

9-2019

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Robert Kelly

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**The man inside
who dreams
and tells me later**

**and stretches out the measure
that holds everything together.**

**For we are two
each one of us:**

**the one who lives
inside my sleep**

**and this other one
who talks to you now**

**and thinks I'm me,
thinks I'm the only
one I am.**

**But when the night comes
I almost know the truth.**

[The first eight lines, as such, woke me from sleep. I rose obedient to write them down. The rest is commentary and I suppose by me.]

1 September 2019

IMPERIAL DESTINIES

**Julius is still a relatively
common name. August less so,
Tiberius hardly ever.
But Anthony is everywhere
and Mark is legion.
Which serves to prove
you win by losing.**

1 September 2019

=====

**The slightly slightly
faded green
and the not quite blue
above them tell
us something slightly
slightly tends to make
us shiver at the thought.**

1 September 2019

THE LETTER

There will be no answer
to this letter--
it means too much
for any one voice
to respond,
and I am no pope
to write to everyone at once.

No, this is just for you,
to you and from you
and about you
the way you live in my mind
or the grotto they used
to call the heart, just you,
and I care about you too much
(love, as they used to say)
to want you to waste
your lovely hours and hours
it would take to answer me.

**But I can't keep myself from
writing again and again
this letter to you, just you.
Once long ago this would
have been a sonnet and be done,
but nowadays it just goes
on and on. Read me someday
if you ever have a chance.**

1 September 2019

=====

**Have I ever
said enough?
The crows across
the road are calling
maybe laughing,
their language
loud and complex
to drive a hawk away
or warn us. Who
am I protecting
by saying so?**

**In deep belief I utter.
Every word saves someone.**

1 September 2019

=====

**Try not to doubt things--
they're all you have**

**and they have you
in their care**

**we are reciprocals—
answering one another**

makes the world.

1 September 2019

=====

**Tell the story
till it comes true**

**tell it till it comes
to you ith leaves
and shadows in its hands**

**never mind about fruit
you eat too much already
all those facts and histories
people feed you, and they
were once pure stories too.**

1 September 2019

BRIGID

Her name is pronounced like *breed* or as *bree-id*. She is the goddess of wisdom as known to the Irish ancient and modern. Her wisdom embraces both knowing and saying what is known--thus she is, I think, the goddess of language and poetry.

Soon after I came to Annandale (a name signifying the Vley of the River Goddess Annan or Danaan, whose name shimmers still in danube, Boyne, Rhone and other of her older waters), this is half a century ago, and had settled in at Bard , the college ppointed a new young chief librarian, Andy Haig. His beautiful wife Pam was the grand-daughter of the famous Irish painter and mystic, friend of Yeats, George Russell, who chose to be known as A.E. In her great kindness Pam lent me a small handsome oil pinting by her grandfather.

For three years or so, until the Haigs moved on, the painting stood above the bookcase at the far end of the very long living room (the largest space this city child has ever inhabited). The painting showed the pale and lovely goddess, Brigid herself, filmy bright, stepping towards us on a gentle hill slope. Tender, intimate, as outdoors can be (post-impressionist, the air itself alive), the painting welcomes us, we are children idling towards a thoughtful mother or wise young aunt, the woman who will shape and forever haunt our dreams.

I loved having her image there, trying to welcome her into my life as it began to heal from the zigzags of adolescence and the wrath of young manhood. There she was for me.. And for many others, who had the benefit (noticed or not, acknowledged or not) of her presence. Robert Duncan stayed a week with us, and slept on the sofa under that painting, as did Stan Brakhage, Diane Wakoski, Paul Blackburn...

I have every reason to think She spoke into their dreams. I think She poured into all of us new powers of utterance, new, but older than Ireland, older than India. Thank you, Pam, for the grace of your ancestress so richly given at a pivot of my life.

1 September 2019

=====

]in the dream academy]

**recording the coning-into-being
(birth?)
of three beiungs
(babies?)**

**Only two had, have, voices
or made sound**

**And their names are switched—
can change them at will**

John and James?

**James and Jesus—
was iy Jesus then who went to Spain
where alone in the whole Christian world
Jesus is a name common for boys and men?**

2 September 2019

APOLOGIA

In two days my students will come. Then I will belong to them. The many childbirths of all my Septembers. The reciprocal bonds, the strange music of the other that I make them, they make me, hear.

