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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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APRIL FOOL

He doesn't know what to say about it
that the lunch he set out to conquer
has retreated without panic before him
for thirty years or so, that he drives
every day to the diner and it's never there,
sets out to cross the Seine and does so,
arrives at the Café des Pompes, it's closed
or they've run out of cheese or a dog
has been hit by a car and yelps about its leg
and everybody pays attention to the dog,
he goes into the gaudy saloon behind Grand Central
and orders brisket of beef and they laugh at him
or yankee bean soup and the waitress
pours it out on the floor scornfully, reciting
as she does so a passage in Greek from *Medea*.
The Greens won't talk to him and the National
Liberation Front has him on its get-rid-of list,
what is the matter with this man all his life?
How can he get so snakebit? His pencils
have erasers at both ends. No lines in his palms.

1 April 2003

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION

he had with a sound
came from a hole in the rock
anybody could be living there
depending on size
the sound was big
it scared a yellow finch
came between him and the rock
a man looking into a hole and listening
once a field all round
has snow on it
it needs the sun
what does a sound need

he knew nothing
he was only playing
with what goes on all the time
to notice it
makes it stop
it makes a noise it makes a noise
he goes home with the sound in his ears
later he makes a rule
about it
a rule called remember
it's a way of bringing
the world down to what happens in his head.

1 April 2003

CHAIN

My chains glitter in sunlight
then it's overcast suddenly my chains
are cold, if there are enough chains
people can hardly see my naked body
shivering inside my chains. They are amazed
by my vigor my virtue my difficulty
and all my laws.

Bring out
your chains and loop them on,
we're in a time that takes comfort from the hard.

1 April 2003

LE CAREME DES POETES

Deny myself the girls I love
take all these common nouns away
I babble in my ordinary trance
and who is left to tell me what I mean?
And what will you do
with all your hearing?
Break silence into little bits and spit them out.

1 April 2003

VISAGE DE CAREME

But how did I come to guess
that words are girls?

Was it the bare vowels alone
led me to their chaste chateau

where they keep their grail
and every other transposition

and I'm the only rogue in sight
but they let me spend the night?

1 April 2003

TESTAMENT

It is a time of summing up,
a fat candle burning on the grass
with a shake of April snow around it
by a garden Buddha halfway up the hill.

I spend my life
trying to live up to such opulence.

1 April 2003

WRITING SILVER

Even if it's not the quantity required
it is the other thing
you can't name without snickering,

the thing that lives in the mirror
or thinks it does, you are
after all a New Yorker, you became

where other people came, you own
the right to be afraid all by yourself
on the immense, almost infinite, avenues

running from South Ferry to the North Pole
right through Washington Square
and it all inherited you too,

it has a right to your anxieties, your palaces
of fantasy, the sauntering pleasantries
of your sexual despairs, your girl friends,

their boy friends, the Zanzibar
you made of the land beyond the subway,
snakes, wolves and Yankees,

the weird religion where you live now.

2 April 2003

METRO

1.

Paris subway
insistent yellow
mantra ticket
learn under
the mycelia
corridors under
Chatelet a vast
Chinese character
scribbled
under the ground
follow every curve
till the word
is written in you
and you're there
a train already
is leaving you behind.

2.

Jeff Scher's
Grand Central
explains a little
what places do

to you
to those who
hurry through,

place makes
character
the earth
controls

our speed
is our only way
of understanding

that's why jogging
is such a sin
they pay for,
to maintain
the same speed
no matter what
the earth is saying

just there
where only this
once in your
whole life
ever will speak.

2 April 2003

THE MIND AS A STORY

trying to tell itself,
can I go there again
leaving my resolutions
neatly under the yew tree
and go see what happens
where things come up
by themselves
and marry me again?
Can I be my own theory?
Answering the lyrical
occasion (west)
the sun rose,
had to, no choice,
boiled up out of the sea
the same sea
huddles against us
snow on the ground
only me only here
after the confession
fingering the horn bead
rosary of my derelictions
stagger out of the chancel
forever and face
the terrible Law:
you can do anything
always and ever
you choose,
you can't live in

a world you didn't make,
you live in a family
a punishment,
that people do
trim rosebushes
and you belong to words,
even the cheapest
of them, forget them,
copy them out
a hundred years
and call it your life
then go back
to the mind,
can you bear
to admit it
that it all
is pleasure,
a camel
you love to ride,
a magic carpet
lush beneath
your meditating haunches?
Admit it. Love it.
Put the words in.

