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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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AMNIONIC

There are so many questions
and then none. No bird at the seed.
The rain had stopped before anybody woke.
A stillborn child still wet with birth.
Morning is a system of forgetting.
The sun is Acheron, a river of hell
we do not have to cross again
to where this had been --- the land
we call *inside* but who can tell
what direction we're really moving
when our eyes are closed and still we move
and presently we see. And what we see
is what this waking takes away.

*I will be there again tonight
but the one I am
will not be the one I'll be.*

Moves dark against a dark landscape
loving, struggling, just going along.
He finds something. Whatever he finds
turns into me, now, remembering nothing.
Glints of darkness left
against the pale uninscribed day.

1 June 2004

GAZEBO

A wooden structure in the woods,
a space I love, a shape defining
how it feels to be alone in trees,
spiderweb, slant of light,

on a chair under a steep roof.
Shelter, but not too much.
Enclosure mostly something
for the mind, for it to know.

I am in shaped space,
my space has borders,
boundaries, meaning.
No mosquitoes get in

to raise awkward questions.
It is sacred and I seem
to take on a quiet sanctity
just by being here.

1 June 2004

THE DAYBED

He was the one who understood, having read
Clausewitz, and Rommel's forged diaries --
the essence of warfare is always metaphor,
diaper-changing facility in every john.

Keep alarming the opposition by simple
evidence: a stone that did not kill Abel,
a sword that left Holofernes untouched,
asleep, dreaming of nice Jewish girls,
their opulent smiles, their promises.

I want to give you what you gave me,
a piece of furniture you found on the street,
but you used it, you lay down in it
a thousand nights till it was yours
then you had boyfriends drag it to my place
and ever since it shapes how I lie down
and how I sleep, dreaming of rusty swords.

Now I have to give you some cushioned thing
infested with my life, my imagery
to agitate your sleep. Memories
of things we heard each other say --
the words get inside our bodies and repeat
till we spend our lives trying to practice

all the lunacies they specified,
the lies we told us on the telephone.

1 June 2004

<late> =====

THE VALUE

It costs as much as a cup of espresso
on a marble topped table in Avignon
among scarlet oleanders
or the new Airbus on its way to Geneva
or as much as Mozart on the road to Prague
in the beautiful novella by Mörike
or as much as the third woman on the right
in that photograph of the cheese factory girls
or as much as the whole color black
which they say is not a color at all
but the absence of one, then
it costs as much as absence,
an aluminum coin, or a heron
over a pine tree, a bus on fire.

1 June 2004

====

Against the privilege of day,
long snout of the vacuum cleaner
busy in its share of the Great
Molecular Shift we call culture

i.e., moving stuff around or
interfering with the lay of the land.
Whereas in dark we leave alone,
and what comes to mind is journeying enough.

2 June 2004

MARKS

All right, suppose we did not
leave traces. Those are sea clouds
over Annandale today, moving east
and that's remarkable enough
for us to follow them right now,
real mackerel clouds like Buzzards Bay
and a here crow in them
coming down to linden or locust, can't see
where he lands, locust moves but that's
the wind and then he flies,
I'll never know, west again
to tell us we'll finally come home.

2 June 2004

for Charlotte, on our eleventh anniversary

Count the years.

They try to tell us something

but we don't know what.

Not yet. We'll have to wait

another year.

Then all the years,

eleven more, twenty, then

when all the wine-glass elms

of Cambridge are gone,

we'll begin to find out.

Wait with me. Let me be

with you while the truth

of us goes on beginning.

3 June 2004

Boston

MATERIAL REMAINS

Which is the burden,
the stone or the man
the stone lets carry it
here, up the hill
on the edge of Nepal
to build, people
are always building
something, everywhere,
no earth without their scat.

I assert there was no time at all
between Lascaux and history.
There is no null time at all.
If there were people there at all
they left marks. Always.

Because we are the animals who make signs--
if we live somewhere a month
the traces last forever.
Look for them. Interpret them right.
And if you find a thousand years without a trace
then those years did not exist.
You counted wrong. We're bad at math
but we always leave remainders
of our presence. Human history

can't help but be continuous.

There are no empty years --

connect the dots, scats, scars, scabs --

seamless the human day.

3 June 2004

Boston

<late> =====

1.

On the promenade

a balustrade

on the raindrop

a small world convexed out here at me

red as English tea

with milk in it and it's still the color of mahogany.

2.

Old Boston churches stone, stone as if you could believe a stone, granite block,
tandaradei, love cry, birds feed in the rain

big baby sparrows begging to be fed by smaller parents, you tell me, wing beats,
footfalls, Robinson Crusoe recognizes his own naked footprint at last, cloven
hoof in wet sand, showing the marks of a crucifix embedded in his heel.

