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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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FALLINGS

Constrained by beauty*
a measure falls.

* Orthodox theologians use this word to connote danger, illusion, deception, perilous allure. It is like the *aelf-scín* of the stern Saxon Christian moralists, the sin-finders in England, “elf-shine,” which is also translated ‘beauty.’

But what is measure
Valmiki asked Homer*
but what is always falling?

* Here was the world-shaking, world-dividing tension between the 17- syllabled verse and the 18-syllabled verse – shaggy Homer and Virgil and haiku all ranged against the immutable perfection of the *Ramayana*.

But there was rain that day
in the schanigarten
the tabletops thick with green paint
glistered and were empty.
One wept with happiness
to see such lucidity—
*louetai** – the whole city washes itself.

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* Middle voice, to act on with respect to oneself, the subject acts upon itself, *louomai*, I wash (myself). But the rain rains absolutely. I stood on the sidewalk looking down at the table where Thomas Bernhard once neglected a moment too long his glass of wine into which one small fruit fly had just then toppled.

Beauty, then, has to do with falling,
is that right?
Wolves come down from the beechwood
where they prey on the infants of wild swine.
They stand around the brown-cloaked holy man & ask,
Brother, how have we done wrong?*

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* He would try to explain, Yes, they had done wrong, but they weren't wrong. Wolves eat such things, just as other things eventually eat wolves. It is terrible and nauseating and vile, eating is such a disgusting thing, and killing is always behind it, somewhere soon. But it is all we have, and so we deem it beautiful. Philosophy is the gastronomy of abstemious men, he went on, reasoning with them. Beauty is the inevitable. The beautiful is the inevitable, suddenly apprehended. The gleam of your fangs, a bishop's smile. They had called him Brother, but when he admonished them he spoke to them as *mes loups*, my wolves.

Sometimes one falls into a foreign language
to hide the mind's operations from the heart—
the heart's a notorious monoglot.*

This falling is so quick, spontaneous,
that its deceptiveness is not the same as lying.
Though it is hard to explain
to man or beast just what the difference is.

He had always loved French things, who knows why. They teased him about it, nicknamed him Frenchy, and the label stuck. Nobody calls him John anymore.

All deception is self-deception, right?
And self-deception is natural, isn't it,
is consolation, keeps us breeding,
knowing. Self-deception
is as natural as rain after drought.
That's what's so hard to get moralists to grasp.
But then they never look out the window.
We are all incontinent, we have all
soiled our clothes. And all the world knows.*
But we pretend otherwise. And we are wise.

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Agree with your enemy while there is still time, the Book says. Agree to unsee.
Consent to the deception with a warm smile, as you would, in a tipsy moment,
allow a beautiful stranger to fall into your arms.

15 November 2007

= = = = =

A knife and what to do,
a knife. And to do a knife
to things, to be the bead
of water on the blade

to be the knife knowing light
and no more, to be there
and be enough, to be here
even and that too be too much,

as if a knife were enough
and no meat. No wood,
no thick, everything thin
enough already and a blade.

Everything is a knife.

16 November 2007, *Day 1 Tijax*

N O R T H

for G.G.

There has to be some presumption—
innocence it might be. Or a bat
powering a ball over the infield
but no further, a palpable hit
but no more, sir, a sentence
absent punctuation leading north
where surely he knew but wouldn't
let himself say: the mysteries were,
are, candent in snowfield splendor.
We think of it as where silence lives.

2.

And when it lives in us we've found our north.
Wolfless, dogless, just me and aurora
staring into each other's measureless eyes.
There is no limit to the human senses.
That is the first lesson, and I suppose
trying to be honest, or at least logical, the last.

3.

It was what I prayed to too
when I saw the sign my heart
pounded the genital sphincters
tightened as in the love act
I was years from knowing but I saw
New England & North painted
plain on the little brown wooden sign
and each of those words defined
the rest of my life, the restlessness,
new things. new word, the next
poem, the old England of books,
and North the pure direction
upright erection heal all my life.

17 November 2007

SACER

What listening or not
what wine poured in a circle
round the fire, who?

