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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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CALICOON

Knowing something or waiting for something
is an old steam locomotive hauling
easily half a dozen summer open railway coaches

floor to ceiling window wide open black iron bars
to keep even the drunkest man from falling out

the kind the old O&W used to carry us
Decoration Day to Labor Day
up the route that found the furthest north
along the Delaware and the DL&W did too

down the broad as a ball field unpaved single street
the train came rolling and sat a while steaming
packing freight and letting people down

I stood on the steps and gazed at the wide town
the train I speak of runs right through the mind
as if it too were a permanent part of the brain.

29 November 2003

BREAKFAST IN VIENNA

It is time to know the no again
and touch her in the slim
reconnaissance of captive sky
huge over the free-wheeling atmosphere

you thought of parliaments café
where Gitler sat despising cigarettes
it made me smoke a little from her lips

woodpecker breakfasts on the tree
a fatal sip and winter ring
and operas with their squirrel tails

so much to do and so much shame
to wrap around my shoulders
parts of the body that bend to school
crouching we listen to god below the hedge

thick worm the color of baked earth
uneasy after rain drives him up and out
from the burrow he made with such effort
under our communicating earth
and here he lies frail among our storms

seeing anything clearly sounds like prayer
and you I hold inside my something self

if I speak a word the word contains you
and constrains me to make manifest
the trash of my everlasting feelings
near the canal, almost December.

30 November 2003

LONG DISTANCE

You think you've got the number of the sun?
Call her up and see who answers.

You'll hear my voice, she sometimes
lets me stay the night. And you,
of course I miss you.

What do I miss?
Your body of course.
I'm a man and your body is the door.
Because women are taught from infancy
to keep their bodies locked against the stranger
and all men are strange, all men
must come through that door

or never will they be inside your time
with you and within you are the same.

Otherwise he would be living
only in the shadow of her house,
dumb peon asleep against the wall.

Now you understand
or at least you hear,
there is a doorway into time
and you are it.

That's why I miss
you in your body, not the namable

parts of it but the whole doorway,
the linger on the threshold, the quiet folds.

Pli selon pli said Mallarmé

thinking of you. I don't really know
what he meant but the words say Fold
by fold or something like that.

But I know that he was or they were thinking.

And I told you once before I bring
everything I know to you.

So hang up and love me.

30 November 2003

AFTER ALL THE ORACLES HAVE SLEPT

Now know the other, the serene.
Means evening. When the copper bowl
is dry and laid away till morning

when you'll unwrap the old towel
and light comes out of it.

So much
work you have to do, chafing
every leaf to make it speak,

breathing on every shadow
to bring its body back and stand
listless as a daughter before breakfast
until the machinery kicks in
and the morning as in birds begins.

What do you really care about the leaf,
the house's old vocabulary,
oil burner switching on and off as if,
I don't know, as if a different planet
brought its weather all too close,
sneaks beneath your feet while you work
and that's still the only way to travel to the stars,
pink as Beatrice's backside, a thought to heaven

and a pick-axe down here to break old roads
so that the living can inherit space
every single morning just the same

or almost so, so only the subtlest
of them dare to catch the difference
between this place and what it really is,

but by then the stars have left
it's too late in the light
you don't have to worry about the meanings
you have pockets to hide all of them
and time again to take them out
and love them one by one.

30 November 2003

END OF NOVEMBER

Finally tonight I see Orion
lying through my linden tree

a winter later
and it is now at last.

30 November 2003

