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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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THE CRISIS

Things keep imagining themselves
the thunder the ear of corn
August over the hill
the rain right now

the candlelight.
Another day it would be daylight now
but night holds on
hungry the thunder will not sleep.

Ruby peacock
walks up and down my head
along a path even shadier
than this dark lawn

ruby peacock busy keeping still
but when he shouts
what will happen
and all the world hears?

And they do shout
even dawn has to come
drenched with thunder
cuckolded by candlelight.

A native ornithology
a shaman in the trees
at this blue moment
mocking me, says

my blood is ink, says
my hand likes far away
that distant skin is best
says I'm selfish

selfish as any man
and full of lies.
I hear him in the trees
acoustics of the night

how accurate this valley is
the beautiful ever-flowing water
Muhicannituck
tide in and river out

I have become one of them
shaped by where I live
the water outside me floods in
where we keep our stars.

21 July 2003

It's where we live, and depending on our closeness to, our affine relations with, the place we live, that determine *how* the stars affect us. Stars are everywhere, but can only come to earth by means of earth's own various virtues. These virtues are the forces by which we are disposed to stellar influence. Else the stars the same for everybody. So people born at sea have all the stars but no inscription made of them in themselves. It is place that inscribes us. Buddha Eye, the local absolute.

SILVER

Silver sum
of all our rain
burning gold
the sun recurs

the crew is busy
clearing fallen trees
I wonder can I sleep
now in this brightness

kept awake as I was
all night by the wild dark?

22 July 2003

XENOLITH

Get a big boulder
set it on the lawn
get a mallet get a chisel
hit it till I carve a throne.

22 July 2003

Salisbury

THEOLOGIES

Not defiled but different.

An outcome with no story
a girl asleep in the snow

How do we bring ourselves
to such weather? listening
to what the hill says
behind us,

the natives in their trances
under the hedge

foxes reciting their prayers
in front of us
triangulate their apostrophes
and find God
the called-upon
the target of their speculations
the Intersection
where all prayers meet

their prophecies,
crows, doves, coyotes
the one

universal object
the imaginary subject

keep listening
only the math is wrong
always
but the numbers are right.

23 July 2003

PHOTOGRAPHY & WRITING

Photography has no pronouns.

This is its immense liberty.

To say

without being someone

a story

without whom.

And when they write about it

the object is called the 'subject'

a personless face

on its way to form

on its way to thing

piece of paper, gel,

array of pixels.

A love story

with nobody home.

Whereas writing (much more than oral performance, oral poetry) sets the pronouns dancing, each grasping at nouns and letting them go, each desperate for referent, for a plausible 'antecedent' as schoolteachers say, some thing, some thingliness to ground its algebra.

In oral poetry, there is always someone there, preempting the pronouns, always a mouth open and reciting, privileging the speaker as radical presence, the real “I” to which all other pronouns (all other beings, modes of being) are phantoms. Phantoms that take their bearings from this I.

Whereas in writing, only you have anything like that privilege. You can close the book whenever you choose, without damage. Whereas you are many and everywhere and all. No picture could be taken of “you” that would silence all the “me”s of the world.

24 July 2003

PRAYER

To be knocked down
after a storm
like Charlie Chaplin
or be a red stone
passed from hand to hand
among Freemasons
but why
or a ladder
carted away from a window or
a cup of silver filigree
sets the wine free.

24 July 2003

THE NEWS

Every day there is a new republic
or a coup in an old one
old King Death not so easily unseated
corpses of rebels and onlookers piled in the street.

24 July 2003

BIRCH GROVE

we live
by altitude
Bernal Heights
take off your clothes
writing postcards
on what's left of you
some day
I'll come back
waiting is so naked.

24 July 2003

HOMAGE TO APOLLINAIRE

I want to read this article about Kazakhstan
in a rain-soaked magazine I left on the deck
on deck when I sailed off
inside or to the opera
I don't want to think about anything that's mine.

24 July 2003

Butterfly

hovering at the edge of shadow
edge of rain

the garden is well
watered by the clouds
the grass is all grown

now what can I do?

24 July 2003

MAURIAC

what a moral eye he had
a piercing understanding
of how wrong the right was

and how deep inside the right
the good was hidden

they used the insights of the prophets
to bind their wills
and break the spirits of the young

and still a century beyond their rule
we think that pleasure's suspect
and body's dangerous

25 July 2003

HYMN OF THE NATIONS

The English used to drink green tea with milk,
a fact, and where was I when that was going on,
hidden in the condensation like a house elf
or one of those puckish Slavic sprites
who pinch girls' cheeks while they wait for buses
on empty country lanes never far from wolves
and now the idea seems so gross, milk is so unZen,
so lower-class, unappealing, Kool-Aid at the Ritz,
why bother, what happened, why is it all different
now? And who put all the commas in my coffee,
sugar everywhere, is it in my Pero yet?
Did I put it there and then forget, like any
colonial Englishman? "The clouds of Kazakhstan
cast shadows on the Kremlin." Old Russian
saying. The girls giggle and pinch right back.

25 July 2003

IBN RUSHD

Reading what's left of an article on Averroes
after the rain stuck most of the pages together
I think back to the café on the corner of the rue
des Saints-Pères by the medical school,
the portrait medallions of great physicians
carved up on the wall, craning my neck
to stare up at Averroes over my coffee,
that Arabian drink on such a narrow street,
strange to put old conjectural faces of dead men
all over any moderately new wall, especially
a building aimed to heal the living
via these busy students trotting along below
shlepping thick textbooks, who knows
what these people really want from life,
their own or the lives of those they touch.
Who knows what's in the books they carry,
it changes every fifty years or so, someday soon
we'll discover blood doesn't really move
in the arteries, something else flashes through
our long-suffering meat, bring back leeches,
the eye is a brittle fragment fallen from the moon.

25 July 2003

THE FATE MACHINE

Whip canisters
align her thinking,
ship.

Gannets'
strange human chuckle.
Whip surge
strum foam
a far strand
choosing.

Seeds
come with surf
for story landing.

Places are blue
together
naked landing
naturally sit
bare wood step
three from the top
heather discourse
as if a stranger.

Keep waiting
as by machine
the fate device.
Gaze into eye slot

soft twinkling blue
lights of the interior.

Diodes emit destiny.

26 July 2003

TELLING THE FUTURE

1.

Always some waiting left to do
some weft to parse
through its pilgrimages
before you can be sure.

For things have hands too
and hands have palms
and all the palms have lines
all you need to do is follow.

2.

But you can't even be you yet
so how can this major world religion
tattoo your soft ankle with the five
petalled generic form of that *difference*
it is so easy to call love?

And who really lives in that house?
Ask the neighbors
ask what they smell and hear from across the lawn
the smooth-cut grass that holds so many secrets.

3.

Where it comes from, runs and goes—
then read the pattern of its pilgrimage
through the matter world of other people's
fixing, then call it an instinct, a drive,
a deity, a cause.

4.

We always try to read the last chapter first —
then we get married and hope the book itself
leads to the conclusion we interpreted,
this simple act.

Then we watch
crows feeding up there
deep in an evidently empty sky.

26 July 2003

“and had no other teacher
but my father”
and needed none

C.P.E.B., *Autobiographie*