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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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PRELUDE TO ACT ONE OF *PALESTRINA*

1.

Listen along the line
and the simple continuity
will brush the fine hairs
forward (right way)
on your forearm gently
length of the dream.
This way you know
someone is happening
to you. This is someone.
This is what someone
does. You know by feel.
The only way you can
anyone at all. Heartbeat,
breath, taste in your mouth.
My mouth also. Talking
as if talking to you.

2.

Prelude to a long complexity
simple enough for a bird
to be scared off the roof
though you only meant to
say hello bird hello. So
often welcome is banishment.
What can we do about that?
List all the loves you lost
and pretend you never had
even one of them. You never
had them. They were
sunshine at night, fountains
in the desert, more dreams, dreams.

3.

That's why this particular
music is so important. After
a fitting number of violins
a human voice comes along,
child or woman, hard to tell
Words in some other language.
Light around the edge of curtains,
possible daytime. Shake
the cloth gently. Then shake
the light even gentler to see
what kind of body that shimmer
clothes. I thought one day
I saw that person, the actual
body behind the light and then
the veil fell back and all
was wall and window once again
the way we like to keep the world.

4.

But if this little voice (it is
a child I think, I read its shadow
on my ears) is saying something
we need to hear we'll never
know. Words die into music
and here we are. And mine too,
these, are just looking for
some lucid death to pass into
on their way to some better
kind of saying.

5.

But who knows.

What is said here is spoken
everywhere, and what you hear
turns back into irritable grammar
inside you, telling you all the things
music wants you to do, all the Asias
you're supposed to go get wisdom

from, all the awkward propositions
you must cajole all your hoped-for
friends into pretending to believe.

Love, religion, justice, policy.

What if there are no angels really?

Where would our conversation be?

Isn't there some agency out there
that parses even this and tells you
in cleaner words the things I mean?

7 December 2013

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1.

Upgrade the ears'
 expectations— wake more sense
 when I take longer
 at the wheel at the clasy pot
 intricate with revolutions
 rests in the kiln —
 let the line know you've played it out
 through your anxious fingers—
 the way the word
 masters such as me i
 nto speaking —
 o hear me better than I am.

2.

Someone was coming. The snow
 was melting. Inference, inferences.
 Hearing *Tristan* in the morning,
 every modulation means.

And sometimes the words mean too.

3.

Hard to be anybody these days
when not even the ink is black
and the sky's a higher octave of the snow –

the human voice is frantic now
something needs to spe
reaches out through so many mouths,

all we really know is how to fall in love.
Meantime the sheep wander loose in the ravine,
looking vaguely for grass, looking for wolves.

4.

O mute pastoral of modern meaning,
one by one the buildings instruct the sky.
Nothing to learn – chemistry textbook
from childhood, of dubious relevance —
all that precision, everything changes,

every breath a new cosmology.

We don't know how everything works
though we can handle anything at all.

5.

Have I said it yet? Of course not.

Those who know don't say. The brass band
silences the parade.

Try to mean me.

Try to remember for me.

Tell me what you want,
for sky's sake tell me what you mean.

6.

So it turned into a love song after all
just like Tristan.

The ship always comes too late —
that is the meaning of philosophy,

a lover

loses his sheep, the sail is tattered,

holds no wind.

No one

is coming, the snow will never melt.

Everything speaks German.

Do you understand?

There is a sign in the sky, a shape

like the face of someone you never knew.

Time gets longer and longer but never gets here.

8 December 2013.

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Flag maybe.

Alternate loyalties

cloud flutter,

scud

across the heart.

I am no more than

what it lets me hear.

8 December 2013

BRAHMS

1.

Melody in reserve
hidden behind the striding
orchestra the fierce
piano rolling out its
nets is waiting.

Back there

an energy,

a song

not meant for singing.

2.

Always waiting
by the bronze doors
open a new year
right in the flesh of the
old year never ended,
time turned inside out.

3.

We're used to
his agonies by now,
call them romantic,
Late Romantic,

but time hurts him,
hurts us in him
if we really hear,
tone makes him do

and all this happens,
love has something to
do with it but what kind,
what hand reaches towards us?

4.

As love once wove
and spread the meshes
caught Agamemnon
in his bath so unarmed

he could be struck down
the music strips us bare,
controls the nerves, meshes
in us, what does he mean,
why does he say what this ‘
music make me hear?

5.

Are the lines long enough, sister,
lover, for you to find him, touch
the fiber of his pain and set him free?
Can you save the man trapped in music?

8 December 2013

(Bard Conservatory, Brahms No.1, conducted by Jeffrey Kahane)

CADASTRAL

1.

Listening as over words
sun's first glistenings
illumine hours—
the forest you never entered
thousand acres of my father's house
and we a hectare bare.

2.

No grass for goat.
No girl to milk it.
No road to go it.
Poor goat. Identity
is something like that.

3.

So try to keep your
equilibrium in your
hip pocket with the little
scrap of cardboard some-
body wrote the address
on you're headed to
in case you forget. Left
foot right foot and the ice
melts by noon. Finger it
at afternoons of doubt
but never take it out.

4.

Or eat the rice and beans.
Nothing must pass your lips
till each day has its Easter

and he rises up in you
new-named and glorious,
you walk him in the garden.

5.

Bilateral symmetry was the answer
our flesh offered for the riddle
of how to be, and also be someone somewhere.
But wouldn't it have been better just to be?

9 December 2013

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A plea

for left-sided motormen:

don't always leave my mail
on the dining room table,
the morning sun has to spread
out there unimpeded,
splendor on oak, just a wish
away from being everywhere.

I am the motorman and I tilt
always to the left. Where
does my mail come from now?
I can use the table but the wood
is not mine. But the sun is.

9 December 2013

PREX

Guide me through
the green gospel
on the scarlet
pilgrimage.

It grows dark now.
this strangest
winter fruit.

9 December 2013

FEATHER

1.

What wasn't said
is still speaking.

Feather on the wind
deserts its bird,
carries its tiny parasites
gently into the deep-
peopled forest
where everyone
lives and everything
is alive.

No dead
matter—only persons
come and go, die
from one into the next,
shapes elapse
but the rest persists.

2.

So the feather
might be blue jay's
tufting along
through the light
snow sifting down
until it loses
my attention
and is free again
from commentary
and inferences,

a thing out there
at peace
among the all of it.

10 December 2013

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Asphalt almost
wet enough to reflect
fence posts, fence rails—
and slick cars pass.
Everything in my world
must be a mirror.

10 December 2013