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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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A TRANSLATION FROM THE LIBERTINE

across the room I could feel
the actual heft of her
the contact he made with her
when he slapped her
shook its way through the earth
and up my legs to find me

o god o god we are temples for each other
and in the deepest holy of holies inside
we live in each other
in a body that only thought can find

though we try every other body that we know.

26 November 2002

I STAYED TOO LONG

I stayed too long at the bar
dawn had happened already
and even the leaves had left the lawn

the principle of the thing
seemed to involve dancing
the long walk home from the subway

the occasional little brown bat
channeling towards my face
but missing, always missing

and some animal in a doorway
meaning no harm
I wanted to pet it but held back

don't excite expectations
especially in streets empty as these
everyone has gone to dreamland now

and stands on a bewildered beach
breaking sapphires off the tree of the sky
and crying for their mothers

dead city and when I call you dead
I don't mean anything bad or final
just the ropes have broken and the sails

flap free and there is no boat
no birds no trees no crystals
everybody asleep and I miss you

you'll never know how much I'm yours.

26 November 2002

QUALITAS

Find the nature of the animal you mean
you miss some quality Aristotle didn't mention
busy as he was with everything, this small
immensely precious quality eluded him perhaps
since it was waiting for you to manifest it
and me to find it in you. But who are you?

The question recurs like Oklahoma tornados.
When I think *This is you* I can't think anything else
I can hardly breathe or figure out the waiter's tip
everything is up in the air, any single thing might
turn out to be everything after all. You could be
the real you. The quality might be ready to show through.

What I know of its moment: something
is spoken. Then nothing is ever the same again.
Something is touched. Someone touches you
where you have never been touched. Maybe that
—rather than sculpture and feats of engineering—
is why we have hands. Maybe not.

Once the ritual gets started it goes on forever.
This quality turns into quantity. I am a new man
just thinking about it. “Animal” means
you move around wherever you can make your body go
and I can catch you there just following the words
because I am the same sort of chemical myself.

26 November 2002

AS THINGS CHOOSE US

Find out anything where anyone is
as a rifle finds a shoulder first
and then the enemy animal
you think you have to kill

a square of sunlight on the forest floor

sequences of scarce voluntary decisions
like choosing a book to read
in a country library in summer
a book somehow steeped in the place
the smell of ocean in the paper
a book you think is waiting for you
how does it find its way into your hand
and later you read it, in the old Adirondack
chair careful of splinters, in sight of the sea
but you're not looking at the sea
just the soft pages of this fated book
the voluble old woman who rents a strange house
and someone is murdered it seems on the back stairs

down which the kind of Turkey carpet called
a drugget is laid and you think about that
just as midnight after midnight you remember
a pale square of sunlight on the forest floor

nobody home nobody gone
the book is old but the story holds your interest
it's not your story but you're reading it
the person who wrote it is dead
the persons described in the story were never alive
but the pages are still soft in your fingers
almost as if the words were on their way
to being sand or talc or something that blows away
or the pages if you riffle a few of them
feel like pieces of white bread your mother unwrapped

about this time of day when the sun
would define a patch of light on the forest floor.

Do you think you'll solve the crime
before you get to the end? Sometimes you fall asleep
still reading and dream the story forward
then have to backpedal awkwardly when you wake up
book in your hand and the wind blowing,
do you think you'll finish the book before you have to leave?
Do you think you'll get it back to the library
before you take the last ferry
or just leave it in the cottage all winter
with the sun occasionally coming in the window
and embracing the book as it lies on the table
resting in its own little pool of light?

27 November 2002

THE PROBLEM

Everybody knows everything
except that he knows it she knows it.
What is known is only there for them.
Apart from objects of knowledge there are no objects.

I too was on a train, I too met a woman,
we made love right away, it was strange
in the dark of a tunnel, and only once
ever again, years later, and it was no good.
It was better when we were nobody to each other,
consciousness only of the dark. Everybody
comes back, all roads wind inward
ever-closing circles, knots, clover-leafs,
Armageddon when we meet again.

For example you can't lose me.
Only I can lose myself. Struggle
with a handful of coins on a trolley car
it could be Vienna, a drunk is sleeping,
it is usually November. Someday
I'll find out where I came from,
why I'm not anybody important, why
I don't like dogs and butter and guitars.

