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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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FROM HIGHBRIDGE

Everything meets its mirror
cycles come round the sky
fills with smoke

first

there was just a ship on fire, a tanker
between Governor's Island and the Brooklyn shore
black smoke as comes from oil, as I watched
the smoke mushroomed out quickly

and covered the outslip of the river,
hour later, after an endless dumb group reading
in a crowded bathroomless café
the smoke had darkened the sky halfway up Manhattan
like a seafog walking in

and the characteristic of it was this: green pine trees
along the street and in the front yard of two family houses
in shadow turned blue,

there still was a sun

in the sky and some trees had their natural color
if that is natural, the way we see them and notice nothing wrong.

After all the wordless poetry
I heard nothing, nothing spoken, just
audience response
as if they had heard something
and something made sense

at next intermission, no sun now,
and people began to worry about getting home,
or was that me, always
with that particular anxiety,

I seemed to know more about the sky
than anybody else.

Gerrit Lansing was there then
in a gold silk shirt and a necktie,
had become at last a Muslim, went to a brotherhood
that met in Glens Falls, he kissed me and read in my ear
from a text that talked about our Maker
and I spoke into his ear What do they say, your brothers,
when you tell them there is no maker?
He said the sheikh would urge on me
long study of the text, to go through all the discipline
as if. I understood then
that to take away the word
changed nothing. God or godless
the world is the same.

And I who believed in no maker but believe in grace
turned away from his kisses and sought the terrace
where the sky was darker still
it all was burning over the sweet day
and a truck crawled down the off ramp nearby
frightened of the darkness into which he moved.

1 January 2003

SO MANY THINGS HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO ME

1.

Salsify satisfies,

okra *aussi*.

But chard,

discard.

2.

Even a bugger

can choose her.

3.

Vegetables

command attention.

Eat me

or else.

Whereas

the things we crave

eat us and die.

1 January 2003

CATCH

caught and then
the spirit of the question
comes through,

the avid.

Verbs in [-ajt] are fierce
aggressive words

bite fight might write

scratching something into the smooth of things
scraping silence

original moisturizing lotion
non-irritating fragrance
free, the stops the stops

from silence all meaning spills,

meaning interrupts the world

1 January 2003

FROM THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD

an opera,
how can it be

try hard to be me
and I'll reciprocate

launder, lumber,

the prettiest girl in Dagestan
my right to think her so

all I can think of
when I remember her
is how they beat me in Moscow

how I am lucky to be alive.
Breathing is my glorious aria.

1 January 2003

PUER

As the midnight Russian church dome
brittle mosaic of soft gold your
astonishing you pudenda new fledged pale

who can answer so general a cry
as your body lets out
sometimes as you sleep

I speak for the words' sake
no need to reply
when a telegram arriving says We are at war

as if love had something to do
with all this tender hardware
mysteries of India rivers of tantric prose

around the thrill of something simple
lucid presence
a diamond blue-hearted clear in

the middle of everything that's not.

1 January 2003

INVENTIO CORDIS : *the finding of the heart*

To be quiet at my desk again
after so many years
it could be twenty
since I sat here, my elbows
on this wood, even though
it has been here all the while,

my behavior I mean
and what could you know of that
or knowing, what could it mean
that it moves me so profoundly
just to be myself again
where I am, where I used to be,

writing with a fountain pen
always being older than I had to be
because I love the feel of *things*
the flow or scrape or drag of letters
pulls their way through paper —
be afraid
only of making no mark

in the Magdalenian night
that comes again.
Every night a cavern
and we write by feel.
By belly blood those women

reached in, and from those ocher
fountains pulled out the heart,

drew it on the wall
by touch and smear
in darkness, in the form
of a hard-humped buffalo
charging at us forever
snorted and ran over the hill.

I January 2003

THE MASTER

“What a strange way to have lived!”
said the Irish swordsman
dying in a duel, only ten or eleven years old
but tall as a man, and wrote a book
about it, the sword,
and the sword went in, he died
in this duel, unprotected
by correct garments or a master,

unprotected by any words I told him.
Who set him to fighting?
There is a guilt in me
that wakes me from sleep
in the first night of the year, something
I have done to a girl and her book,
something I held back, something
I didn't tell. I sent her out
from me, without the protection
of preface or commentary.
Robyn Carliss maybe, someone
who doesn't love me.

