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Robert Kelly  
*Bard College*

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Nobody knows how to cast a bell.  
We live just long enough to learn.  
Then the bell is cast and then the bell tolls.

15 March 2007

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What were they talking about  
the rain the first snowdrops appear  
only today the ides of March  
and a foot of snow predicted  
by wise men for tomorrow.  
What were they talking about  
the raindrops on my sleeve  
my woolen hat its brim too  
dappled with dribble sky  
lets us down again the future  
is the past turned inside out  
the imagination is the past  
mistaken for right now  
forgive me for these small  
white flowers I loved them  
for a second in the mud  
beside the roaring stream  
crazy with the old snow  
melting into the momentary  
whatever you call this place.

15 March 2007

## IDES OF IMPROPRIETY

Not one's own at any rate  
like music out of somebody  
else's radio, i.e., something  
to be endured if not enjoyed.  
Dine with Duke Humphrey  
they used to say. Eighty-six  
in other words, run out of them  
too, no more words, just  
Sirius music on some gizmo  
in the middle distance, sky  
in a Dutch painting, all those  
people ever owned was sky.  
Don't you love the flat world?  
Mountains romantic obstacles  
at best. Chairlift to Parnassus.  
Modernism rose to battle  
entrenched academies, fell  
before the infantry of MFA.  
Modernism is too hard for them,  
give them retro cheese of Self  
or vanguard flarf, no words  
left to our sweet nattering  
my dear. Modernism meant  
have no gimmicks, make  
each encounter with the stupid  
paint or paper a new thing.  
New thing. One is older than  
another. Time has some meaning  
still it hides inside its sleeves  
left for girls and right for boys  
like an unsuccessful tattoo  
that suppurates beneath the silk.  
Once upon a word the time  
meant the reproach a dying  
person uttered to his murderers,  
used to say them in church  
around about now, Lenten-tide  
and hot cross buns and why  
are the old ladies weeping

thinking blood-soaked ashwood  
often? Rhetorical question.  
This is the day that Caesar  
got it. Even you, my son!  
he said in Greek. A strange  
language full of verbs, pine  
scented afternoons, a knife,  
no, I don't speak it either,  
nobody does, they all  
died with Achilles and went north  
where Death keeps his lodging  
on the other side of the pool  
those people for some strange  
reason decided to call Kind  
to Strangers, they way we call  
fat men Tiny. The things  
we dare to do. *Kai su,*  
*teke,* and then he fell,  
dozens of puncture wounds  
blossomed in his tyrant torso  
and so on, republicans  
like that sort of rhetoric,  
the man is dead now  
leave him alone, with Achilles  
aforesaid, by the salt marsh  
just this side of Odessa  
where God has a secret  
little dacha he spends His  
weekends in (He invented  
the week, remember, so it  
could end and He have  
a place to hide) while  
sectaries of divers sorts  
howl on the twin Sabbaths.  
Of course Death is forced  
to listen too. He's the one  
who turned the damn thing on.  
It sounds like a Bach fugue  
played by a high school band.

15 March 2007 (The Poker)

## AROUND

Silent dream. The clutch  
around the pericardium. Around  
around. As if as if. The carousel  
will not stop these days  
to let the children off.

How long  
before the little girl on the lion  
begins to doubt?

She chose  
this animal because of reputation,  
ferocity, dignity, gold mane.

But this is one of those  
that don't go up and down  
unlike the frivolous ponies  
her glad pals mount. She sits  
ruling the world and bored.  
And the wheel goes round.

How long before I climb  
down from my seated dragon  
and try my luck with her,  
two shy imperialists together?  
All thumbs and sixes, not a seven  
in my hand, all bells  
and no whistles, all jacks  
and no trade.

Gimme a chance.  
A clutch. A pericardial  
welcome like a catch of breath,  
spring on a Bic. A snick  
of something falling into place.  
A scapular round her neck  
with pictures on it slung  
low along her chest, holy  
house of Loreto flew up through

the actual air from Palestine to  
Italy, no politics intended.

