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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE TO THE TURKS

Imagine then an ordinary sentence.
Mixing numbers.
Eight parts of speech distribute
Sensibly over ten digits
— this is the root of your art.

Like a man strolling on the moon
and looking at the Earth and saying
This we will call the morning
but it will not last

the sheep will escape up the hill
and ravens fatten on the fallen

mixing numbers
the Logothete bent over his subtle documents
(silver ink on purple skins)
Turkish and Genoese and left
unanswered till this very day
my *Letters from the Unknown Interior of the Earth*
I am just about to write.

Alas alas or just as well,
because I didn't write them timely
the City fell, the Ottomans swarmed in,

the secret weapon of the dark
fumbled by its enemies
still skilful enough to take our city

and here I am five hundred years late getting born
and even so waiting three thousand weeks to begin my work

and the whole thing I have to write down
is only a few pages, days, orgasms, lies, lives,
only a few more names for me
to recite into my pillow as I fall asleep.

Things that can count
are wonderful and rare
things that can be counted
are wonderful too if less rare

and things that can be counted
are the most wonderful of all

except for the one that can't be counted and can't count
and still knows how many plums are on the tree.

Dates in your book.

Peaches in your pocket.

Something knows.

Which is the number that can't count?

(What is the square root of me?)

Some call him Aleph, a naked fool
 playing with the seeds of things
but some say she is Aleph's first wife,
 whose name is in the breath
 every time we breathe,
a gasp of air in
 as if in surprise or passion
 the breath that romances call breathless
and Egypt wrote as *hesh*

to hear this sound is like looking at an empty chair.

And into it, breathing in sharply, hiss, you suddenly sit.

he'll say: The sentence says:
there is no way out of the sentence.
No way for you to be me.

You'll ask: Or you to be me?
Of course not. Every sentence is a life sentence.

12 September 2000

O CRYPTOGRAM

O secret flowering
of two by two
in one by one

flowers anxieties
autumn answers
ripening, apples
I can't get away
to answer no phone

the rivers come for the weekend

name us for our attitudes
and I will be Arrogant the First

acre emperor, generalissimo
of obligations, philosopher of woes.

Secret marriages of things declare
we were not meant to live in air

the oxygen addiction makes us twitch
into that random muscle they call dance,
music of the fears.

A sparrow has it too,
Hopping between seed and terror.

Crystals were we meant to be
Align our axes over eons till
Orgasms of translucency disclose
Vast plains inside mere diamonds

Whose blue flame of perfect union
In my mother's wedding ring
Gleams into our nervous world

All getting and forgetting.
In that pure blue gleam
Window light of our first home
All growing, never forgetting, ever condensing
Everything we know into one lucid solid

Until the volcano speaks that is our dying.
All things whatsoever die, and most stay dead.

12 September 2000

Is there any more to be?
Subway and parlor
Rice and rule,
We go and we come home —

Do you think it's enough
To live? Or is there something
Beyond the day and past the night?
I used to want to visit

The backside of the moon
To see what could be seen
From there, other side of the fence
We can't see from this life

I know is there.
Maybe the moon I mean
Is further even than the sky,
Fallen through heaven and space

But still inferable from
Our ancient longings, logic
Of the heart, to find the place
Beyond the day and past the night.

12 September 2000

I send these texts of life
Safe through the secret mail

In hopes all the words I say
Will let me someday

See again what I have seen
And feel the wood beneath my fingertips

Of the most intelligent door.
I stake my heart on what I cannot prove.

If measure meant,
Music would.

And all the gospel might be worth
My hand on your hip.

12 September 2000

ASSENT

To make you complicit in my desire —
That's what every lover wants.

The fragment
Always bigger than the whole.

The beautiful body
Of the soul.

13 September 2000

Catch up with her
Who is not running
This is truth and limestone
Water made me

And fire that is hidden
Inside water
The fatal hydrogen
That made the Sun.

14 September 2000

If I could catch up with yesterday
I could make tomorrow.
But as it is I'm as it is.

14 September 2000

please bring my mind back
I didn't mean it
the separations
in the world are only me

the comets the northern lights the immense luminous mistakes
are me, I warn you,
I am wrong.

... 14 September 2000

For Raworth,

A translation from Middle High Cat

Raptors as captors
Agreeably posed on long
Edwardian creaseless trousers
Irons neat and Berlin near
Ravaged under aerial
House arrest the pong of war
Sneaks out of the paper

We were poor then
And hoped to be otherwise
And now we are otherwise
Poor without prospect

Always at the mercy
Of somebody's body
Usually our own
But could luck out
And be her be hers
That empress of impress
Above me soft
On her guesswork
Throne she sits so
Solid on like an
Absolute in Aristotle

What is she like or
Who she does amazement
Stays in me so many
Houses full of basements
Without an article of mouse
It is difficult to discern
A pattern in the pattern

There must be something
To do with all these leaves

So leaving London
No compass to levant by
I northed without needle
And came in rain upon a
Cam with a park
Where I sheltered under
Unseemly shrubbery
Huge rubbery leaves
As big as pizzas
What could they be
I need to know
More than the silly
Names of everything
Rheum, see them?
Relatively rhubarb.

15 September 2000

MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING OF THE SANHEDRIN

Abrasive tender

Delicate?

Diary of a shadow

the public waits
unilluminated

they live in cartoons

a blackboard, yes, a blackboard

what in on it? A word.
What word?
Put it on the blackboard.

Write it in another language

Wind blows curtains in the window
Billowing

Sails on a ship going nowhere

the *Tennis Court Oath* the billowing fleshy drapes
the veils the secret body of the wind

Search me

Stars. Draw a star
On the blackboard make it gleam

Make it believe me
And you believe me too

Dear love I write you
all my love poems
while delegates prattle
and the council snoozes

for love too is tedium
the blissful humdrum
of its hummocky familiar bed
the same old me

embracing the same young you

The senators startle
out of their comas
and think their names
have been called out
it's only the wasps
thrumming in and out
the windows, it's only
the tepid sea outside
flushing the beaches

will anything ever wake?

I sit in the corner and remember

Exaggerated entity,
that's the problem with society

everybody thinks he's somebody
and the law backs him up,

me, I don't think I'm anybody,
just an impostor of the néant,

sit in a coma and remember

exaggerated entity?
enervated identity?

euphemistic empathy?

They talk till they are blue in the face
I listen till my heart gets up
and walks out the airy windows
to watch the gorgeous wastrels on the sand
buzzing their Shelta and Basque

just the turn of her body as she lifts
one hand to her face and the other
stretches to her friend

a loving loose salute

heart?

In here the heart is tweed,
thorn-snaggled with listening

o listening is so lewd

do you hear politics
chittering like mice
deep in the woodwork of the mind
these nibbling opinions
wreck the fabric of the whole

o love
let me always
be a layman

let my violins
be strung with hours

and the buzz of those strings
make a music no
word can overtake

no attitude can speak

and over the speaker's rostrum
where they still drone on

is spread to my delight a photograph
showing some angels arriving on the moon
hotfoot from Sodom

and Lot's wife is with them, Lily,
Lily White who left behind
a saltlick shaped like her

to stimulate that male bewildered flock.

15 September 2000
[from notations of 6 IX 00]

POETRY

Poetry is a yeshiva
Where the teacher is
Sound asleep at his desk

But his students wide awake
Some reverent, some dozing too
Some trying to steal

Glimpses into the teacher's
Big book. And one of them
Is staring out the window

One of them is eating a pear.

15 September 2000

[from notations of 6 IX 00]

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