriah Turner, Jr.

I find your proposed volume's working title "Spectacle, Identity, and Otherness" to be intriguing. This is the case because negotiations of 'otherness' and 'specularity' through the contexts and contests of history provide a spiritual and theoretical grounding for my art. At base, this is seen in my submitted excerpts from *The Burden of Being Seen*, a manuscript which mines the territories of performance to examine and perhaps exhibit how self-conscious constructions of art can be used to reify categories such as the self, community, and identity in a globalized industrialized world that tends to invalidate or diminish these categories. Also, the concepts of longing and belonging have a distinct impact on my poetry. At times I engage the concreteness of personal, familial, and communal narrative and depend on the logical contradictions common to figurative language to explode limiting designations of 'otherness' and, with the perspective of a lyric poet, investigate territories of the 'self' to rediscover connections to others best rendered through thoughtful and artful discourse.

ALBERT U. TURNER, JR.

Ode to Ira Aldridge, “the Negro Tragedian”

Once in character, you knew of hue
the dark ruse-raised, the brooding
hero listing to bruise the craning neck,
lent to fragranced desire, refusing, at last,
the caress of Desdemona’s jeweled fingers,
another Iago promising satisfaction.

Rare for the London stage, “[o]wing
to the shape of [your] lips,” you gave
voice to the Globe’s strangers or, grotesque
in white-face, you made Richard (the) III
a restive monster of inclination, speaking
death into being with the bard’s breath.

But what did you see after you eyeballed
the mirror, wiped away your greasepaint,
waiting for flagon, flesh, an unstockinged leg?
Was it elaborate escaping the noose to be
cut down? Was a willow tree elsewhere
weeping at the weight of new fruit?

Robert Johnson Records “Hellhound on my Tail,” San Antonio, 1936

In the Gunter Hotel, room 414,
a votive brown bottle
slides rhythm down new steel strings
bent by workin’ man’s fingers

As his St. Peter in a wheat-straw hat
roams old Delta cobalt crossroads,
hell hounds leave blood lairs to lurk
where reel to reel sound is struck.

Moaning to know a kind heart,
he plays shyly in a corner
using the hoping of sadness to sing,
“I can tell the wind is rising.”

Old field-holler feuds move the cutting
head and stylus; Robert’s Legba walks
far away; in this absence devil-dark green
chinaberry leaves tremble on the trees.

Vivien Leigh Thinks of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, 1951

After the screening there was perfume on the proffered wrist
for the leading man to kiss—of course, to err, it is divine.

Unlike Brando's bellowing Kowalski, I heard some are strangers in kindness,
their peeked-through lace curtains monsooned by the scent of magnolia.

(Devoted to 'method acting' by the terse tears of her Stella's denial—
the price of that Stanley's yearning— I think that Kim Hunter cried for days.)

And if that scandal is not the tattletale of my lines, my swooning
is someone directing traffic into on-coming traffic; the strong bare arms

—Marlon's muscle-bound *pater familias*— carry me; my Blanche,
brooding like the "to be or not to be" prince, is 'soft-focus' tragedy.

After the off-camera storm, what old roots could brave ground, gnarled
as the promise of green stems pruned, of hot-house early flowers?

A Photograph of Otis Redding Being Pulled from Lake Monona, Wisconsin – December 11, 1967

1.

In a place once called “beautiful”
in the old tongue of Chippewas
who wait for walleyes to surface,
fishers of men are caught fishing.
From a dock listing on grey waves,
bright flashbulbs light Lake Monona.

This contrast is grainy; gloveless
to fight smooth grip, the hands lift at
a cowed strong arm weighted with rest.
Right fist wrapped around a towline,
a left hand lifts Otis, a body heavy
with the cold wet of black leather.

2.

Brother, sing now of dark’s lightness;
there’s the cobalt cue of memory,
the clay red bricks kilned in Georgia —
The last “Soul Revue” resounding,
what lover’s plea resurfaced, tuned
to the repeat-blue of hoping?

Otis, silk suit sweat- brocaded,
works the crowds like the miracle
of new boots and Woolworth’s perfume,
of payday rye had at the end
of set, encore downbeat dropping
to his whisper of “I have everything.”

3.

The last loving plea to surface,
belief is your echo, attuned
to the repeat-blues of hoping.
After crying “I live my life
in doubt, you see,” you sang “I’ve been
loving you” near Sausalito’s shore.

Wide collar open for relief,
Otis works in rare miracles
of throat shouts beyond the Bar-Kays brass.
And if the yawing sea reshapes blue,
sounds homesick whistles for red clay,
a dock is the soul call of return.

4.

Sing as you will; sing so above
the call of Ole Man Trouble, we
can hear the rumor from the place
we called soundless— Lake Monona
is still— again called beautiful,
mist gently lifts to shift the view.

Street Scene: San Juan, Puerto Rico 22 March 1978

Karl, poised, pole cutting the air,
walks to the gravity of gravity,
untethered to any cable above.
No net below, the shoes steady,
resting on the effrontery of inches,
it's one footfall in front of next.

It takes practice to be perfect,
to be almost a wren on a wire,
not falling from but embracing
the fluttering, the teeter-tottering,
the unsteadiness, the imbalance
of balance, the what of the not is.

The 'Flying Wallendas' practiced
being, the guy-wired dry run,
Icarus missteps not of matter
as their grayed ballerina slippers
touched sawdust to broad guffaws,
stumbles not yet counted for keeps.

In San Juan, someone drinks rum.
No one is forever in the moment.
And someone in the crowd below
samples street sold pork *pasteles*,
someone cranes an arthritic neck,
buoyed by the burden of being seen

Confederate Memorial Carving, Stone Mountain Park, Georgia, 2009

Discards of the eye, blossoms lie fallow,
crushed underfoot, color no longer
regard of custom or crenel of mien,
redoubts known to illumine the sky.

Here is monument, birthright cut into
coarse granite monadnock raised by rupture,
the mass rewarding bird's-eye scrutiny.
Impermanence is the only lost cause.

Gravity of weight recalled, gray homespun
or flesh tinged with rust, heritage is wish
not quite gleaming like pyrite, flint, and fire;
burnished oak stock, oiled steel, dream of good.

Here Lee the gentle horseman and Stonewall
loom to cast anti-shadows, blinding glint
of shuddering wish, that cherry blossoms
will lean to whispers that allege advent.

Looking at Flowers, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2012

This faith in form is felt, is seen, is
chosen like the result of seeds sown.

Moist earth of dreams retouched,
trickle of labor down the neck,

packets of color, the trowel upturned
by rest – if in hope I scatter

handfuls on blue-veined marble floors,
a tour-guide will amble to the command

of a walkie-talkie while weighted petals
still survive each mistimed ice storm

by design, yellow daffodils reprised by
new flowerings on a canvas of white

Riding with the Old

Billie's scent of gardenia
mixed with late-night tobacco
makes someone's hit parade;
a stereophonic trademark tuned up
to move wavelength to foment,
Caddy backseat bass is
the first-love yes of offer, is
healing made from old gifts.

No need to rehearse
past-named love songs for feeling,
this ride glides with rising
Muscle Shoals-made whispers
of heart-knotted things;
the ride glides to the rising
ruby voice of midnight pleas
for empty-arms Stax/Volt solace.

Somewhere a lover's ear knows
of a Motown of motion unloosed
by broke-beat harmony;
somewhere a lover's ear
hears Philly soul before the fire.
"Ain't no stopping us..." Catgut
cut fingers ready, set
to the timing of the freed thing.