28 November 2002

THE BLUNDER

Every now and then I'm dumb enough
to lace a Greek word through my weaving
himeros it might be or last night
what the gods have in their hearts
while men are dying. I believe
the original language of humanity
can be recovered by touch, by dreams,
by signs left in the sky by birds,
ice cracks on a rock face, the crawl
of turtles up from the sea, legends
of our footsteps, weeds straggling
just under the water in a stream.
And Greeks. Greek has a little
of it left, in the multinational
Afro-Celto-Scythian Hebrew blend
of those weird islands something lasted
that tastes like the real thing. Tastes
sometimes like the smell of your hair,
honey, or the sound of an apple
falling from the shabby tree in lank grass.
Everything is ripe. Ripe and new at once:
that quality, this dry old word
juicy as a new lover. Do you know
what I'm saying? Do you know how hard
I try to find the world in you and find

a place for you in my world at once,
how hard I'm trying to be me, to give you
what I really am and where I come from,
a truth the body has to keep blurting out.
Some day all the new words will be ripe
ready to burst out of somebody's lips,
wipe you brow and say it, you're right,
nobody knows what it means, it's too new
to mean anything, we have to live
our way to it, through it, on.
I touch your shoulder as you leave the room,
it leaves a mark on my hand forever after.
This mark is called my skin.

28 November 2002

Reading record reviews

I hear nothing. Looking
out the windows I feel no wind.

29 November 2002

Boston

It is morning, I can't see the dark.

The glass is empty but my mouth is full.

29 November 2002, Boston

Someone laughing looks so alone.
I feel so sad even as I share the joke,
how much I love her, her wit,
her heart. But how alone
we all are inside. It overwhelms me,
the huge hollow inside a feeling.
What is it I feel? What is feeling?

29 November 2002

Boston

THE OTHER PART OF THE OTHER PART

Another church begins right now,
Saint James's mystery, the true Jerusalem
lost in the west. Leave the old city
to the Muslims and the Christians and the Jews.
That was only Salem, only a hill
and a field. We go where the true is,
the church that rhymes with everything.

29 November 2002

Boston

A BROWN BEARD

A Bruno board. To sanctify the man
and relapse history. Listen to the Vatican's
classical Confiteor, sung
beneath the big basilica of sky
like a Unitarian translating Homer
war is a necessity, though sad.
I want more from poetry than that.

I want the unkillling temperature to begin,
a deck of cards with no knives,
a recognition of Palestinian rights
phrased this way:

reality

is not reversible. What is the case
is where you have to start,
not how you wish it were
but how it is. They are here,
the land beneath their feet is theirs.

What is, is the only citizen.

And then it was I thought to run
by fingers through my beard

and found my old brown beard
was back again, tough and bushy
and mine and young, browner
than ever, Marx on Russell Street.

And then the Pope said: We were wrong.
History has some meaning. Bruno
died for something. We have an obligation
not to kill. This is our new martyrdom:
to endure the world the way it is
while we find decent ways to change it.
We are knifeless now, and have a wife.

He spoke, and there was song in heaven
for half an hour, and Bruno answered
from the eternal paragraph
the world has been composing all these years

and finally you understand,
we scouts, you sent us
into the fire to find the way
and here we are
 deep in syntax
where the gay girls are
and all our musing angels speak
who are the thoughts of other people

wake from the brightness in their sleep
to the shadows round them

the Lord gave me a dark bedroom and I slept.
And from the scribbles of the smoke that slew me
I made out words, and these
I breathed in turn into your sleep.

And so it comes you dream of me.
And how it is contrived that a dream
of a brown beard suddenly grown full
could be in fact a proof of the
restoration of the Universal Church
in every color and the rights of man,
apocatastasis and all comes right again.

I woke because the beard was so big so young
whereas in specious waking life it would
be grey or white. Now fully awake
I understood the moral fact at last,
which is the same as human chemistry:
the only way to change the situation
is to take it as irreversible, change
can happen only forward.
You can't pretend people aren't here
because you wish they hadn't come.
Everyone is where they belong.

This is now. It is what it is. Now what.
You can't start anywhere unless you
leave from where you are. Amen.

Morality is the only politics that works.
Silence I insisted was most beautiful
but he: in certain music you can hear
an order inside the tumult of things,

a hint behind the havoc, maybe, Bach
on the keyboard understanding something.

In every insult blind authority
imposes on intelligence and art
we have to find the Bruno angle

the geometry of historical inference
that shows us where to turn next
how to coax ourselves towards justice

as if it were a place we could travel to
and come there blameless, almost kind.

30 November 2002

Boston