Even the houses go up and down  
and she's still there, sobbing now,  
charging forward on her sleeping beast,  
her sweaty fingers in his wooden hair.

16 March 2007

## APPLE

Who knows what might happen  
between there and then? Overboard  
like a dud torpedo. Or fall  
simply from the hand like an apple  
yesterday from the beak of a bothered  
crow, let fall at our feet, half-eaten  
Granny Smith, we almost picked it  
up ourselves, but knew better  
than to steal things from a crow.  
Who waited on his tree, ten  
minutes later we passed again  
and he was eating it, holding  
it delicately with one foot.  
He had come back to  
what he needs. They always do.

16 March 2007



## NORTHERN COOKING

Of course in a sense worth making  
a fuss about the way women did  
when we were children, veils and powder  
and fuss, that's how they were different  
from the sullen men bent over the piano  
punching out stride. Men said nothing  
and pummeled the piano or pinochle  
women wore Evening in Paris and tiny  
flower studded gauzy veils that swooped  
like bad weather from big hats.  
And who were we when they were they?  
Worth thinking about that, a garnet  
chunk beside a blue knife, what more  
does mankind need? Sweet potato pie.  
Manhattan clam chowder. Potato pancakes  
none complete without a scrape  
of knuckle skin from the *ribeisen*.  
You know who you are. Pig's knuckles  
on Thursday with sauerkraut. Flounder.  
Or fluke if they weren't lucky, blue  
faced fishermen at Broad Channel.  
A world made exclusively of aunts  
and uncles. And pianos. And cheese  
of a sort, soft, from yellow boxes.

16 March 2007

## WE'LL GATHER LILACS

from New Zealand it says  
this morning half a world  
away a millennium ago Ivor  
Novello songs Wellington  
Marilyn Hill Smith singing  
with a concert orchestra  
crikey this is pretty music  
why does it linger only  
down there with sheep and  
water going down the drain  
the wrong way round  
and snow about to fall on  
us up here, we'll gather  
lilacs in the spring again  
the radio explains, a voice  
we tend to trust, anyway  
we want it to be true  
which is all you can ever  
ask of music isn't it, say it,  
say it is or isn't always so.

16 March 2007

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There has to be a tendency to say  
less than you feel more than you know  
that is the pavement on the road  
or salt the men put down on snow  
the voice of your mother never far  
from being heard the way a star  
is close when the cloud expires  
like the offer from your broker  
you leave unregarded on your desk  
a fancy name for the kitchen table  
because you never do grow up  
the world is still at the breakfast stage  
and it mingles with all the voices  
of your unborn children singing  
sweetly from a nearby opera  
till you don't know how to face  
the mirror and it begins to snow.

16 March 2007

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If I believed in suicide  
you'd all be in trouble  
but I can't think of any  
thing smarter to do  
than go on in this long  
permission, day, night,  
day, night, it means  
as much as any wisdom  
does, the holy bible of  
whatever comes next.

16 March 2007

## ESCHATOLOGY

Not sure it's actually here yet  
the lurker at the threshold you  
keep worrying about or waiting for  
it's never clear, like the sky  
one minute blue the next minute  
and always far away. So far  
you think you hear Bird playing  
out of the corner of your ear  
the way the distant traffic chants  
of far and near but never here  
for long and all the ones you  
cared about so much are gone.

Highways rule. No name  
sandwich with coffee hot  
enough to substitute for taste.  
Loose sugar in tall jars ago.  
When it comes a waitress  
will be the one to tell you:

“Look up from your stupid book  
and watch it lurching by the cars  
stepping up the cinderblocks  
yanking the screendoor wide  
and here it is at last, the one  
we all knew was on the way,  
we knew better than to say so  
but you. You idiot. Catsup  
on your upper lip, the sweet  
remission called the philtrum  
where I impose right now  
like it or lump it your last kiss.”

16 March 2007

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Human universe yes yet not secular.  
I touch your godforsaken hand  
and thrill undertakes us both. Not secular  
because the human proper is a god to find  
deep or shallow swaddled in the sense of self  
another who is you. That god.

