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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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I settle down snug in my fauteuil,
the eternal living room of 19th century music
embraces me like the smell of Christmas punch
on gleaming walnut tables, slices of stollen
drying slightly, studded with cherries,
candied lemons, angelica.

18 December 2007, Olin

SCHERZO

The piano sings
the cello beats time—
this is tantra,
we wear one another's clothes
woven from the same strange loom,
inside out, we live
by backwards, turning
it all into singing,
the sky inside the bird.

18 December 2007, Olin

= = = = =

I am made half of metal
steel mostly some copper
a little gold. But it's the gold
that shows.

No fingers but a hammer
no nail but an idea—
drive it through the day
like a child beating a drum.

18 December 2007, Olin

LA VALSE

How we live inside each other. Is it the 'mind' where such persons as ourselves live? Down in there. What do we make of one another in there? If a day should come when I no longer desire to kiss you, and so on, what will have happened? There, and to whom? And would I tell you then, out here? Should I? If a day comes when the inmost you and the outer you are the same, what then? Is that like a ghost story where the ghost turns out to be only a mirror? A mirror. Only there is no mirror in that dark room. In that house. Who would I be, or would I have been, if there is no longing left to link me to what or whom I hold inside me?

18 December 2007, Olin

= = = = =

You and I, what a farce,
circus, regatta, tragedy.
Is there life before you,
is there a time before now
safe from the future all around us?

18 December 2007, Olin

SKULL

Getting to know
your skull
by fingertip.

Pressure on bone
reveals the leanness
of the skin between.

And the house of bone
so clearly built
to hold something in

and let something out.
Press fingers
on the brow: prominent

zygomatic arch
an elevated highway
in Oakland twenty

years ago my skull
is there still, my
time is bone

all times live inside.

18 December 2007, Manor Parlor

= = = = =

Things come back to talk
about other things, unreliable
that toaster, scrape
the black off and still the nice
bread is soft brown inside no
problem, aces come in more
than hearts and spades,
there is a dark prince too
there is a queen of fetching
and a jack of doing good
or seeming to, some people
are learning (she remarked)
to be with an animal, some
carry a small dog in their arms
not all that small while
listening to young poets read.
Well, that's just fine. Do
whatever tastes best. Let
the toothy organist look down
on her empty cathedral
and ask who is to blame,
blame is always comfy, like stained
glass on a pale winter day,
ruby and sapphire. Blame me,
I guess, I got here first, found
the music empty and went out again.
I wish I could smoke so on the steps
I could do something not just
sand here like a leper, waiting
for a handout from the sky,
talking to pigeons, even tomorrow
no one ever comes. What kind
of church did you say I was again?

19 December 2007

ADJUTANT

as if
to a bigger bird
—or one for instance big enough
to unpeel a corner of the sky
and get out
when it wants to
but right now
wants to be in,
to be here
with its pretty assistant from the audience
(that's you) counting
brown oak leaves still on the tree—

and not just counting,
reading Summer's suicide note
letter by letter,

we are not smart,
we have poor memories
scant vocabularies.

But we're here.

20 December 2007

= = = = =

If I could actually give you the weather
wrapped up like a cup of tea
you give to the man who shovels
the snow off your porch roof and you with your
poor shoulders aching

but you don't wrap tea, the man won't drink
he does his work and smiles at private thoughts
the way we all do, the stuff that goes
on inside, the private weather
and I keep trying to give mine to you, you don't want it

the snow outside is wet enough for you
and has according to some lunatics you love
some feelings or at least some message of its own
for you and only you, whereas what I'm
always trying to convey and you know it is

love songs in love with anybody at all.

20 December 2007

= = = = =

Enact, as knuckle,
feather,
 prince
looking for his slipper must be
somewhere in all this velvet he

needs a measure we all do.

Touch me he keeps saying
and we say why why.
Because I want and we say oh
oh that is a reason
if not a good one

there are no good reasons
there is only reason,

last night the mountain fell over
so now we can't even find the sky

sensory deprivation!
counterculture!
smoky icon snatched from brooding nave!
no bud that is a mirror

that is a man.

20 December 2007

SIMPLE GIFTS

How the haunch
of a passing waitress
brushes the shoulder
of a tired worker
waiting for his food

and ecstasies him
with a fierce
tiny mute delight
no matter what
she was thinking
or he was meaning,

what the body gives
is absolutely given,
no giver, no giving,
just suddenly here.

21 December 2007

READING SCIENCE

Let the words
stroll past
the eye.

The mind.
What harm
can they do?

Sometimes
they rouse
a strange excitement,

a feeling of nothing lost,
everything connects,
even though the book

itself is a good
mile and a half ahead
of anything I

can actually understand.

21 December 2007

SONATA

Finding the way to me
is as hard as a dumb tree
midwinter lilac
even the sky can't remember
the smell of color

*

It's what is heard
at the edge of hearing
little words
none bigger than
the smallest fish

*

weaving interruptions
into unmentionable noise
the way pain
stops suddenly for
a little while who knows why.

22 December 2007
(Ustvolskaya's Sonata No. 4, 1957)

= = = = =

Not a question but a kid
carrying a comb
once he thinks they used
things like this
pipecleaners telegrams
walls of Jericho
once they whistled
everything there is falls down
smoke from autumn
fires farewell maple leaves.

22 December 2007

SONATA (1986)

Between any two tones
an image arises.

Has to.
The mind abhors
any vacuum but its own.

*

Thirty years pass
and silence
still sounds the same

air bubble in the intake
sings, vapor lock
stalls the old car

in the spray of
the Canadian Falls
only language

*

Only language—
which is time
running sideways—

can kill the king.
Spill me
into your lap

and remember.
Is that enough
of a picture,
summer
in love with winter
we all

fall short
finally of what

we really mean.

22 December 2007
(Ustvol'skaya's Sonata No.5)

= = = = =

And where have all the long words gone?
Gershwin walked by the fire house on Fountain Avenue
past the cowbarn in an old garage,
who knows where straw is born, from grass
isn't it, or corn, and where is that from,
a pocket full of seeds or straw or can't even remember,
a string of straw his fingers toy with
over and over deep in his pocket
waiting to wrap it gently gently round whose wrist
and lead her, lead her where,
where does he have to go but who he is?

22 December 2007

= = = = =

Why are there so many things
when there could be one
or a field of snow stretching away
into the uncountable pines?

22 December 2007

= = = = =

So I am with quiet determination
in the middle of this precocious winter
two thousand and eight returning
to my seventeenth summer when
I had to think about nothing but
what I was thinking about
books and winter and desire.

22 December 2007

= = = = =

Music is interruption
isn't it of an everlasting
breath? And what if
the interruptions themselves
are built into the machine?
Does that make melody?
As if every counting number
heard itself in your head
and every equation an
aria in opera?

22 December 2007