2 April 2003

MATERIAL GIVEN IN DREAM, 2/3 APRIL 2003

Writing is what we do to deserve the book.

The book is given.

Kitab.

And we work hard, writing words down
and when we're fortunate,
what we have written partakes of the book.

It is not clear what relationship exists between motivation, skill, or industry on the one hand, and the arrival of the presence of the book, on the other. That presence is unpredictable, yet unmistakable. Some think of it as the Christians think of *grace*.

2.

A dream is always between one day and the next, so why do we date dreams, and try to fit them in our calendar, saying In the night between April 2nd and April 3rd, why do we think it important to do so? Dreams live in their own times. That's what they tell us by coming between the days,

in the null space. Or null to our calendar, rife to theirs. If we had a calendar of Dream Time, then we'd begin to understand.

We do what we can with April, but what is the real month, the moon's own history, that happens between our days? We go to the alternative calendars, Hebrew, Mayan, Muslim, French Revolutionary ... they seem to us more arbitrary, voulu, dreamed up — hence closer to dream. Germinal is closer than April is to the dream from which the earth grows

3 April 2003

WOODPECKERS

(red
bellied's red
head, red
collared
downy)
and one
gold finch
cover me
my garden
with yellow
and every
green come
live with me.

3 April 2003

LOVE SONG

but this is not
what I want to think
this is old as sunrise
this is Genesis stuff
and I want the chase
the absolute Apocalypse—
you without circumstance
nakedly yourself.

3 April 2003

Of course it midnights often
and things do. Of course the empty taxi
rolls by, not even a driver,
not even a light. Things
have taken over the city,
the world belongs to those who are most like it,
metal and stone and water,
who are matter and don't care.
The cobblestones on touristic streets
float off to the sky magnetized by moon,
the road has developed a curious
vocabulary, it speaks every language.
I hear everything, I understand nothing,
the President is coming to town and the wind is dead.

3 April 2003

That's not what I mean either —
what is left to mean
when I don't mean you?

3 April 2003

THE PACIFIST

...Kaurismäki...asked Donald Rumsfeld, in the interests of tranquillity, to go into the woods with him and gather mushrooms. It is an image that, once conjured up, is strangely hard to dispel: the filmmaker and the Secretary of Defense, hand in hand, each with a little basket, shyly picking their way among the fungi.

—Anthony Lane in *The New Yorker*, 4/7/03

Maybe the image
means another
less tender
interview, northern
Europeans notoriously
amused by Americans'
fear of mushrooms,
we are the people
afraid of the woods,
so the apparently lyrical offer
may speak gentle contempt
not unmitigated by a sly
offer to teach us a thing or two,
and given some of the reasons
people go off alone
into the forest
early on an autumn morning
there might be a hint of a duel
here too, don't you think,
a master of natural process
challenges an urban gunman
to a game of quiet chicken,

let's just nibble mushrooms in the woods,
just you and me, you who can't tell
mushrooms from toadstools.

I can see him smiling at us
offering something
black in his left hand, cherry
red in his right.

4 April 2003

BATTLE PIECE

List keener lost cunning
but they stood there
took whatever the sea
threw in their faces

how bad can it be
if it all comes again
a wave of murder
not so different from a field of sunflowers

broken by the mistral,
the pain stops when you die
starts when you're born
a little while in between

you walk among flowers.

4 April 2003

BLAME

But I am different people mean this
I am whatever it says it's not me
blame it on the dictionary
all those women who crouched around the fire
making things up then the words to say them

I only do what I'm told listening
like the famous white dog of Schenectady
to his sovereign's voice how snug
they fit into the dark they fit like flames
their shadows at morning turn into trees.

4 April 2003