17 March 2007

## EDUCATION

Encouraging likeness by crayon and soft rough  
paper dismays the raw aesthetes in second grade  
who already know a thing or two about Mirò,  
the art on freezer doors at home. How can I draw  
a house when a house has sides and all  
you give me to work with is some colors?  
Colors are an afterthought of space, a trick  
the sunlight plays on us. Give me a stone  
and a forest full of wood, give me union workers  
who know the difference between up and down.  
Colors have no insides. They sleep all the time.

17 March 2007

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He didn't mean to be cynical, it was the wind  
wuffling in his jersey that made him rude,  
boys are like that, ill-laundered and insecure  
hence full of noise and random ceremony  
waddling downtown mid their peers. Disgust  
enters the equation here. To drink in doubt  
until the sun goes out. To lie at home  
dreaming of another house, eat your bread  
dreaming of a crustier loaf, et cetera. These  
are the forgeries of infancy. What they dream  
will come to pass. That is the terrible  
truth about dreaming. Now the crowd of them  
shuffles through the snow, the noise  
is in proportion to their numbers, hobbled  
by decency they don't do all the things they think.  
The god Mercury observes them from this  
or that lamppost and decides which of them  
should survive till morning. He too  
was young once and understands the drill,  
the ceaseless sub-clinical infection  
of dissatisfaction, the acne of the soul.  
They break things because every single  
thing around them is a sort of mirror.

17 March 2007



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I hate morality. It has dust  
between its pages, it has webs  
strung between its breasts.  
It has ideas that go on thinking  
while I try to sleep, it has remorse  
that bites me when I watch the sea  
or any other passionately neutral thing,  
some thing trying hard to forget us  
who scratch along its borders  
digging out trenches to make towns.  
But I do like towns, the lines  
turn into avenues, they lead to you,  
I do love you, whoever you are,  
standing there all beautiful and fresh  
even with that rulebook in your hand.

17 March 2007

= = = = =

There are sounds in my chest  
like voices far away. That's why  
it's so hard to get back to sleep  
plus worrying about the snow.  
Maybe they are voices. The Chinese  
spoke of 'voices in the valley'  
that showed up in meditation  
when you reached a certain stage.  
I don't think I'm there yet,  
I think there are noises in my head  
and chest and ears and belly  
that may even be natural, even  
be normal, not the chatty  
envoys of arrogant diseases  
busy scheming with my cells.  
They may just be voices,  
my friends inside, or soldiers  
cheering each other up,  
infantry in some scarlet-  
uniformed army that hurries  
one blizzard after another  
through empty provinces  
feeding on fallen quinces.

17 March 2007

= = = = =

Basque *boina* on his head, beret  
to you or me, but black, black  
as history, brrr. It sits there  
like a close-capped mushroom  
above its pale stalk. But black,  
black as language, the noises  
that hump out of our mouths  
when we least expect it, which  
hearing we are most surprised  
to understand. And say again.  
Black, like bleak, all colors  
absent. Black, like the wool  
of a certain kind of sheep,  
like a close-woven felted cap  
snug on a weary traveler's head.  
Let him find the way home.

17 March 2007

## **DISTILL**

To turn a thousand afternoons  
into one bright morning. The admiral  
of terraces studies his vegetable sea.

The value of the character's time  
distills some violet-scented topiary  
stands around such houses nine  
generations.

Chessmen and elephants  
with little flowers scenting at their feet.

Or one soft night. Cairo. Passion silk  
or tattered linen after grabs of lust,  
the old story. We are beasts after all.

What is that nice French word for lawn?  
Or not so much lawn as the whole space  
where people flounder to build a house  
usually in the middle of, grass or no grass.

Table rapping in the salon annoys the  
cleaning woman two rooms away. Soon  
she'll go home leaving the poets to their  
play. She'll gossip about these boring  
but dangerous customs of householders.  
Ouija boards. Reading books. Eating  
food. But these days she lives alone.

17 March 2007

[sent to Eliza Douglas for her musics]