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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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PORPHYRY WATER

Drink the shadow
on it of the building
that has stood there so long
waiting for you,

a house
is what's to believe on
a house in the heart best
a stone house to keep your sky in

the mineral in the middle of the air
also is air, water also
is a stone, the mountains also
are just standing there

sign of the home country. No,

we are different geography.

We are heptarchy. The seven
senses rule our land,

our gentle purple island where
among all the self-revealing chit-chat
it grew to be evening and

the shadow of incipient wisteria
fell across the raku teacups

so we drank the shadow
of some future flowers.

That is all. Dark
water in a dark rough cup

to believe in.
Hands clasped, we said architecture.

Having grown too comfortable
actually to be anywhere
we let go,

and the long Grand Concourse of
Bronx apartment houses, we live in all of them,
suddenly vanished.

This is the second episode,
the beginning of the unveiling.

How could every story not be or become
a quest for the Grail—

we know to ask that,
we know to walk along
keeping our eyes on the ground
where the god-dust falls, shivers in wind,
shows the way.

We do?
I do, and I have touched your hand.

Or at least the tweed of your suiting
and led you with me,
you dear mistaken path.

And that
was the third thing,
when you let go.

No, I will never leave you.
You have drunk the shadow
of a flower we both saw
before it was

and at the same moment
unsure what to call it
but *same* was purple,
we drank the certainty
of color

and where a shadow could
lodge inside you, that's where I am,

and like that, you in me

for I too drank the shadow.

2.

Call it event,

what comes out.

Wind from the earth

going home to the air—

a word. Four

qualities, four elements

drive everything else.

But Ptolemy's house had

only eight rooms, big one,

eight and not fewer, eight and not twelve.

Am I listening to you even now?

Trying to understand one another

is drinking the same water

from different cups. No,

said the other, it is different water

from a shared cup.

Germinating each other like kids,

blood, saliva, running

from room to room.

Here,

this is what I understand.

Around the house a great veranda flows

like Okeanos around the small Greek world.

And on that porch we're free to romp,

drip treacle, read French novels, salute strange flags.

But once inside the old screen door

it's serious Bible stuff and mannerly.

I feel a fever coming on—

because we looked at one another

stones suddenly have entrance doors,

wind becomes visible,
pale ink seeps across the sky
because, because

but once inside the old screen door
the rooms begin to count,

a house puts us in our place,
that what a hand
always holds:
a key to a house—

be far away across the street and see me in the window

room by room
a pilgrimage

one room to sit in and talk about Spain
one to eat yogurt and mulberries in
one to sleep in alone or with friends
one to keep books in and coax them to breed
one to stand alone in, let nobody in,

room with a window
window with a meadow
meadow with a tree
tree with a bird
and the bird flies away

one room to wash the berries, breed the yogurt,
hide the broom behind the door

how many is that?
Makes six, and there are two more,
so one is the future and one is the past
or one is the pray-er one is the prayer
or one is the baker and one is the bread—

don't be ridiculous, you can't live in bread.

And this beautiful tumbledown house is my own
because everyone lives here,
sounds like a charlatan
smiling and waving his hands to explain
spirit is matter, honey.

No, no. The fourth episode is over,
a failure. Start again. No description this time,
no counting—

God didn't give you numbers for that.
And in any decent house there's just one room.

25 May 2008

PIMEN. VARLAAM.

Deep voiced. As if sky
spoke. Man with man
inside the ear can tell
a man from a man

a monk from the middle of the night?
Not a love story. The sky
knows nothing of romance
deep voices take pleasure in themselves

need no silvery answerers.
They are voices, a voice is a name
that says itself.
A voice does not have to touch,

a voice is touch. What it says
doesn't often matter. Sounds
fall from the sky. We hear
a little more than we can.

26 May 2008

after Lycophron

And the towers they had built of rock and rubble
God knows how they thought all those tumbledown stones had come
but up they built and now the same God threw them down,

they stood there watching and screaming
as if their children were crushed down before their eyes
in this grim earthquake

and then the waters came, the everlasting rain we need to live
came down to kill them, so they swam
those of them who could, and the rest shuffled on

basketwork and withies and goat-skin balloons
bladders of pigs puffed up and worn around the gullet
to keep from sinking but they sank

most of them, some few did not, rafted or swam,
there were strong swimmers then
and as they swam the fish swam in

the whales and porpoises cavorting
in the marketplace and young dolphins playing
tag in the temples, but most of all the seals

came in and wallowed in the beds
men and women had left still warm from their bodies
and well the seals liked that, silkies they were,

lad-seals and seal-lasses who look for human love.

25 May 2008

after an image by Harvey Bialy

It is a woman you found in the Hoggar
her body made of rain

and now that you have found the colors of her difference
at a word from you she'll

drench that desert and New Aphrica
will happen to our heads,

our silly Tassili bone-dry brains.



25 May 2008