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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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A soft rag marked the start of foxglove.
— Jessica Bayer

We have waited too long and the loom
is tired of our equivocations. Warp or woof
(rhymes with a roof in New York,
not what a dog remarks, or an oaf when a cartoon
punches him in the belly, the sounds
confused with words, the words
confused with things — philosophers
always rabbit on and on about that —
but the real danger is that things
confuse themselves with us,
this hand your armillary sphere
through my fingers take a peek at heaven),

standing thread or moving shuttle, used
to be a stone among the ancestors, who tossed
a stone from hand to hand and round
the stone a thread was tied, a hank
of something spun out of hair or flowers
and they would spit on their fingers and hum
beautiful songs long after the teeth
fell out of their mouths and became the stars.

And we're still waiting wondering
left over right or right under itself to tie
a small shred of cotton, worn out
with loving us and covering our sins,
to a snapped off elder twig to mark
where one flower we don't understand
gives way to another. It is our garden and the same
stars sift their influence (Paracelsus
called it *nostoc*, the sperm of heaven)
down on our questionable enterprises.
These crafts we master but never comprehend,
this language in whose aquarium

we are born and perish and think
ourselves fine lords and ladies, singing
all the soft supposes through our noses
while the quiet loom stands shivering in the dark.

24 November 1992

THREE ETUDES ON TEXTS OF ELIZABETH ROBINSON

1.

Ghosts desire to be obedient

It is not easy to desire
it is a missile
landing in the Arab quarter
and we all know all too well
from what ancient agony it comes

And be reborn still wanting!
what a horror
when obedience is what they never

and we never.
Because our eyes are sort of blue
we had to conquer everything
and did a little minute

till the others, those dark ones, the real ones,
woke up and said
We can close our eyes against the magic of those baleful
sapphires
we can have a world.

But we were dead then
happy in our wanting and our scanting,
kissed our empty hands and said My Lady Poverty.

2.

The flesh of our wishes... is blue

still blue.

I don't know why I'm thinking politics and Empire
our ancestors fashioned and ran away from
to hide in Williamsburg and California
like animals frightened by the echo of their longing
when they dream up loud at the moon say
in canyon nights, in India, in Kenya,
where they killed their prey and ran away from corpses,
where they built their cities and hurried to the desert.
Why am I thinking about that? Is an empire
(lost now, "night now," old Samuel
rightful King of my England rescinded it, I have
the paper still, I abjure he said
all obedience to her, Victoria, my queen,
I hear him sob, the blue agony of his betrayal),

is it desire that leads us to betray, or is it just blue,
the baleful sapphire we live inside sometimes
whose asterism (the "star") makes men and women
hurry to be hurt by us? The flesh
is blue from bruises and from dying, the flesh
of a desire is always a cadaver, the desire is a corpse
(like in the Indian story) the desirer carries on his back

until he comes to you. Then there's a chance—
he lays it down. Or kills you too and adds you to the burden,
song after song.

3.

I feel my tongue loll in the window

where it is natural to taste the light

I inherit the actual

from all those people trotting through the street
who leave it behind them
for me, everything for me,
the velvet cushion on the window seat
the leaded casements that interrogate the light

I feel my tongue
lolling heavy to tell them
tell them something
"that concerns" them, and concerns you
besides,

is it that all I have to tell them
is that my tongue is wet and heavy with telling?

Look at me, you creatures of the light,
I am desire and I watch you saunter,
could anything be of more use to you than I,
hungry to tell and rich with a sight of the street?

24 November 1992

SOMEONE IS ANOTHER SENSE FROM SEEING

for Charlotte

Because these crazy Russian islands we inherit
with their sharpbeaked gulls and rich petroleum derricks
belong as you do only to the air around you

there is a clemency after all we need to forgive
in the Germanic rows of corn stretching across county after
county
boring as high school math books,

empty as comparisons.
Forever and ever and ever the nuns used to say
raving about the comforts of heaven

and forever I've been trying to find you,
you in your white clothes poised
on the gilded stairway to the mezzanine

waiting to show me again how high is up.
Order was at first just a forgiveness,
a furlough from reality,

then we took it as business as usual
with the usual addiction
to follow. It's not the corn's fault,

or Atahualpa's. It is Spain's fault,
that is Germany's, I mean Rome's.
It's Plato's fault if you want to get technical,

made fatal by St Paul. Or was it Stalin?
So much for history—
which is the place I can't find you.

