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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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WANT YOU

I'm not allowed any more to say how much I want you.

— Who doesn't allow you, and how much do you want me?

I don't allow myself, so I can't answer the rest of your question.

— Well, tell me this: what do you mean by wanting me.

I can't tell you.

—Is it something you want to have? Or do to me? Or want me to do? Or be?

All of these.

— What? Have what, do what, or me do what?

I'm not allowed to say.

— Can I guess?

If you knew how to guess right, all of this would not have come up. We'd just be doing it.

— What?

Can't you guess? I'm not allowed to say.

— What makes it come up now?

You walk into the room, like a nude dancer on the stage.

— But I'm fully dressed, and very modest in my demeanor.

I didn't say you were naked or a dancer. That's just how you come into the room. Even on the phone. It's terrible.

— Am I terrible?

You know what I mean. I can't stand it, can't bear it, can't report it, can't discuss it, can't resist it, can't control it. Birds around the full feeder, that's me. And no cat.

10 December 2002

As if it were going to speak
and then listening to something else began
and it wasn't sure. But on the other side
it had to begin mounting again

present and past like different mountains

and no central mountain
since not among things centers are found
and more of them than one means less than one
doesn't it seem so to you, God, you stranger?

11 December 2002

GIVE AND TAKE BACK

Do the lost poems
go back to the Muses

do they recycle,
come to us again

mind treasures
snatched from the air?

What someone wrote
once into earth's

patterning atmosphere
earth always remembers?

Not just Sappho. All
the lost poems

speak from our new
mouths now.

It may be that every poem
is a translation of an imaginary original.

11 December 2002

THINGS DON'T THINK

Writing into your hands comes how?
From mine to yours, but how to mine
in some place we call the first?
Call portions south, the sun
is waiting for us too, so the adolescent
gulls over No Man's Land
that island off Gayhead that the Navy bombs
show clear in morning light
in borrowed binoculars.

Nothing in what has been just said or read
stands in the way of someone desiring sexual contact
with someone else usually specified mentally beforehand.
It is not as if the gulls care especially
or the sea has attitudes about what it sprawls between.

Things don't think. They taught us that
in high school, as if it were one more date
we had to remember, when Columbus got the pox
or Niobe cried. Osiris died. The strange thing
is that though we've never met until this
minute — and not even now — we sat
next to each other in high school day after day
and I admired often the curve of your hip
(which I could do silently as window light)
or the way the tattoo of a Renaissance archway
half vanished up the sleeve of your tee shirt
whenever you reached down to touch your lap.

They don't think but they do chatter. That's why
so many of us slip out early in the morning
to climb into one-seater dories and row away
into the absence of commentary, the heavy
borrowed binoculars bouncing on their bellies
as they bend forward to set into each stroke,
how far we have to go, every boat
with its person, and so cast upon the sea that
no boat is in sight of another, get the picture,
we're all alone, all boats out of eyeshot
scattered all over the sea, how many
boats could be on the way to Portugal
at once if we used the whole sea?
Or how big would the ocean have to be
before we all got home? (Assuming always
we have somewhere to go back there
where we think we came from, and people like us
are waiting for us in stone bungalows
with tasty cod stew steaming in colorful plates
saying relax, that funny way they start sentences
with the main verb, relax, eat, it's over,
it's time for this parenthesis to close.)

11 December 2002

CORE CURRICULUM

Given avid readers:

each reads different books.

No two read the same.

Maroon them on an island.

They share only one assumption:

I don't know what you know.

How precious each one

must be to all the others.

The life of the other

becomes the life of the mind.

Every other. Pantagnosis.

The sum of knowledge

depends on keeping everyone

alive. Coaxing everyone to speak,

communicate, disclose.

Communicate is from a Latin

compound verb meaning

exchange gifts with one another.

Do this. You are the core.

12 December 2002

THE MIXTURE AS BEFORE

How to know the beginning.
Before the explanation arrived.
Rapture used to mean something else.
Tell me the story of the story,
we've been on Tehuantepec too long,
we need a different vista,
some old fashioned thing that happens only once
would be new enough for this
application, like a brittle alexandrine,
cracks in the middle and leaves a taste
on the tongue like candied violets
or the square pastilles you used to buy
when you were drunk, pale purple
as if the color of anything ever changed
whatever it was you were worried about.
So many things. You yourself
were a children once it said, back
when I still knew how to make mistakes,
over the Queensboro Bridge a better Dante
cycles onto that mysterious fish island
crowded with people who forgot to come
home from the beach and stayed and spoke
tricky Euro patois, what's the plural of that,
what will he find, peril on every bridge
there is a girl looking down at the river
or other body of subjacent water
and every girl is dressed in white and crimson
while every opportunity to see her
is freighted with responsibility, *read her and write,*

fall in love, utter blue odes, read Socrates,
eat at irregular hours, bore your intimates,
sometimes it's better to skip the whole thing
and take the miasmal subways instead.
But love is skulking in those tunnels too
they tell me, and it is written somewhere
that if all the passengers look up from
Newsday at the same moment the world will end.