2 September 2019

PARERGON TO *THE CUP*

**Q.
There are holes
in the rim of the cup—
what good is that?**

**A,
They let the light
slip sideways into the wine,
water, milk or blood—
the secret sidewise sidling light!
And as you lift the cup to drink
s/ome always dribbles out
and down your chin, your skin,
so that you *bathe* in what you drink.**

2 September 2019

=====

**Crows flap
hawks float**

**why is honesty
so hard?**

2.IX.19

=====

**Nothing to type today
nothing to tell you
just my fingers
counting the air,
just hearing you,
your quiet breaths
beside me.**

2 September 2019

====

**I made
a new alphabet in dream
and then forgot it
at waking.**

**That happens
every night, the doctor
said, and to everyone.
You see that storm cloud
over Cedar Hill? That
is where your language
went--somebody has to
make the rain, not much
happens all by itself.**

2 September 2019

=====

**And why does it matter
when things are?
All the todays are just
tomorrow, someone
tumbling from a tower--
this is God's house
and you are the sky
through which he falls,
catch him, catch him
before the earth does.
That is your single task.
You can call it your goal
and invite all your friends,
help me help me you'll say
and pour them the new wine.**

2 September 2019

ALPHABET

A is the arrow that reaches the end

Z is the girdle that tautens your soul

B is the cabin you built in the woods

**Y is the yew tree that stands by the door slim
and tall**

**C is the call that wakes all the beasts in your
barn**

**X is the crossroads where you wait day and
night for a friend you call Love**

D is a door you welcome them through

**W is the wine you beg them to share, but true
Love is abstemious and temperate**

**E is the little sign pinned to the door meaning
come in come in if you are who you think you
are**

**V is the dull knife you cut the cake with,
makes plenty of crumbs you feed to the birds**

**F is the flag that flutters on your roof or the
light that flickers from your eyes--you decide**

**U ah, U is the mystery, the bend in the river,
the voice from the ground**

**G is the gold in the eyes of a panther or the
coins on a plate, you stick them in meters or
give them at church**

**T is Christ's cross, Woden's hammer, the
double ax of Crete, the end of the road**

**H is woman who tells you to build,
and also the house you obey her and make,
and then your joyous breath, almost
exhausted, welcomes her in**

**S is the sound all things make as they pass--
listen hard and listen soft and cherish the
differences**

**I is the girder holds up the roof you think but
the house still stands when you snatch it
away--so what can it be?**

**R is that very roof over your head and the
other outer, the big blue one over your head
where it all begins**

**J is the enlightened saint you will become,
some of you are him or her already--listen!**

**Q is always a mystery, isn't it, quail in the
thicket, queen on her throne, the day the fates
appointed for your going, or coming at last**

**K is the candle you need in the daytime, the
taste of food, the bird song that wakes you
then you go back to sleep**

P is the traveler you spot on the hillside, the hitchhiker on the highway you can't decide to pick up and you've passed, but P is also the hand he waves to you, the hand you dream about, your hand on someone's shoulder or knee

L is an outing on the meadow, loll on the lawns and look at heaven, heaven lets you see it clearly them, you lie on your side and look at a friend

O is the well your mother showed you once, told you of the Milk Lake where you were born, O is the organ they play in the church but you don't go anymore, you have a well of your own

N is the fish that swims through you when you're afraid, dark sea, o voyager, even on the brightest day

**M is the middle, mama, Athene's owl gazing
both ways at once, M is meaning and M is the
mountain you climb to call yourself by your
secret name, out loud, and the eagles will hear
it forever.**

2 September 2019

RED

When I look down at my underwer as I put it on I see the name Hnes pnted over and over on the wrist bnd of some, or just once on others. I know from ads that this is the maker's name, but it is also the Welsh word for story or tale. S every mrning as I get dressed I see this Celtic messge coming at me, Tell me story, tell a tale, summon a story.. Mostly I resist, preferring the subtler fictions of poetry on the way to its exiguous truths.

But today I felt guilty--who am I to resist the commands of my Welsh amcestors? So I appealed to the other side of my mind and it told, or started to, leaving it to me to finish.

So. Once there was a little boy, maybe eight years old and big for hi age, and his skin was red, rue red. Not gaudy fire engine get out of my way red, but softer, dark cherry, October maple. His mother and father were white, and all the neighbors and their childre werewhite--and by white I mean not the dead white of putty or the sweet white of ducks and swans, but the robust pinkish tone people mean when they distinguish white people from black people--and black people are not black either, in fact. But he was red.

His family treated jim carefully, as if he were a much loved sick dog, though he was healthy and active and strong. Active as he

could be when hardly anybody on the block would play with him.

Once a girl asked him Why are you red? He had no answer to give her so she walked away.

So he rode his tricycle and later his bike, bounced a pink rubber ball off the neighbor's stoop till they complained, then off his own till his mother said no. So he rode to the park and rode to the river and rode around the big parking lot when the Sears was closed. There is always something to do, even if you're red.

He loved the rain but was usually told not to go out in it, so he'd sit at the window and watch the rain fall, and little voices of it would ping on the window and slip down the pane. Sometimes he'd have a thought that seemed

wicked to him. In church he had heard about Wicked Thoughts, but they never told him what they were, so maybe what he thought was one of them. This was his thought: what if the rain rained down all over me, maybe it would wash my redness away, and I'd be like everybody else. But that seemed wicked too, he sn't sure why, so he put the thought out of his mind (already he knew how to do that) and just watched the rain.