And the nuns carried on a lot about Never Forever,
the noise that the clock made in hell,
the big dial the damned see glowing over their comeuppances

like Big Ben over the nasty Tory parliament
or the poor moon over the sleek haunches of arriviste Soho.
And I won't find you there either,

comrade, you must be simple in the air
the uncounted, spacious, unnegotiated,
actual, undreamt of even, so my dreams have room

to reach out, even to follow you
up or down the radiant inclinations
till we dissolve in the luster of the permanent.

25 November 1992

FIRST MACEDONIAN SONNET

Are we finally going to begin
or is it legal
to orchestrate the Parthenon entablature
considering the rock itself
(it is rock, my comrades)
has been stolen from some swarthy Turks
who stole the land that bore it

and now call themselves The Greeks?
Everything is legal in the name of art
but there's always a chance some zealot
with a folkloric dagger in his healthy teeth
will leap on you in the streets
(and art has streets)
and take your life. If you're lucky enough
to have some life, my artists.

25 November 1992

WILD MUFFINS

in our taste for what could kill
noisy splashy and on TV

n'oubliez pas les muffins those wild things
hot in the morning sudden like little Popocatepetls
ready to pop

soon your backyard will be full of hot jissoming Corn
the Inca's revenge
teosinte from the moon
big and wild-eyed crazy no further than the roof of your barn

you have a barn you're an American
we're all born with one of those
between our knees

a storehouse of the Most High.

If you look down you see it
silo seething with ferment
and if you look up it's there too
glowering silvery in the November sky
just daring you to be thankful for something,

corn muffin moon over a bartered republic?
Not so bad as that. The island
is still surrounded by water.
The moon sails away—
this very night you won't see her at all.

25 November 1992

A THURSDAY IN AMERICA

for Charlotte

How brief to send
a thing thanks gave

as that a gratitude
devolves as star

excellestially eloquent
over my old shoes

mud draped toes
and far to go

as if a tree said this
you are to understand

up and down
if not the same then

near at hand
your hand

testing the beef
of my shoulder

an hour back
when it still was light.

26 November 1992

HOMAGE TO FRANZ BERWALD

That which so little is so known
a species of symphonic music
sent back to school by certain small
European countries (Ingermanland,
Karelia, West Friesland, Memel,
San Marino) to learn magnificence.

Tuba. Me too, no doubt every bone
thrills to the old scarlet Catholic
organ chorals that shake the wall
in big cathedrals where the dead stand
tilted down and inward above the aisle
with closed eyes pretending innocence.

How could they. The world is bad.
Even the smallest country knows that
when it watches the miller screw the baker's wife
and the windmill sails sail round forever
indifferent to the ruined lives inside the mill.
*We get what someone else deserves
because we are them too.*

Every infant knows its body prone
to gorgeous bouts of feeling, can lick
its ever-present skin to get the wondrous
flavor of itself. Today I almost Sweden,
and someday my music will lick you too.

[17 XI 92] 7 November, 2016

[some data from dream]

a week away from [the nearest] piece of paper
so here I'll just write it on the sky

[I saw a pale blue postcard-size sky before me, with six puffy
white cloud shapes on which I supposed myself able to write]

answering the sun's questionnaire:

O Lord Sun we like this planet
you have made for us and
made us for

by spirit
 which is just *energy*

a puff of breath
spanking us along.

.....

