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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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Suppose a precision. To measure friends
by fluid. By how much
—not that they have given—
but how much they have shown
themselves — what is called
Giving Reality, or the only
thing anybody has to give.

Otherwise a world
bent away from me but looking back

(Old photo
of a dancer
someone
you know too well
to remember)

saying a word
like a little
trickle of blood on the skin

On the train to Berlin
I stood a long time at the WC window
watching the frozen landscape pass,
bright children skating,
no hint of history.
Only a canal broad and regular
stretching infinitely north.
And then the forest.

Measure in scruples
how much you yield of you,

the ultimate chemical,
the necessary,

how much you gave
to be with me,

measure in discrepancies
how close we are.

Cadenza: a private struggle
wrestled with a public word,
say Concerto No. 23, first movement, say,
a priest at the piano.

All day long I listen to you not playing.

6 January 1994

Du calme, they used to say,
as if a piece of it
could be eased off from the block
the central unit of calm
quietly glowing in its vault at the National Bureau of Standards
like the palladium meter-stick,
like the moon

our fervent measurer,
a fine fat rock sits there, just sits there
full of itself, full of no going,
and teaching it.

Calm is a thing neat as a bird in the air,
a cemetery argument, a factory at midnight.
No one needs to teach me that..

7 January 1994

TERMINVS

Image: each flake an aspiration

Immediate change: all
we are is masters of change

An apparition: a wall
dividing snow field from snow field,

something old. Relic
of a lapsed distinction. (A word.)

And, Termine, you with your strong hip bones
poised so long at the edge of named things,

you god of our little rims, you
have presided over so many lapses,

Freudian slips, legends, leggo, you
have watched the arrant nonsense of our wills

arrow up to zenith, crumple
back into the unparticular so

and come again, wave after wave,
as is the custom of these houses,

families with a moon in the attic
and a lawn made entirely of sea, wave

of intention forming momentarily
a shapely meaning in a rush of air

but the aspiration lasts. These little glints,
glimpses, raptures, micro-senses fall,

proposing a perfect world.

2.

Jack and Jane believe the snow.
They know where their bodies go,
something soft and something down
and then the clock begins to frown.

I am Jack. I have painted
the great mural in the dining room
of the wife of the Secretary of Defense.
It shows Native American divinities
armed with corncobs and cabbage stalks
defeating the horse-happy Espaniards
in 1563. It never happened. The Spanish eyes
were red from chili and from gold, the gods
fell back into the arroyos, into the bat caves
the oil shale the coal measures the garnet
mountains of the Adirondacks, into the blue
expensive deeps of Tahoe. The gods
are a season in the year of the world,
and then we are, brittle-boned, worried
at every snow flake (will it *ever* stop?).
I am Jack. My painting will be magenta
on the 32¢ stamp. I know where the body
likes to be. I can tell a chicken from a cherry,
I can find the bathroom in the dark,
I followed my skin to get to this place
and now I am famous though much trodden
like a downtown street, a shoe, a public
urinal in France, something glamorous
and filthy and still news.

Slow down, Jack.

Let the words release the air inside them
before you try to ease them into place.
They'll sit better then, the uniform grace
of human breath will hypnotize them once again

like a crowd on a beach watching intently
one single wave with all their separate minds.
You're burbling, Jack, your contentment
has reached the stage of Loud Avowal
marked by discourse on unfamiliar themes
you know nothing about — Indians, Gods,
dinner, years. What you know is to lean
a shadow on a wall so that it stays
after you go home. That is not nothing
though I'm not sure it's something.
But the snow has stopped,
probably just to catch its breath.

8 January 1994

STAMP COLLECTING

People do it

because people do it.
They are pretty, some of them,
and come from odd places.
Right now I have three from Croatia on my desk
on a Christmas card (**Sretan Bozic!**) from the Writers' Union.
All countries have them,
people, stamps, most of them look alike,
only the colors are different, the clothes, the national
costumes, sarong of Indonesia,
chuba of Bhutan. My hat
gives me away.

[9 January 1994]

2.

I am not
a philatelist. The world
is magenta enough as it is,

and the names of its places agreeable,
o they are agreeable,
especially the names of places I've never been,
shut me up before I start reciting,
Memel, Tuva, Fiume/Rijeka,
Franz Kamin's African Obock,
there I go again, the self-indulgence
we are taught by the dictionary,

all I am is a list of names
metabolically empowered, a puff of breath
raising dust from the pages of the atlas,
a gazetteer with gonads,

a monk on the moon
chanting the whole month long,
Surinam, Pitcairn, Wörgl now,
did Wörgl get around to printing
stamps in its brief history,
and Las Malvinas briefly Argie, did they,
and Lundy Isle and Blennerhasset's
Actual American Island — before philately,
alas, or think of the treasures
Burr's descendants would find in their trunks—
and Cyrenaica and Tripoli *avant Lybie*,
and Saint-Pierre and North Ingermanland
(INKERI, it says, and not a hint of how).

I am not a stamp collector, the world is red
enough with blood and politics and pain,
these cute little scraps of paper
gluey with names of dead republics, spent
greedy dreams of linguistic liberties,
empires of vanished everydays,
dead poets falling with their leaflets from the sky.

3.

My friend explained that the photo of Heidegger
in the German encyclopaedia shows the philosopher
in *Volkstracht*, dressed in the national costume.