3 June 2004

Boston

WEATHERS

Late afternoon, as a big storm cloud came up out of the west, with wind, W found himself suddenly missing F intensely. Soon the cloud would reach him, be overhead, break, rain, pass.

Rimbaud's *Illuminations* and Kafka's later diaries, he thought, were actually the same book, written down by different men in different languages. Some translator, he thought, should slip them into one single text, in English or in Italian, whereupon they would reveal their identity.

And we would discover the author who wrote both

Then the angel said (for there are angels in this story, be aware, be awed), Choose any two books at (what you call) random and you'll find that they reveal evidences of common authorship. Shadows pass from text to text, whether we license them or not. All we can do is watch, and try to take pleasure in their passage, and in the glints of *community of person* they reveal or suggest or almost conceal.

But the Rimbaud and the Kafka really fit together, not just any texts, these two, very special, saying two breaths of the same story, systole, diastole of it.

The angel answered, perhaps, perhaps. All we can do is watch. All we can do is take pleasure.

On one page of the journal, the author wrote the date down correctly, but wrote down the name of the wrong town. He was not there. He was right on time, but somewhere else.

He was in a cathedral, he thought he was in a public square by the fountain's rim, admiring the play of light on the stirring water, admiring the people round about. Above him and them, a bronze bishop struck a bronze boulder with his bronze crosier, and a stream of real water gushed from the smitten rock.

Back in the hotel room, W thought about writing F a letter. The sturdy, dignified hotel stationery lay ready to hand. Not so fast, though, not so fast.

From scene to scene like a French farce, no. Stay in the moment a moment longer. Linger.

Not because you like it here, not at all. But because to leave, to choose another room or write down another letter would be a defeat. And one has had too many already.

Every decisive action is a defeat.

Every scene is a war; every moment is a battle. Stick it out. This room. Not that hotel, this room. This letter. W. Stay.

Downstairs, the gilded stucco rococo fantasia of the ceiling in the lobby spread over more recent upstart dividers into the coffee room, the bar, the concierge's little alcove where theater tickets were kept. The stucco goddesses and their

attendant creatures -- birds, cupidos, whiskered gods -- queened it over the public spaces. Beneath their nude adventures, sober and often weary travelers, thoroughly clothed, stood about being attended to by desk clerks, or anxious for such attentions.

W waited for several minutes, not very long, but no one paid him much attention. Perhaps they recognized him as a guest already registered, and with several days of residency still scheduled. In any case, he decided that he did not need the writing desk after all, the one he was trying to get the concierge to arrange to have installed in his room. But the concierge was nowhere to be seen. Several self-supported cardboard placards on her desk offered information about taxis and limousines. Nothing about writing desks.

Better not to write. What good does writing ever do. Especially letters.

Better to call in the middle of the night and see what happens. He thought to do this. This very night. But whatever might happen, it would only be a voice, nothing seen, nothing touched. Heard maybe for boon or bane, but not seen, no more than now. Closed eyes now could see as much as dialed phone then. There is no then, there is only the thought to provoke.

So he stood in the lobby with closed eyes. After a moment, he began to miss the sight of the beautiful baroque ceiling, so he opened his eyes again.

4 June 2004, Boston

The light deciding

To amortize the experience of light, divest, take ten percent of it each night and hope to see.

Orion? No, Charles's chair or carriage, a high habit pointing north. How else would the steeple on the church know which way is up? Does the Pope write and tell, Please point to heaven?

Sometimes I think they move the stars around to confuse me. For instance, it is daytime now and no stars to be seen. I know they're there. I know their names. But where are they, hidden in the long glare?

Quaking leaves down there, I thought they were aspens, Betty said they were Russian olives, but they have no thorns, do they?

There is a dark-faced noblewoman, sun-cathexed, aged at pleasure, horse and hawser, all the windy treats. Hard, she is hard. Sometimes I want to break whatever is hard. Sometimes I want to leave things in the world religiously alone.

4 June 2004

Cuttyhunk

EXCLAMATIONS

Hear the sea. Or what is heard has to be a conversation: what the sea says when it touches shore. Or what the land makes the sea say.

Not to speak of wind. The wind speaks. It is easy to believe that everything speaks.

All at once? It is like the stretto at the end of the first act of a Rossini opera, everybody singing and shouting faster and faster all at the same time. We smile in our chairs and say, Ah, music! Just as we sprawl in our deck chairs and say, Ah, the sea!

