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**FROM "FURTHER AUTOVARIATIONS"
*REMINDERS OF A VANISHED EARTH***

1/

THE POEM AS LANDSCAPE

the definition
of a place
is more than
what was seen
or what was
felt before
when dreaming
of the dead
the way
a conflagration
wrapped itself
around his world
leaving in his mind
a trace of dunes
the fallout from
a ring of mountains
reminders
of a vanished earth
the landscape
marked with rising tufts
the hardness of
clay tiles
that press against
our feet like bricks
the soil concealed
beneath its coverings
through which a weave
of twisted wires
crisscross the empty
field as markers
to commemorate
the hapless dead
the ones who fly

around like ghosts
bereft of either
home or tomb
in what would once
have been their world
the count fades out
beyond 10,000
leaves them to be swept
down endless ages
fused together
or else set apart
lost nomads
on the road
to desolation
a field on mars
they wait to share
with others
dead at last

2/

NEVER DONE COUNTING

Enclosed by matter
all my thoughts
scream for prophecy.
When I wake up on Mondays
the night sky is hanging
above me galaxies
shedding their images
fading unknown
in the half light
a light that confounds me.
Nothing we know is unreal
& nothing is real.
There is only the face

of a woman
blind in the sun
& a voice that cries out
in a language like French.
When she raises her arms
they look distant & lame,
something there
that won't work but falls flat
against me. I will follow her
up to the moon, will watch her
paint herself red
with no sense
of the distances
still to be traveled,
no plot to adjust to
but numbers
that show me
the little I know,
the way one
vanishing universe
shrinks till it swallows
another.
There are worlds here
hidden from sight
whose ends are like
their beginnings,
the world in daylight
turns dark
the blaze of noon
caught in their mirrors,
as the sun slips
through our fingers
never done counting
where the globe
has dropped
out of sight.

3/

A DEEP ROMANTIC CHASM

Head facing downward

I descend the chasm
little caring
about space or time
my face caught halfway
between dark & light
a mix of random chance
& kindred circumstances,
before I reach the bottom
& a narrow street
alongside which I spot
a darkly churning stream
& follow it
until I reach its source.

*Here is a world
outside of time & season*
only broken by the sound
of ghostly birds
that blast us till we find
that we've arrived
nearby a field behind
a battered wooden fence,
the specters in that world
stare out at us,
move back & forth
until they cover the horizon, come
forward, forward
rising in their legions.*

*rhyme & reason

All they have to offer
is a turn, a word,

a sound that we can hear
& answer in return,
what has long been known
but left unspoken,
words from inner space
the tongue turns off,
the dead will learn
to speak again, the universe
is theirs & covers them
until they flee at morning,
leave us in a dream still,
faces awash with dew.

This will be the final book
the poet dreams or writes,
whose home is in his mind
or maybe elsewhere,
follows it around the world
to where it leads him,
a space forever dark
an air so heavy
that he cannot push through it
or recognize the faces
waiting for him as before
too distant to pursue,
the world once full of smiles
now dark with tears.

I am not he,
the wanderer, the captive,
the one who lives his life
as in a dream,
the messages that reach him
from a dying galaxy
fall on deaf ears,

echoes of an empty sky
the final world bereft
of sounds & images,
returned to what it was,
adrift & mindless,
the grim memento
of its absent god.

4/

TO TAKE DEATH AS A TRIBUTE
for Will Alexander

Let us step out
among the suns,
so bright the eye
sees dragons
in a panoply
of gold,
like letters
from Sumeria,
overwrought
with crazy omens
signs of our
impending death
for which they serve
as tribute
blind & held back
till they plunge
down cliffs
into the burning water
barely kept
from drowning.

In the ancient dream
a wife

is ravaged
by a lesser god
who takes the form
of a dark scorpion
the lower part
of a chimera
& tracks her
as his prey
the target of his
mad maneuverings
frenetic
with a lover's zeal
that knows
nor start nor end
no more than what
we always knew
the end as lost
as the beginning.

Always there were
footprints
on the dune
the traces
of a monster
like a god
a hidden universe
or cosmos
shining back at us
from some dark
mirror
hidden place
that might have been
a bishop's
or a king's
a trap devised
to strike & freeze

your innards
while their voices
babble

*in each other's
dreams.*

NOTE

In the 1990s I composed a series of thirty-three “Lorca Variations,” drawing vocabulary, principally nouns, from my previously published translation of Federico García Lorca’s early gathering of poems, *The Suites*. I later made use of this method of composition for homages to Jackson Mac Low, Octavio Paz, Arshile Gorky, & others as a step beyond translation but with an idea of translation—or what Haroldo de Campos called “transcreation” & I called “othering”—as one of the defining characteristics of poetry as a whole. The obvious difference in the autovariations presented here is that I apply the same procedure to earlier works of my own, in this instance poems largely but not exclusively drawn from *A Book of Witness* (2002). As with other variations—other translations for that matter—the procedure, if it works, doesn’t so much annihilate the original version as bring it into a new dimension, where both versions can lead an independent if interlinked existence. The gap in time between them adds its own strangeness to the mix.