I wonder at this, not about Germany or philosophy
but about pictures. What do they do?
Back to Croatia, where the delicate and pretty

200-something stamp shows a mountain gorge
and distant hilltop city. Pazin? What is the link
between this and me, between this town and 200

whatever they are? Where and why and when
and will we ever get home? Will they ever stop fighting?
I don't know what to say, I'm left embarrassed,

and then Sarah Rothenberg calls to ask us over for tea
and I remember the night we sat on the sofa
looking at a ratty old Scott's stamp catalogue

to find what traces we could of the Jews
of Biro-Bidjan. Which is near Manchuria.
Where they speak Yiddish. And I suddenly know

what stamps were for. And people.
The names fall silent and the meanings speak.

10 January 1994

Their hope was placed
in the neat way the woman
lifted the child back into the bassinette
and then turned to the window:

swept the organdy aside and stared
at the side of the church across the courtyard,
mock-Gothic, rain-darkened,
large and very close.

“He lives there,” she said to the child
who was carefully sleeping. “Not twenty yards
from here his vast exciting space
begins, cold candlewax and incense

and shadows. Soon I will be there.”
The parents understood this surely
as a sign of kindness, a touch even
of poetry that their child would feed on

later, when the child woke
the way they sometimes will, like an animal
you never saw before hurrying
through a terrifying ordinary house.

10 January 1994

POLYPTOTE

Words nobody understands
make you Nobody
if you understand them.

“Your readers hate you
and your books are a kind of disease,
languid, without disfigurement,
mid-morning, well-
dressed women coming from funeral Masses.”

Europe. Everybody
anxious to get back,
do you understand that,
at least, with your sunny
marina, your piano bar?

12 January 1994

OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY

They say they do
things different
over the ridge
foxes fly
and geese talk
beer is free
but water's not

and their flag
is inside out!

I will walk
that way
and see who touches
me best,
king's wife
or the baker's
adorable
foundling child

raised on millet
angelica and poppyseed
and I will marry her
for all to see
and put my face
on a penny stamp
and cry out loud

lick me,
we are here at last!

13 January 1994

Not the color
but the bird you
found it from

the name of him
who gave a signature
into your hand,

twist-tortured
in the strings of a harp
this flower flowers

a feather
made of lines
& sheer refraction

flies.

14 January 1994

Call for the names of things then
call them by their rightful names
a preacher in his chariot
mowing down the congregation

a starlet in splendor resorbing love

the toast in done now in the little oven
these are things to celebrate
the propagation of the light

the merciless details that love us to death.

15 January 1994

— 15° FAHRENHEIT

Coldest morning
since I moved here

in 1968, twenty six
below that winter

or so it says
in my head

that tool box
where every hook

has lost its eye
but every is.

16 January 1994

A POEM LIKELY ABOUT LOVE

for Charlotte

Will I encourage the mode of you, the mild
will to be something? Burnt chapatti,
drone of a feeble violin. Things come
and come hand in hand or go.

Will I specify your form? We fall
in love with astrals, presences
vaguely centered on some one
long enough for us to stroke or touch

the startled flesh, as if the body
never guesses who it stands inside,
what talky flame of glory
envelops it with such beauty

call it, or desire, or just you.
Identities wander through our world
settling on random bones.
Our faithfulness allows the stay.

16 January 1994

MARGINAL, ALONGSIDE THE MONT BLANC WORK

A vague and holy mountain on the sky.
Like one of those we put before us
to remind us of religion. Livy.
God's acres. It is dangerous
to give up your gods then fight with people
who still keep theirs. Not so much
a matter of conviction but of cult,
to tend them. To pour out milk.

Which is why weak Hindus can keep
Muslims at bay but Westerners can't—
those people have real magic, they lean
on powers we disdain. Even
without terrorism they appal us
with their certainty. We die by fear
facing them from our poor afterglow.

We had not much trouble with the Kremlin—
they had even less to do with gods than we did,
prepared for war by giving up all sense and spirit.
We put all our gods into one, then gave that up.
The powers are around us and would listen
to us still. If we could speak. By sacrifice:
something saved for them of all we eat and drink.
By keeping earth morality. By taking
care of each other. Earth lives by care.

18 January 1994

FAIRY TALE

As if told. A tawdry
story in a bar. It was Tuesday
of it. The horse
walked in, the woman
lifted her glass up,
toasted the clock.
When Jesus took five thousand fish
swam hurtless in Galilee
and He gave them in the sign
(representamen) of bread.

Ingot texture. Sourdough
fetid in the laundry,
but the bread is fortis, fortis,
this little isolate
(blue footnote to a black utterance?)

answer: the sky. To rapscallions
on stallions, here's

hears a bolt or several
clatter free from the bridge,
the bridge finally will fall.
Fairy tale. Secrets
of the air. Secrets of the God of Air.

18 January 1994

A SONG OF MY SELF

The *sonneries*
of it. Drive
the ego out and he comes back
in everything
seven times as bad as how it was.

But drive
with him, say I to everything,
and wear the ego out.
This best
fanfare of the Cross.

19 January 1994

PATRES CONSCRIPTI

The fathers of it, the senators from
money wanted to dispossess them,
soldiers, farmers of
the little they had left. Live rich
by taxing the poor. The most we can hope
for is to slip through the cracks
while keeping own mind intact.

No other chance. The changelessness
of oppression is not remarkable.
It is Livy talking of 450 BC. It is CNN.
Of all arts, oppression needs least to alter,
take from the poor and offer empty choices.
Packers or Cowboys. Dem or Rep.
Marx or the Pope. Vote and shut up.

20 January 1994