[Dreamt in two wakings, morning of

27 November 1992]

IN THE SHADOWS OF LANGUAGE

Now take my measure, measureman,
and open the old dry goods store on Blake Avenue
the one on the corner with the old man spoke no English
festoons of rickrack yarn ribbon my mother
understood these arid mysteries I waited
 in the shadows of language

I will never understand I will never speak
I have studied Latin Greek German
French Italian Spanish Swedish Welsh
Sanskrit Hebrew Chinese Tibetan
and can barely speak English when someone calls me

because speaking means having to say
and having something to say to the man in the shadows
the dry old man among the tape measures
his yardstick nailed to the edge of the counter
his cutter his shears the accurate his patterns

o God there is a pattern
the blue sky is over me now
the white clouds are sailing my way over the mountain
there is a pattern
I will never understand

and I had nothing to say to the old man
 to the cloth what word mattered?
nothing to say to the Murtha girls
waiting for the bus with me catercorner over,
 to their pink voluptuous flesh
what word mattered?
 what word does the body need
 in its immeasurable completeness?

and what did their clean sweet Catholic minds
 need of my language?
 the blue smoke of my longings and my

red passion to remake all the endless
structures of the whole world
without damaging, green me, a single leaf?

o God I had nothing to say to them
and the habit patterns of sentences dried on my tongue

use this word in an ordinary sentence

Not even fear could let me speak
when the crinkly brown Simplicity patterns
lay strewn over the dining room floor
and my mother was darting pins in and out of blue fabric

and roses of wallpaper climbed the pale plaster

and the piano rumbled in my aunt's parlor
under the stride of Uncle Joe's barrelhouse
and the crucifixes loomed down over my coming and goings

and no pattern I could form with all the words I knew
o God how many words I knew

would ever mean anything when I actually said it,
I am so afraid of the crucifix I said
and they laughed and pushed me up the hall past it
or I asked *what is sufficient to the day like Jesus says?*
and they shook their heads and rubbed my hair

yet these were all their words, not mine, I had none
of my own, their sentences
I was giving back to them, these aliens of my mother tongue,

I tried to find the key to their
hearts their dry mysteries their juicy bodies
I looked in their books and my own heart and my body
never had anything to say.

27 November 1992

PRAYER

for Charlotte

Even the smallest thing could be of use
letting some chips of wood slip through your finger
or counting seeds

or naming the clouds that come over the hill
and praising those names—

it is like water, what we do.
We can never tell where it might go.

27 November 1992

And we are trying to ask again "Who
are the blunderers who broke the Moon?"

It is silent in the sky then.
As so often, only down here is there clamor.
Earth, Planet of Noise.

But who was I asking?
And why did an answer
of some sort come down

you "are holding now in your hands?"

27 November 1992

SECOND MACEDONIAN SONNET

When the mind is tired of its penis-sheath
and the broken branches —it is winter—
of the Only Forest make bad reflections
—I think I mean shadows— when the sun
goes down, the anthropology of being alive
is too hard for this native informant.
Let the angels from Berkeley and Ann Arbor
come and go in their funny hats
smelling of magazines. They understand life
because they own the categories. We who are here
forever have resisted forever and forever
lost — the categories squeeze us out
because we are not something worth knowing.
Our distinctions are delicate as the breeze
that wakes you for a moment before breakfast
then you sleep on, happy with the undemanding dark.

27 November 1992

NIGHT AFTER NIGHT I PREPARE FOR A DEPARTURE

and now I see the boat-tail grackle on my lawn
ready to lead me down to the long
tarred creaking longboat
which sweeps me out bouncing on breakers
to the ship I have never seen.

It waits, it waits and must wait
for all departures
for me and my comrades
staring stupid into the heart of the sun
when it falls encouraging cheery as Dickens
into the dark part of the world
where the boat stands waiting.

But I have not seen it,
I and my comrades have seen
only the exaltations of birds
shouting into the sky
where there should be rigging,

we've heard only the screams of children
making out on the beach
around their campfires
over the broken flotsam and jetsam
of what should have been the hull.

Yet the ship is there, waiting,

28 November 1992

[Written after one more night of dreams where I am late or obstructed on my way to a departure, airport or dockside. Last night it was a Scandinavian vessel, and I and a friend, male, scurried around in snowy Brooklyn trying to find one another in the right sequence of luggage, busses, boat. This report-poem was dictated onto the old micro-cassette as soon as I got downstairs alive, drinking tea, safe awake.]

ON BIRCH BARK

It's just the electronics that have to be changed
the swaggering metaphor
wants to blast us in our tracks.

So the answer to a computer is a canoe.
Fill in the blanks,
paddle there, let your wet wrists
moisten pleasantly your tired knees.

