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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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NOVEMBER MORNING

There was a man
who walked around the night
around and around it
till the night was bordered
by the rut his feet had worn
the rut filled up with small white stones

There was a woman
who walked through the night
back and forth across the night
until the night was pierced right through
by the track her feet had worn
and the track was pale with fallen leaves

small yellow ones from nobody's trees.

1 November 1992
Mount Tremper

THE DANGERS OF INFORMATION

and a dog the dangers of what is said
and a cat beside him on the sofa
his hand stroking idly down its patient back
his other hand or the same hand other times
strking idly down the fur of his mustache

until all the great empires of the earth
Hun and Mayan and Roman and Chinese
Anglican and Gallican and poor old Amérique
are all wrapped up in this calm young man
stroking a white cat on a green divan

he listens to what everybody says he is the ear
for which language fell out of the trees those high
gods who turned their leaves into tongues
and their skins into books and their roots to gnarled
fingers and taught us to hold on for dear life

to money and slaves and wives and information
until our society spreads over half the earth
then comes to the end of itself suddenly
like a word spoken in a vast echoless plain
that fades quick away and you hear birds again

and his fingers move slowly on the cat, they both
are waiting for breakfast perhaps, to be calm
as this holy couple is must be the product
of a dozen high spirited civilizations.
It takes real religion to know how to touch a cat.

1 November 1992
Mount Tremper

ZEN LUXE

A writing desk
beside the toilet
en forme de water heater
just at the level
of my elbow

to write while otherwise
expressing
and smell the difference!

full of these very words.

1 November 1992
Mount Tremper

IN THE PALACE OF KOANS

1.
What can you say
that isn't saying
and isn't hearing?

2.
What can you say
that speaks for itself
sweeter than magazines

the long farewells of businessmen
in the morning on the way to the great Deceiving
the psychoanalysis of cars.

3.
Buy me
and caress me
my body will love you

and my heart be busy
with another music
like the sea turning away from the shore.

1 November 1992
Mount Tremper

*to Daido,
Myotai, Jun En, Fu Sho
Eric, Desmond,
& all*

*just
a word
I plucked
out of the air
to drop
here
on your table*

thanks for a beautiful all hallows weekend 2 November 1992

CHARACTERISTIC OF THE DAY

They came to ask for peace
the kind of quiet
flickers in leaves
then runs away

fear quiet quiet with lustrous
eyes vigilant
who knows for what
fear is too busy with itself to know anything

fear is a tree full of birds

2 November 1992
The Day 8-Came

I asked the mountain for peace and it gave
for a woman and she spoke

it said Say me
and I spoke with a high curious voice
I smoked I ran my fingers
along polished mahogany

I wore my clothes like the sun
I was the same as myself for an hour
and then I was quiet

a quiet man is everybody else.

2 November 1992

That we had spoken
closely

to it
the real

argument becomes
is it there

to hear,
the foxy shadows

of listless maples
now

when nothing listens.

2 November 1992
(after a six months past note)

DARK ROSES, 4

The purple dark flowers you gave me
have me. The dark of you
is a sculpted thing not an absence not a thorn

the dark of you is a shaped petal a turn
upward to the light from where something
firmer than clarity lingers. And loves me in you.

2 November 1992

Bothered in the arm of the man
the hoot of a bird he hears in his shoulder
the rain runs from his elbow to his wrist
the stick he picks up breaks inside his fist

because he can do nothing but feel and feel hard
in some cities there is no word for old
except as a man might by some strange chance
become old and old but not forget how to dance

since even the crows do that hopping in the grass
where they could fly over but they condescend
to the faculty of food and fall down and eat
he wants to stand like them and eat with his arms straight

at his sides a part of the whole package of him
and no pain except the pain of being there at all
between rain and the language and taking the outside
into yourself and having no place but the sky to hide.

2 November 1992

INTERVALS

It is quiet then suddenly leaps
so that the Moments of Time
(a) between the deer stably browsing
and the same deer at gaze

and (b) between that and them
leaping into flight
so all the grey pasturing's now just a flash of white
tails dwindling in underbrush

are perhaps precisely equal.
I will say they are.
I will say that fear enters with our appetite
and screams long before satiety.
I will say the railroad station over the Mill River
where I stood so often in the last years of my parents' life
looking down at the swans and cormorants

is just a chip of brown heaven
fallen athwart land and Atlantic,
a trestling habit of the mind
to make a bridge out of a station

so that all things (all our poor things)
are poised a moment in the growl of idling engines
and the far-off applause of never satisfied gulls
before the machine shunts out and carries us away.