To make the random
your ritual how peculiar
yet you urbane deliver

plausible pleasures to young
persons. You are music
sort of. Round flame

square flame flame pointed
flame with no end
wine seeps into ash.

18 November 2007

INDIANS

Who are they?
They have feet
and sometimes walk.
Thighs
and sometimes ride.

Why are they different?
I am, you are
too. There is a tree
between us,

cottonwoods, vegas,
pinyon pine. We eat
the difference, we

live on it alone.

18 November 2007

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The ink that spills
speaks.

Will never say again
though human word.

18 XI 07

= = = = =

The church of St John
in the town of St John
on a street with no name

it is ordinary it is town
the street is the street
the steeple always points up

bakers early at their ovens
rivals at the two ends of town
one better at bread

one better at sticky little cakes
shaped like hedgehogs
with tiny raisin eyes.

18 November 2007

= = = = =

I want a winter
with birds in the trees.
This isn't about me
it's about Yucatan.

18 November 2007

= = = = =

to be so close to the heart of the world
at a morning a moment
wakes inside another moment
you are a man thinks inside another man
and the moment you are that other one
you are at the heart of the world

that is you have come to the place
where there is no distance or
all distances are the same

no more approximation no more calculus
you have come to the actual identity

19 November 2007

= = = = =

What could it have been
but the magic in the hand
or magic hand
wielding a silver pen
in which a whole forest
got written frost by frost
and the veins came first
before the leaves,
and they came before the trees.

19 November 2007

LISI SPACE?

A surfer discovers a shape
that spells a new world
and it happens to be the one we live in
at the moment,
chance or no chance,
caught by mere numbers in a naked wind.

19 XI 07

THE SHAPE OF A WOMAN

Maybe after all it is the contour only the contour
that decides Eve to stay in the garden only her lips
that persuade the nameless man to stay with her
and send God out wailing into the wilderness
and set a flaming angel at the gate to keep Him out

and we were God. That is the story. She ate
the fruit that turned her into gods, all of them
but us, and we were gone. Ever after wander
where there is to wander, divided into genders,
ages, races, but all of us together make up God

the grieving one who lives forever almost
and in His heart keeps trying to resurrect
the simple garden from which we have been banished,
and leaf by leaf and love by love we'll build it there.

19 November 2007

= = = = =

How me soothes the first snow.
Think in it. A maple there
trying to, leaf a hand.
The light knows different.
Begin. But beneath

all such a quiet the day
turns gold back to lead.
Sound enters picture.
Green seen in rain.
Still the as it was is.

20 November 2007

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Afraid to break the quiet
sometimes. Alone in the house
he feared making the least sound.
Fearful scratch of pen on paper,
flap of the turned page. It,
it itself, wants to be quiet
in and around us. Who is he
to disturb it. Small
rain falls on soft apologies.

20 November 2007

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Movement
in trees.
See nothing
but my own anxieties.

20 XI 07

= = = = =

1.

As if the hands had
or tired of the music
repairmen in a truck next door
the shifting junctures of our parallels
obscured by ghosts
is what they simply are.
How can the oboe have such soft hips
or aftermath, A city,
always a city. Where the rain,
the rain always reminds.

2.

Ghosts, I said, and I stand by them,
they are realer than you and I
and last longer, and they use my lips.
Organs of articulation are varied—
might there come a moment in our lives
when we could all of us learn to speak
that other language?

3.

Quibbling with a maple leaf
or circumcising a guitar – these
are exercises for the very young.
We who were young so long,
or too long, now we're hot
for the blurred outline only
of the withered rose, yellow ones,
the pale neurology she called it,
of everything that unaccountably
simply is. Like a man humming
at the piano. Feeling is the final mystery.

4.

But the picture the music draws
repetitious as nature is
if one can say 'is' about

what mostly does. Or are.
Our blunt abstraction
of all the happenstance at play
drowning thousands in Bangladesh.

There is no is, is what
I've come to say, but the fact is
I came to say it
from nowhere to no one
with beautiful hands.

21 November 2007