28 November 1992

MAGAZINE MEANS GENERAL STOREHOUSE OR ARSENAL

And the angel said: It's not the *writing* of poems
that causes grief
but the publishing thereof.

Such profanation denies the *instancy* of
song, out one mouth and in your ears.

28 November 1992

I want an alphabet shaped like herons
standing or flying low
to write sentences shaped like lagoons
looped off a while by winter sandbars
from a clement river carrying
everything I say to the sea.

28 November 1992

GLASS WORLD

The world before me
filled with glass

sheets of glass
forest of glass.
Every pane is flat as close
to two dimensions as a thing, a thing

can be in our three-world.
I sit on an outcrop of shale
on the top of the ridge
king of dead leaves

memories are the skin to slough
ditch those
o serpent Mind
be now.

I encourage myself I reach
out to the trees
touch glass

if anything if I have hands
to fit this mind

to reach
like Heurtebise in *Orphée*
right through the mirror.

Alas forever these
are transparencies

glass through which more glass is seen

only at certain incidents of light
can you recognize the sheen

shimmers of reflection (=memory)
between the world and me.

28 November 1992
Clermont

What are the opportunities
the form disposes?
"Who are these citizens
who belong to something?"

Don't they know the universe
is a shredded contract
a torn-up marriage license
a broken mirror?

Don't they know sheer time?
I am not certain
who they are. There is
forgiveness and there is food.

I read a postcard from the future:
Be with me here
where the torments are tired
and the mountains are crowded

and the colorful partisans
drag me through the streets
parading my shame
because I loved so much

in a time meant for hating.
On the other side
there is a harbor and a moon
and a girl sitting on the dock

thinking about a long-ago guitar.

28 November 1992

SOFT MIRRORS

Caught in the hall of mirrors
flesh thinks about flesh

the tall young mother's body
present to me absent to herself
gallivanting up the aisle her
mind remote in Childerstan
tending to His Fractiousness the little King

and I think suddenly that what we are
we actually are

there is no becoming no turning away
if I could only be what I am

undistracted by my projects and projections
suddenly into the art of myself

and find you there.

29 November 1992

DINER

The hurry of ordinary wonders makes me glad here
a kid and her small doll on the counter beside me one
sits facing the world it is adequate without remembering
delicate faces of the ceasing to be young the satisfaction

necessarily to be here the failure of alternatives to arrive
like a knight in a Lancia a smile launches the transaction
mutability in the quick chilling of their foods I reach to touch
a curve or capriole of smoke drifting long like a good idea.

29 November 1992

[prolegomena to your Theology]

How shall I not love trickery, did I not make the scorpion?
And how shall I not love greatness, did I not coax the lion out of
somber clay and make him roar calm over the endless savanna?
How shall I not love vicious hatred, did I not make the serpent?
And how shall I not love unreasoning murder, did I not make up
the weasel and set him to hunt?
How shall I not love wastrels, do I not squander quadrillions of
fish eggs?
And how shall I not love thrift, did I not carve pollen that lasts a
billion years?
And how shall I not love monogamy, did I not fashion the ever-
faithful coupling of swans?
But shall I not love promiscuity, I who made the cat full of delight?
And how shall I not love timidity when I made the sparrows,
And how shall I not love magnanimity, did I not make Plato?

You who adore me as God the Most Good or Venerable Nature the
Kindest of Mothers,
Am I really who you suppose?

29 November 1992

for Charlotte

To wake up with geese crying their *how?*
how? close over our bed,

to wear the dark many gold buttoned uniform
of a conductor on a vanished railroad

—these are the two most interesting
conditions I thought about yesterday,

one actual, the other contrary just the
mind's old worn blue serge.

30 November 1992

I have come down to the end of it
waiting to be home in the dark wings of a crow
sleeping where I pass I
find too much of myself here my pronouns my big
bed in which I wallow dreaming of my desires
in a world where there is no ocean only an endless room.
On midnight blue carpet I step to the ones I have imagined
and Austrian trees all round me break into raspberry blossoms
as if a lake were dead and the earth were finally free to sleep.
Not to know what it means. To go inside
and be myself there, as if a sidewalk had answered.

30 November 1992