3 November 1992

How to keep something clean that isn't even there in the first place Atlantis

So the telephone rings they tell you things:
I plan to make away with my life or We did
send it to you but we sent it to you in a different town
and you ask Why did you do that and suddenly

there is a terrible silence on the phone.
How many people do we say. How many people
do we have to talk to before language is finished with us

and we begin to speak. I have taken certain measures
against my existence he says and he says
it is in the women that the problem lies
my mother and my father's mother and my wife

and I say there is nothing to be known
you can't cure a problem with women by talking to men
I say and then I hear that I'm talking and

no one's listening. Not even me.
Some people are bodies some people are not.
When you talk to the company someone talks back
but it's not really what we mean by speaking,

it is a horse that has mounted its rider the rider
lies under the crushing hooves and dreams about marriage
about children and churches and yellow flowers

growing on the graveplots of the unknown dead
while the horse talks with all the words in the world
you can hear it in the wind when you open up to the sky

3 November 1992

ATHEIST OF MIRRORS, 1

for Dennis Tedlock, in the skandhas

This divining business—
listening to knees, stifling
impulses shaped like these

jute bags of highland coffee beans still green
heaped up, neat lumps by the river

like sand bags against the flood—
what is the river whose whelming wave
a physical body is created to withstand?—

and the wise could count them, count on,
reckon when the hawks fly over and set their scream
loose on the downwind
at the quick of nightfall
into the broken palace of the heart

those howling courtyards.
I believe in nothing.
Stifling by numbers
then still the numbers. Count
the sacks of green. The colors.
I look into the dusty mirror
over the dead sink in the shit house
and see nobody I know.
Not even someone who used to be here.

3 November 1992

It is voted now.
I did not
wake up this morning
to find broken
that certain delicacy
of hope I slept with.
The new man
was still president
an Indian was in the senate
two women senated for California
and a black woman was the wisest of Chicago.
I was afraid I had dreamed
this little turn-away from violence and accusation,
from men, mostly men, blindsiding into chaos
out of fear of where their greed had led them,
led me. But the Angel
of Original America stood firm again, one last
whitmanic shuttle of her wings, one wild shout
of our oldest mandate, to be different in the earth
until every human voice has said its piece.

4 November 1992

THE MEASURES

There are certain measurements
salt pepper sugar vinegar
there is a shape like a flower
but no kind of flower you know
you orderly graduates of an abusive lycee

everybody has something to teach you.

There is a door open into a tree
(this is how the story's told

by whom?
by me, me
is the ever
teller, anybody
who can say I
can tell)

door open into the tree.
What do you see therein?

A lion crouched by an empty chair

a bird like a dove
 fluttering, wounded, something blue
 coming out of its breast.

I saw an old man whispering
 into the stringboard of a guitar.

I see a cow shuffling up a hallway
 pressing its blunt wet nose against each door

I see sunlight on a big city cemetery
a stone forest
a word for every death

I see a coach unhorsed and rolling free
through blue midnight clunking
its brittle wheels on whitewashed curbstones

I see a handful of salt
raised to the lips of a dying man
Taste this and live
you tell him and he goes on dreaming
—which way does a dream go
into life or into dying?
you have to wake to tell
you have to dream to see,
tell me, me—

I see a chinese red carpet big as a house
unrolled and chickens pecking on it
vain quest for seed
the despairing cock

I see a glass of water alone on a shelf

I see a hundred wise men pray to it

I see nothing but simple things I see a shoe

I see a boat full of parrots
a cage of marmosets
two men washing their shirts on the riverbank

I see a man in a green hat
walking so fast

I see someone reading a book and smiling
 who speaks to her from the big
 double-column pages?
who is still left alive
 after a book is printed
who listens when a word?
 She does and she smiles, breathes
on the page
 does she know she's breathing
and breathing onto the page
 and that her breath
give life to this dead read thing
 again
and every creature flies up live in her breath?

4 November 1992

Then there was the waiting
on the other side of the door
waiting for you
because the wood of the door
said your name

when I looked very close
saw you and your name
wreathed or writhed together
like the shadow of smoke
easing from a candle tip
when the wind has made
free of the light

o first of all
we are citizens of things

and then you answered
I heard the sounds
inside the room
(the room is what a wall
has inside it, what a door
is trying to say)

there was a movement
and that was you
coming forward
lightfooted as a crow
to open the door
I hoped or just stand
near it with your cheek
pressed against the wood
hearing me breathe
on the other side of the world.

