

How much is music, key lowered now,
gone minor again, flowing that little groove
where pain runs convex to the surface? How much
is the glint of crystal hung from mirrored arches,
barely moving with audience breath,
striking flints in his pale blue eyes?

He is a prophet. Forecasting ruin, forecasting
rain, predicting your heartbeat, willing it,
playing your spine like a keyboard, electrifying
your long red guitar strings. He compresses
a grain of hot salt in every pore, starts
small internal combustions, all pistons at odds,
then one enormous turbine synched with him,
generating enough current to throb down
the marble columns, revving the riderless carriage
outside the fourth dimension, holding a seance
with Gabriel and Gershwin, Debussy and Berrigan.

His grin is sudden, mocking. He flats his fifths
and goes south on a short bridge, tootles
to the carved unicorn, blows out the chafing dishes
along with the illusions. And for a jigger of time
you can stand it, fill your lungs on the afterbeat,
see that he's nothing but a trumpet man,
not a sorcerer, not a fakir
pulling the cobra out of your basket.

He is a child. Blowing bubbles of light,
expanding the spectrum,
merging with bobbing sixteenth notes. He is
imperial Rome, an announcement of gladiators,
Caesar chariots, a boast of soldiers,
an ancient fury. He is Africa. Black hunter cry,
leopard stalking, impala bleeding, eyes looking
out of water, eyes burning, curling edges of night,
smoke rising, winding winged scales,
sucking back into his bell, recycling.

He slams a fist in your throat, turns you
on a spit and hamstring you with blades of ice.
He hustles the horn, wrestles it,
mistress and mentor, a panpipe saved by his kiss.

Feel the sound, mama? He's concentrating
on all your edges now, honing sharp sharper,
quivering on a sill to otherwhere, retiring
to a glistening waver pulsing between turquoise
and green, hanging on like dying gills.
A trumpet man, mama, more lives than a cat,
more wind than a Texas twister.

(cont.)