Or do they take turns? Aria means air, after all. The hydrangeas Betty planted on the lawn already have a knob of green flower -- in this plant, the form comes in the flower before the color comes. Will they be blue? I pray that they will, the 'sky flower' of my childhood always wet with dew. I went back this spring to see it in Brooklyn, Marine Park. In vain, of course. Even the dirt in which they grew is gone. Traceless, finally, the mind.

They say that those flowers, the blue ones, happen best near the sea. *On verra.*
Be blue!

Imagine, Conte Robert de Montesquiou used to wear one in his lapel! Huge, soft, *une fleur floue et pleine de ciel*, flopping gently as he walked. He called this flower hortensia. Such a tall thin man.

When I look at the grapheme <!>, I know it's called an 'exclamation point.' Yet somehow I think I know it has another name as well, one I'm often on the point of saying, it's on the tip of my tongue, but I can never find it. It may be a word I've never heard, just one that I know inside, by shape, or the way its unsounded, inly sound corresponds to the shape of what I see, or the shape of what this sign does to the words it follows.

Because this sign reverses the past, changes an observation into an exclamation, retroactively (since the reader comes to the point only after all the words it modifies have been expressed) dramatizes the utterance, puts it on stage, or shouts it, or breathes it with irony, sarcasm, mordant doubt or passionate avowal.

The cautious Spaniards take the sign and hang it upside down before the sentence even starts -- a curtain for the reader to pull aside, warned already that the words one is about to read need something else, some strategy of interpretation one finds oneself called upon to supply. This cunning stratagem helps to keep the reader from missing the point -- but think what is lost! The chance to enter the snowfield of the text unmarked, unguided, not a red flag or a dog in sight. Make your own way, citizen.

American printers and proofreaders used to call the exclamation point a 'bang,' an astute way to signal its sudden force, exploding at the end of an innocent remark.

Somehow, I said, I know another name for this sign. This 'somehow' -- what a fluffy, inconsequential sort of almost-knowing it signifies. What an unfocused ontology it commands, a blur of maybes like clouds over the Promised Land.

A robin on the grass. That's clear. That's here.

To have written, conscientiously, a text in which one does not believe, that does not express one's own experience, opinion or awareness, that was not commissioned or commanded by some other party -- that is the position of many a poet many a day. That too is your famous 'negative capability,' to have attended to something that wants to get said for its own sake, for its own sake. *Verbum gratia verbi*. Not for my sake, all the stuff that's on my mind.

Hill, help me walk up you. Chair, help me sit down. Conspire!

Let there be a conspiracy of things!

Last night the compass pointed east instead of north for a whole hour. What was going on? The stars were hidden over clouds, no way to tell if they too had moved. Last night the compass pointed east.

All around this island the other islands shifted. The poles moved, and then settled back. I was the only one who noticed. I went to bed saying, the world is utterly changed. But so many nights I have thought that, so many dreams have come to remind me of what does not change. Her name.

Compass, tell me two suns are in the sky, one risen in the east, the other already waiting, always waiting, there above us, always noon.

There is a dark stone above our heads always waiting to be turned on. Noon is permanent in the mind's world, up there, a fathom above the weather. Where that stone turns gracefully poised and catches light, catches whatever light we give it.

Be the stone in my sky, my lode. Show me, vaguely, the way. Let me mine you for my own.

5 June 2004, Cuttyhunk Island

VACANCES

Coming to a place of rest
the way an otter would
seize a salmon in its teeth
and for that one sharp moment
between catching and devouring
between stream and shore
between the fish alive and the fish's death
there is a resting in the mind
that the world tries to copy.

Repose. Vacation:

means making empty.

Empty time of just one second
and see what comes between
new arising from
something at right angles to now
and coming here
as if it were being with us
the whole while.

6 June 2004

Cuttyhunk

OR

he turned on the gas jet
and found that he was dead.
Or was the stove just out of gas?
He flicked a switch
and no light came on,
opened the door and no breeze blew in.
For a final test
he went out and walked in the rain
and didn't get wet.
This must be death
but why does it have no feelings,
just incapacity?

And why is the rain
as beautiful as ever
everything silvery and close and full of promise
and why was there this happiness inside him
walking around
in the rain, in the rain,
and nobody spoke to him and everybody smiled,
not that there were so many of them,
no, he was mostly alone
on a mostly empty street.
By now he had forgotten
where his house was

and then a little later
what a house is in the first place,
those strange heavy shapes along the silver road.
Evidently the dead have no need of houses
he thought, or it thought for him, he thought
I think the rain is thinking for me now.

6 June 2004

Cuttyhunk