4 November 1992

DOORS

Because they were waiting
there is a word

a door

how many woods have you been made from
how many ships carried you here

never and no one I am a door

I am the door

and the clock had something to say and the wall
and the cat lay on the windowsill in sunshine

forever
because in a door nothing is different

open or closed a door stays

you think: it is the house that hurries
now and the sky
pours down over the horizon
tired of carrying all that staying
suddenly gushed

or you think: I will get up from this chair
and carry a light bulb into a dark room
and wonder why I have come there

and the door knows

I am the door he said
but didn't tell us how to listen
we know how to listen to a bird to a train passing
two hundred cars of it heading south full of silage and glue
we know how to listen to a river

but a door creaks or slams you can listen to that
but you think: no, that is what someone does to a door
that's listening to people again or listening to houses

the house is running so fast now
we will never catch it
it is full of ourselves overweight and drinking lime kool-aid
listening to the war
there was always a war then and the sun went in and out
and that was before the peach pit
flung to the asphalt rebounded
and smote the afreet's grandchild on the eye

that was before the hopscotch diagram drowned under blood
you still see the white lines a little
the brave straight lines meeting at angles
sharp as the edge of a door

you think: my mother was the lintel my father was the post
you think: the door is a much kinder mirror
you think: no matter how far there's always a door before me
you think: I will be an admiral of doorways
you think: there is no stopping me

the kingdom of heaven is like unto a lock on no door
a door with no wall
a wall with no house
a house in the air

you think: there is always someplace to go

out and out or in and in or both together
like an old song from an empty country
only the crow on the dead tree remembers
the crow that creaks like a door in the sky

you think: there may be no place to go

in and out the doorknob under your fingers
the sway of the great harp of it
swinging on its hinges
you plunge it in and out of its doorhole
swinging it in and out like a great concertina
the air rushes this way and that way
the papers rise from the table and flutter the news

you think: that is only something to do with a door
but what is a door

I am the door he said *through me* he said
there is some kind of going

you think: I will go through the door
but the door goes with you.

5 November 1992

DOORS, 2

for Charlotte

But what is it made from
this door

from wool or from wheat
or both together

was it an animal
who left it there alone
like a tuft of tawny fur
stuck to a thorn bush
or like a scat of its droppings
steaming in the autumn chill

is it like a pool of milk in the goat yard
spilled when a nanny shifted the way they do
and the girl who takes care of the goats
missed a beat on the downpull
and the teat gushed ivory onto the chaffy ground

what tree does it come from
and how does a tree do it
the rigid rightness of things
without contrivance standing into the sky

I am the door and I am made by myself
you can open me and close me
or lean against me at twilight
listening to the finches bicker among seed hulls

what is it made from this door that is there
you think: it is there forever
therefore it is made from nothing but itself

but it has no self it is a door only a door
opening and closing and not about anything

I am the door he said I have no self, I am not about anything

you came back from a far country and it was waiting
and wherever you traveled it was ahead of you
waiting at the end of every day
a hard dog, a sunset built out of wood

it is all the roads in the world all at once

but what is it made from this door
you think, or any door
why can't I put my hand on its matter
its elemental its essence
the way I can put my hand on its doorknob
or rest my scratchy cheek against its panes

whispering the name of my wife
so that only the door can hear it
open open to her
the way all my life the door has seemed to obey me
bringing me deeper into room after room of my life

and it was always the same door wasn't it

you think: the door is made of habits or of nothing
you think: the door is made of going through
you think: the door is made of me

but there is always something there that isn't you
something that reminds you of a tree
yes, something growing not too far from anybody
something hard and useful and answerable when you ask

yes, but something that isn't that either
something no kinder than glass something
emptier than steel a crystal
with nobody home a broken radio a child's thumbprint
left on the window of a closed store

what is it made from this door nobody knows
you think: someone I love
standing in the doorway
tells me all I need to know about doors

but beyond anything you know how to know
the door sways open and open its powerful wing.

5 November 1992

JACQUES PREVERT

has a poem where the English word *fading*
is used of love, both the rumor and bruise of it,
the feel of it
and the dictionary tells me that the word is used
only of radio (and I guess now TV) signals
fading out as you crouch over the buzzing tube set
desperate for news from the other side.

And love is just that listening.

5 November 1992

The miracles are mostly wood
I name a child for what I lack

there is a clock below the stream
its hands are fire-hands

we watch them creep around our necks
fire of water this humid flame

the wall gets written on all over
with whatever you really have to remember

and what did you have to know?
there is a paper with every fact

printed in river water and read by birds
no one else finds his way to that dry cavern

where the shuddering mining machinery
is still new in its sleek white enamel.

5 November 1992