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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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The weight
of knowing you
it takes a long time
to feel the weight of you
the knowing
as if the years
also were skin and more
than skin the pulse
of quiet meat inside
that presses always
up against the world
as if we were flesh

as if we were flesh and knew
something quietly that only
flesh can know

the hand tells us or the arm
the lap recites it quietly
always quietly
so quiet till it is the only thing we hear

to feel. And time does that.

And something else.

Because all of time is locked in the first glance.

We know who we are the minute we meet
all the rest of the years is pure negotiation,
stalled, accelerated, true, evasive, false, fond,
trivial, triumphant, don't get me started,

(19 XII 08)

= = = = =

Trying not to fail
is difficult. Succeed
is easier: angels
push your shoulders
forward to the work.
That's why we think
that they have wings,
our shoulder blades
ache from their nudges.

20 December 2008

= = = = =

Still snowing.

 The future
shows itself in funny ways.

Try to get a handle
on it.

 But there is no door.
Or I am the door
he said. And went away.

But not far. Or far
as the snow comes from
onto your hand.

 To be
the same door. Or know.

20 December 2008

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Because the smaller is always

and the reindeer walking soft
among the Sami look at me
with just the same eyes the viol
does when it plays with absent-minded
tenderness something Louis Quinze-ish

and the heart, that poor victim
of every art and skill, beats
a little weirdly on its way to breaking

but never breaks. Because the small.
Because what ruins also heals.

20 December 2008

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So. Much. Snow.
A kid would be in heaven.
Why. Not. Me.
Am I all about consequence,
the harsh Stalinist maybes
of causality? Roof
cave in. Car slops
off the road. Power
goes. The freeze.
But the trees. The lacery
of beauty worth it
all. The dry white fluff
all over us. So.
Really. There is only
this to know.

21 December 2008

SCENE

Say something to make it better.

--Something.

No, like you used to do.
You'd kiss my knee.

--You're not bleeding now.

I am inside.

--I don't even know where to kiss.
I don't know where your inside lives.

21 December 2008

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Just to have begun the thing to say.

Being near it
is like an Acropolis
snow-white in memory
against a snow-blue sky.

The single word
is a complex monument,
a temple on the hill
and down below, deep inside
the sound it, a word
is a drive-in restaurant
where cars full of family
come to be fed, the kids
amazed at all the meaning

in such ordinary noise, a word
inhabited, by so many animals
in the sound of what people
say and listen to the crumbs of, truth.

21 December 2008

THE HANGED MAN'S LAST WORDS

Funny, I've spent my whole life
preparing for this moment.
And now I have nothing to say.

Wait, there's this: I loved the world
more than the world loved me.
Or maybe that's wrong too: see

she strings me as a locket round her neck.

21 December 2008

[*Sorrow's Map*, continued]

Let me experiment with the pattern of language. It lies before me, a solstice, a whole landscape. Also, it lies before I do. If there were truth to worry about, it would be a complex simplicity, somewhat like a pot of luxuriant poinsettias on a clean table by a window, a field of snow out there and more snow falling.

*

Still trying to find a fox in the snow you have to wake up earlier than the air. One is red and one is white but still it's hard. You are mostly blind about such business. Nature! How much pain in a simple color. How many teeth the wind has, to tear. And you with no fur on your eyes, nothing to warm you but what you see. There she goes now, like the world escaping into itself. Gone.

21 December 2008

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Once I could write a novel in an afternoon
now it takes a whole day
to read a sentence.

Wittgenstein or Henry James or Thomas Bernhard.
Thank God there is no time inside a word.

22 December 2008

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I think I shall trim my mustache
and go to the north.

Tasting snow at different latitudes
I'll know a little more
about this earth I fidget on.

They'll see me and say
Here's that man from the south
trying to tell us something about snow.

22.XII.08

[*Sorrow's Map*, continued]

Laundry lists last through ages, and tell us. Tell me. The longer the less.

Eyes *want* to close. Death is the normal condition, from which we sometimes rouse to live. Wake up, the clock misses you.

*

There are no statements without sentiments. This is a fighting proposition.

Description. 'Without' means 'unaccompanied by or not arousing.'

In a world without consequences we could not live at all.

22 December 2008

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Something seems missing
from the calendar:
a day of the week I vaguely remember
but everybody else forgets

it would come between Monday
and Tuesday, a day godly
and symmetrical: whose day is that
when all the past is wide open?

Some woman sleeping by the well
suddenly touched by a passing
god and turned into a goddess
this side of the sky? Who will never
be thirsty? Whose story is that?

Day of the Woman at the Well,
we need her, we need it,
Wellday, no, Herday, the day
between yesterday and today.

23 December 2008

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(towards *Ben Tripp*)

I think of Boulez
the tossing of the music
or what the sound
tells us to take as music
from instrument to instrument
as in his *Domaines*: so here
the words in nonce array
as far as lines go, the unit
of your attention the word the phrase
maybe not the line.
Have we come at last beyond the line?
Into the great Armory spaces
where the words move,
guests in the house?