What a strange shriveled limited
selfish reading of a strange dream

yet alas the interpretation
was part of the dream, or was a dream,
a twinned anxiety,

the boy at dawn dying
as I woke, snow
howling outside, woke
to my guilt, my reluctant
analysis, woke
with his words in my ears
still, gentle, unreproachful,
marveling at what happens.

2 January 2003

THE SCROLL

Could there be a book to tell these things
the breaks that come in dream
or breasts of dream
the life you get back
when you have given everything away

and who has done that, my critic,
my luscious contraband
my harlot smuggled home in a dream?

I have failed so many it seems
myself among them but I will recall
a few decencies to sway the Court
how to the underside of things that scratch furniture
I sometimes attached soft patches of green felt
how in little box on a bank counter in Donegal
I dropped a whole Irish pound for the Leprosy Fund
because of strange links between me and that malady
and how, am I grasping at straws now,
how I once went out of my way
not to laugh at sorcerers in front of your cathedral,
God, in Mexico a long time ago.
I think I deserve some remission
of temporal punishment, don't
your Honors think so too
sitting there so pretty on the polished bench
smelling of early morning and shampoo?

Of course after such a lifetime
teaching them not much more
than how to look at the world
through their own eyes and answer it,
after all that being clear about
being no clearer than they have to,
looking out loud and speaking
from vision, my vision of judgment
would take the form of three
girls as they are, clothed
with the morning and decent as sleep

as decent as sleep itself that pharmakon
can make us, your Honors,
I throw myself on the meaning of the Court,

explain me
at last
to myself

as I have all these years explained
you into your work.

There is no explanation.
There is the smell of your hair,
the faint aftertaste of my facetious humility,
humble as lightning, humble as the ocean,
I who would be a god of saying it,
to kneel before you
in the exquisite Viennese farce of my life,

a god in chalky coat
begging for mercy
a smile that says
I knew you better
than you know yourselves and
at least you know who I am.

2 January 2003

EROTIC

demons
come as dreams
about other things.
Only when the tall black book
with so tight a binding
is closed do you wake and know
it was a woman.

Or that goat with six horns
we saw up at La Chaux
was me in the sunshine of my Jewish adolescence
going at all the world's orifices
with my poor lonely mouth.

2 January 2003

LUCID DREAMING

they call the kind
when you think
you know you're
dreaming, can bend
the dream a little
story this way
to hurt or help or
just wake up.

Is waking different.

Lucid is conscious
intention. Or is it
only a dream of being
aware, a dream
of being in control.

Is it even a question.

I think I am awake
I think I can decide

can go downstairs
brew coffee put a shirt on
and something
will surely follow
something always
follows, there is never
a lack of consequence

Is this a statement
about love

here or there, now or later
upstairs or down
but how much of what happens
will be anybody's
decision to do or to be done

I can't even tell a lie
let alone the truth

choosing, I thought,
it is about choosing
no matter
what comes of it
something always comes

choosing is the leap of faith
the novena to the Virgin
Mother of the world

and we praise Her for that
deference that delay
in choosing "be it done
to me according to thy word"
she said, deciding
on her deciders
to decide

a virgin is someone who thinks she's free to choose.

And when I do wake
later today or tomorrow
or whatever they call it
then will I think
I wrote this in my sleep?

2 January 2003

ICON EIKΩN

One's own
face seen
a photo

drained
of what you feel
when looking so

caput mortuum
or *residue*
a black crow
leaping from the snow

crow beak
palaver
weird wire
that runs
through both of us

the voltage
the sky out there
the sky inside.

2 January 2003

THE WRECK OF THE PRESTIGE

But this, is it adequate,
your soul, your soul I reached in
and snatched out of your sweater

and I bring it home with me,
is it, do I have your soul
inside me now, soft inside the hardest

part of me, the remembering,
pressed against my skin
from the inside, always trying

to make her way back into the world
to you, throbbing
above the left breast where your ear

would hear my heartbeat if you pressed
yourself to my chest, do I?
And you, with your soul far away

walk along the winter beaches
where oil slicks grunge ashore
and sea birds thick with black dying

the laughing gannet the liberty gull
they hold only their shape
against what's happening

to all of us
but to them first,
the thickness of money

clutches them, us, they beat
their wings, no good,
against it, can't rise

from what we do to them
to us, the winter beaches
with the tortured birds

cormorants, sheldrakes, dear seagulls
as if the whole thing is ending now
the world we thought it was.

2 January 2003