12 December 2002

ON DEPOSIT

Old age must be fun—
all the adjectives you never used
wait for deployment
now when your heart needs more color
they crowd around you
like evacuees crammed into a railway station
all the different ones side by side
so close you can smell the difference
between sensual and sensuous at last
or see how sure is a little sketchier than certain
and over there in a corner bristling like a Corsican
rebarbative crouches, daring you to say him out loud.

12 December 2002

Red bellied woodpecker
on my tree.
Things have no shame.

12 December 2002

Blue jay on snow bank.

We give so much

just by being as we are.

12 December 2002

BEAUTY

Mist in trees

I saw

without my glasses

at first light

slept some more

and woke thinking

trees in mist.

Now at eight

o'clock just trees.

13 December 2002

JESUS

All night I kept wondering about this:
if you wanted to talk about Jesus
but couldn't use his name or even
refer to him as a person, what
object would you choose to say him?
I thought in my sleep a *mixing bowl*
and began to itemize its properties
when sleep gainsaid my argument.
I wake still wanting to know.
And you? Do you care if Jesus
is a *bi-colored rose* or a *telephone*
or *the decimal point* or *your*
hand in my pocket? Is there also
a list of all the things that he is not,
a book that does not mention him at all?

13 December 2002

Blue jays and crows. Titmice. Doves.
A solitary wren. Chickadees. Juncos.
Sparrows. These are names, the names
are at my window now, eating seed.
Cardinals, red-bellied woodpecker,
all these. So why am I thinking?
And about the flock of bluebirds
you saw yesterday. Colors.
Color is the only answer.

13 December 2002

EVERYTHING READY TO RESIST

So set before me
that it stumbled
down the light and held on
like a drunk
clutching the banister

that sort of tree
maple in summer
I guess now
a black scar
against the snow

I feel the rough of it
bark wet
a nuthatch hits it
climbs down

a crow coughs.

13 December 2002

SAPPHO, 168B

Dead decay men a cell on a
quay, plea a day's measured
nook. Despair. Rather cut aura
or go to moan a cathedral.

13 December 2002

DATING

Waiting for your younger sister I wonder
how many animals live on the moon.
You have none? I will grudgingly make do
with reality, star on my forehead, gooseberry
jam on your silver spoon, pale road uphill
a little blue truck puffs along the slope
log cabin on the crest stuffed with fireworks.
Something asleep on a tree stump. There.
This is how you spell Sun. Moon is shorter
but with harder letters. Wigwams and ash.
So is it all right if I just wait for you
to get younger, but sometimes call you
by the other's name, the one you claim
does not exist. at least not in your family?
I try to tell the truth most of the time.

14 December 2002

EXAGGERATE THE OBVIOUS

That's my business,
a land sell officer
in a town at plague.

I get words wrong —
that's my job too,
the dust on them
sneezes other noses.

I think I'm safe,
write better than I read,
read better than I eat,
sleep seven colors
plus naps in Portuguese.
The basement
dug out of music.
I want to find a woman
to wake with me.

The important words to get wrong are the verbs,
action words they call them now, can't think
what action means, one more dead white noun
lying beside the moneychanger's stall in the bazaar.

Three a's, one z. As I was saying, verbs.

When I was eight I wrote a biography of Napoleon
then a long one of Mohammed,

the alarm clock put me to sleep every morning
so I had time in all her plenty
who ravished me speechless with her blue hours.
Even before that, I gave birth to my mother.

Why Mohammed? On him be the Peace, a stretch
of desert happened to my head. Red rock
east of breakfast, I couldn't get the swords
out of my mind, those crescent slivers of steel
I understood were cousins to the diamond,
something about crystals, the sky blue glint
of infinity on my mother's left hand.

The word knuckle. The word gum, when applied
to a sticky amber exudates of peach trees
the one in our backyard. Dinorah wanders
crazed alone in mountains, accompanied only
by her goat. It is an opera, the legends
haunt us, drive us into music, that hysteria.
The word work. The word chair. The word
scrupulous. Sometimes we would walk around
the ant's house, or visit the silver walls
where fish received their guests, the word
Aquarium, the word Battery, the word ferry.
The green quiet thing they told me was the sea.

Dear Christ those were the days when the blue
plaster statue of your mother held down a napkin
on the night table, my little altar, that's all I knew,
there has to be an altar, the principle of worship,
the word crucifixion, the word wax. Her smile

was painted on — emotions are not permanent —
simpering a little but forgiving even me
for thinking what I thought. She knew, she always
knows. Where did you hide your secrets
between her wisdom and your father's wood?
I kept mine hidden in the words. Under her toes
the snake was wriggling free, why doesn't she
press down with her heel instead? Or is she
his mother too? Once you start to worship
nothing will ever be safe again from your praise.

Everybody can wake up a god in your house
till the verb changes right in your hands
and carries the wind back to the sea.

14 December 2002

Its laws govern, for example, how corporations carry out acquisitions, what farmers can call their cheeses, when hunters can shoot small birds, how many hours a week people can work, and who is a dentist. - *NYT*, 14 XII 02