23 December 2008

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There used to be contests
to see how many people
(coeds they used to say
or frat boys or soldiers of
the Queen's army)
could cram into a phonebooth.
In those days they had phonebooths.
Contest is *agon* in Greek,
the protagonist is the first actor
who steps out from the crowd
and talks. I hear your words,
every one of them spoken
by somebody else: everybody
must be protagonist, the chorus is gone
every voice individuates.
They pretend to be laughing
because laughing is louder than tears.
It comes across to us, all of them
come across to us. All the words
anybody says get heard. Inside the body
of us we come to hear, is where.

23 December 2008

= = = = =

Compiling what can be said from what was written
as if some older angel hovered all our rigmaroles and science
anxious to claim a single sensible remark: something
with light in it or feathers on it or a grim cigar
burning on some autumn leaves. *O god the elm is dead
we had to cut it down.* As the subtrahend approaches zero
the zeppelin gains altitude and soon is hard to distinguish
from the three-quarter winter moon you earlier this afternoon
hung up in the sky to confuse me. It does not move.
But it gives a great deal of light. Or the other way round.

23 December 2008

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The sadness is not in me
it's in the Virgil of it
the *lacrima rerum*
changefulness lost time
wasted effort spilt
blood samsara.
I'm just a notice on the wall
read me or tear me down
the child is still whimpering outside.

24 December 2008

at Christmas, for Charlotte

I never cry. Remember that
when you think of all the gloom
I'm afraid you find in my poems.

Love is always afraid of losing
love – nothing else fazes it,
it tries to hold up a quiet vernicle

to dry the *lacrima rerum*, bring
a smile back to the world's face.
Solemn poet chanting crazy odes—

that's as comic as I get. Even
those angels catechizing shepherds
in the field by night: peace

on earth, good will, do it quick
and make light of it, don't wake
the baby, let the mother sleep—

even they were crying as they sang.

25 December 2008

=====

But who was born today? The names we call Him by: Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, Savior, Redeemer, all of them tease us with the vagueness of reference. Anointed by whom, with what oil, according to what tradition, to a kingship of what country, or priesthood of what temple? From whom does He redeem what, or whom, and who is the slave owner or pawnbroker? Every name has clustered round it a Sanhedrin of interpreters yowling accuracies into the night of time.

Yet we know Someone was born. God? Man? Godman? King? Prophet? Rebel? Ascetic? Revolutionary? Madman? Ethicist? Gentle teacher? Teacher of humankind? Rabbi? Rejecter of family values or crown jewel of the Holy Family? Maybe every word is right, and we have looked in the wrong places.

I'm guessing that until we manage to understand the Buddhahood of Christ we (at least we western peoples) will never understand either Buddha or Christ. They are doing the same work. They are speaking different words of the same sentence. I do not think that all religions are the same, or one. I do think that some religions stem from teachers who speak from the same place or the same mind. I know that Jesus and the Buddha spoke from the same mind. To different people in different times, certainly.

I like the Redeemer name: it has all the action of the story in it. Is the redeemer one who redeemed us or it all already? Or is the redeemer one who goes on redeeming? The word is beautifully ambiguous. The mind tells us it must be: the one who redeems us day by day, or teaches us to buy ourselves (redeem means buy back) out of slavery or imprisonment. And it is delicious that our commercial commodity society, the society that does literally nothing but buy and sell, should have as its God a Redeemer. Perhaps the one who at the end of the day (what day?) cancels all the dream transactions and wakes us all up.

25.XII.08

ENDGAME

Somebody else
should make a play of it
hard rooks and slippery
queens and not much else
but some meager crap
left around the field
makes all the difference.
Field. Forest. Checkerboard.
My life for yours. Mate
means life in English
death in chess. No wonder
games creep up the spine
and kill.

There was but little light in the hall, and that little lost itself in darkness in the background. It was very spacious and lofty, with a gallery running round it, which, when the door was open, was visible at two or three points. Almost in the dark my new acquaintance led me across this wide hall into the room destined for my reception. It was spacious, and wainscoted up to the ceiling. The furniture of this capacious chamber was old-fashioned and clumsy. There were curtains still to the windows, and a piece of Turkey carpet lay upon the floor; those windows were two in number, looking out, through the trunks of the trees close to the house, upon the lake.

Description also
takes your life
and changes it.
What is in the lake.
Who when I go to those windows
will be standing there outside
looking up at me. Or when I wake
from sleep whose face
will be mashed against the glass
to see what little there is of me
lit by the flimsiest candle?

Chess. I was playing chess
all night as I slept. No candle
needed for that game.
And all the pieces were red
none white none black
nonetheless I knew which
ones were me and which were you.

25 December 2008