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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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in a ragged time
and full of guesses

buy a period
and stick it in some words

to make what they
called sense

shove it in
to make change happen

out there in the actual
nothing but one

word after another forever
until you ram it in

the little point
the unimaginable pause

1 November 2004

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Keeps bending over
to pick a patch of
sunlight off the floor

litter of light

the rug the room

heaps of leaves shift
uncertain in the wind

the light is never still.

He sees this, he understands it
as clearly as if he had read it
long ago, translated
in Victorian times from the Persian,

the *Garden of Bare Trees* maybe
or the *Scented Envelope from Tabriz*.

And now there is nothing left to do.

1 November 2004

CROWD NOISES

Christians and lions,
faiths that start as
martyrdoms turn mean

later, later, the jib is set
(my yachting wife will
tell me what that means)

and the nave sails on
obliterating time,
and sucking space itself

up into the shiny wax of heaven.

1 November 2004

TOUSSAINTS

And they were all saints
the ones before us

they did as much as they could

what wordier definition do you need,
what miracles or martyrdoms?

1 November 2004

RAMADAN AZURE

1.

Sol on hay Thrax

nubior repetens

uncanny eons of múst pass

ere evolute winglesses

neantheless advanceress

among the elms of Juarez

shot self in the love zone

o to touch of whom were tell

2.

men wore white starched

skirts and mustachios beset

with admire like a true diamond

sold for a song and a funny red hat

to tell cadastral destinies below

who owned earth the tunnels of whose

archive run kilometers

under any history where change

gibbers scat and skeptic quick

3.
as was Baghdad before
storybook *stercore* o so manyly
visitombs a thousand years renew
doing their mesjids and *salutamus*
squat red hat to signify
fides the soul's sole heroine
in this sand opera, if we lose her
(politico-phthisis, northern blights)
we do lose all we are not just her eyes

4.
the empty signifier such trim hip
a bawd a-sail a cup of travel
murk after marches and a whistle
silences night time have you room for a cat
can you spin on your heel can you dime
dance on my knee do it new the Olduvai?
harp on her hands a bag of money
anyone love to learn Swiss by you
still a pack yelping marmosets
the sun is set the cannon goes now eat my heart.

2 November 2004

TOURNESOL

blossoming beneath a sky of women
the sight of that commotion fills the face with seed
it's what is shown that makes men know
grow thick with oil and endless
endure by what is seen.

2 November 2004

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harp on her hands a bag of money

closer to the dome of Saint Sophia a church
to hold a candle in, a candle
to hold a flame, what does the flame hold

I smell the incense of a missed connection
hold that fruit to my lips the melon of absence
the empty signifier nailed to the sky
above all love the city wall

the curtain of our skin
flaps from the collarbone
a sorry flag with no crescent on it
just the everlasting sun over the yardarm

and we poised for the night's first drink
like Turks besieging Byzantium
but where did she get all that money
who carved that harp

from elm wood was it or acacia
the thorn that we suck honey from
John John you dip it in the desert
for all vascular plants grow from music

as in the gamelan it is in the space
between the sounds that men grew wings
and flew away from the City
as the ground suddenly abandons the dancers

and we leap
until the old priest waddles down the nave
no dancing in church he says
no dance in heaven

heaven honey
is sitting still
lucent thick
and glowing in the comb.

2 November 2004
Olin 101

In Memory of Anthony Hecht

John Donne had an artist make a picture
of how he'd look a few days after death—
shroud with topknot, bald eyes and sunken cheeks –
you can see the statue version in St Pauls.

But Hecht paraded his mortality
out loud in that hammy voice of his,
portentous grave and slow, unnatural

as if to teach a comfy time like ours
so much in easy love with nature that
poetry is not a natural thing
and never was and never ought to be.

It is a hard thing, doubtful, brittle, mute,
so deep in struggle and self-consciousness
that after death it still has things to say.

All Souls Day 2004

=====

The twelve-times table
was the highest register we had
from a dozen to a gross
and the nameless stops between

laid out on the marbled notebook's back
a chart of all the land
we would never own, the altitudes
we would never reach.

How numbers kill.

How uncounted beauty
slips mornings over the prairie
while the ballot counters in Ohio
sentence more and more young men to die afar.

3 November 2004

AFTER THE ELECTION

We did this.

And it is not enough
to claim to have no
part of this 'we.'

Their money
is in my pocket too
and I still live here
where the killing begins

from bank to bunker
one clear line.
"My violences, my violences,"

sang Tennyson, now
they all are ours.
The American people
have voted for war.

3 November 2004

=====

Something better in this sunlight

than all my doubts. I take comfort
in my ignorance, having to trust
myself to do the one thing at a time
that needs to get done and I can do.

Talking to those who listen.

There is a weary will that makes men mute
and that I fuel myself to put heart back in.
We need joy, not happiness.

3 November 2004

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1.
Will this tell truth better
than the cloaca
of my last letter?

Work it out:
Ragnarok,
Fenway Fenris, oracles

spill from *things seen*,
votes tallied,
body counts.

There is no truth to tell.

2.
Measure
the vowel
to fit the mouth

men mew
like violins
and women change the subject.

We live
by attitude
and parse

insecurity
into theory.
O pay my rent

archons of cleverness,
I too bring a mouth
full of commodity

for which I am paid.
We seem to ride
forever in

Paolo's whirlwind
with no Francesca
at our side,

bewildered
without sentence
a turbine of imagery and lust.

3 November 2004

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Somebody's with us
in this fall
a murmur of small birds
somewhere near

follow the furrows in
a maple's bark and
maybe get there
where something waits

close enough sometimes
to breathe through my mouth.

3 November 2004

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The martyrdom, the men
who set the pyre burning,
the miracle workers who plied the crowd
healing dog distemper,

the pious nuns who watched a brother burn,
Field of the Flowers, Holy Rome,
and God knows what they were thinking
if they were thinking

and who knows what God was thinking,
his pearly fingernails overhead we read as sky
into which the smoke of all our love and learning
passes as it burns away,

a lean little man called Brown is burning
whose crime was to try to measure
thinking, the shadows of ideas,
the terrible shadow of God.

3 November 2004

DETECTIVE STORY

And does this too make sense,
dying Alpinist crouching on the sidewalk
scribbling in his blood the initials
of the one who killed him?

It's a beginning at least –
we know all things by alias alone.
Who knows the true name of the world?
The killer's initials are the same as his own.

3 November 2004

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Antipodes upon us,
we australate
with heavy breathing,

suck our bellies in
to be beautiful
and count the stars.

3 November 2004

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Language is metabolism, no?
A blasé rich kid
in a flaming car wreck.

A bird on a branch
gets lost from sight in other
branches though they're bare

in autumn but who's looking?

3 November 2004