You can learn a lot from watching the rain-
-how to be quick and how to seem slow, how to cover something totally and still be yourself, how to seprate yourself into streams and rivulets and drops and pools and still come together seamlessly and be yourself. So

sometimes he would send a stream of himself into some place he had read about, and then watch what that flow of him would do there, in the Himalayas or the horn of Africa.

He would do and do and do and still be himself, he could rule a little kingdom and wed a thousand wives and fly over the Matterhorn on his own wings and still be himself, still at home, still at the window, safe and red.

And sometimes he would sing.

That is as far as the story told me. One day I may get around to figuring out what happened to him later, if anything, where he went and whom he loved and what color he was at the end, if there was an end.

2 September 2019

====

**I washed the glamor
off the street
until there was just me,
no pretty girls, no nuns,
no carpenters or beggermen,
no pigeons even, just me.
And I asked the empty road
What are cities for?
At sunset its answer came
but it was in the language
I had also washed away.**

3 September 2019

=====

**Coin on the table
tell me the time.**

**Time to give me
to someone, any
hand will do—
I come to life
only at the touch
of human skin—
you call me copper
or silver but I
call myself yours.**

3 September 2019

=====

**The pagan faith
keeps growing,
gospel of weather,
of light and dark.**

3.IX.19

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**I taste you
all the way down—
are you wine,
are you the wind?**

3.IX.19

=====

**I watched the lake
quiet, much sun,
few swimmers.
There is a grammar
in people moving,
coming, going,
standing still or
stpping up the shore
with hair all wet
and the smile that water
teaches, and teaches
mehow to read.**

3 September 2019

= = = = =

*(I saw a little bird flying very high, and seeing
it taught me this:)*

**The larger the bird
the higher they fly--
there is more air up there,
a lift of heat they ride
while down here the sparrows
barely leap from tree to tree
the meek shall inherit the land
and leave the eagles to the empty sky.**

3 September 2019

=====

**Not a rhumba
not a samba
there must be something
that isn't work
and isn't play,
isn't sleep or dream
or consciousness,
isn't music but you hear it,
isn't a dance and yet you move,**

**there must be something
in between, something
that lives in luxury
between the contradictions,
something that will welcome us
the day we find it.**

**Not a rhythm not a stillness--
I know a man who called it
noisy silence, and a woman
called it joyful pain**

**but both were wrong,
it is not in the contradictions
but between them.
irrational as snowflakes
and just as precise.
Forget everything I;ve just said
and it may spring open in your hand.**

3 September 2019

=====

**I wanted to hear the Nineteenth Century
and put on a record:**

**organ
sonata by Horatio Parker
who was Ives's teacher,**

**and suddenly the organ
was everywhere
shouting through the forests
to find God.**

**Did it summon
or did it plead? It ended
with a fugue so I felt
right at home,**

**we live
in fugal times, when everything
goes away and hurries back changed,
folded in upon itself, we live
in mirrors and the mirrors dance.**

3 Sepyember 2019

=====

**Was I born tomorrow?
that's what music asks,
sighing and bellowing
and billowing and collapsing
into quiet tenderness--
we love music because
music alone knows how to end.**

3 September 2019

=====

**Across the street
and through the trees--
my eyes are slower
than she walks, in white,
hidden in so many leaves.**

**The sight becomes a paradigm
in the grammar of losing,
of forgetting, of wondering
where are they now
who once moved before our eyes?**

3 September 2019

IMAGING

it says over the hospital desk.

What can it mean?

Imagine means
taking a picture
of the inside you,

the insides of you.

At least they tell you
that's you inside yourself,
all boulevards and bells,

a city full of strangers
wandering through your dark.
Then the learned specialist
tells you in simple language

what some part of you already know.

3 September 2019
Rhinebeck

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**Learning the alphabet
all over again
start with a letter
only you know Ж
sounds like the S
in measure, say,
now let the old
tired letters come
dance around Ж
till the town square
is full of loud revelry--
but do you really have a town?**

3 September 2019

=====

**Slepy fingers
tend to skip pages—
apply this truth
to history.**

3 September 2019

= = = = =

**Morning headache
grey road glistens
wind in the trees—
another quiet day
pretending to be me**

3 September 2019

=====

**Stand too long by the barn
and something horse seeps into you.
Or cow. Or old wood panting in the sun.**

3 September 2019

OPEN DOOR

is made of air
breahe in before you go
blithely into any space
there bfore you got here--
almost be afraid. Wind
comes in but never goes out
again—think about that,
the Lesson of the Open
Window. Think twice
about doors. Indoors
and out, reasons for doubt,
soft skin though of going in.

2.

Then chanticlear awoke nd sang:

Put out

your doubt

the sun is here

come welcome her

into the spirals

of your fear.

**And then the cock slept again
waiting for his hens to wake
he thinks of them but they
belong to what they want to do.**

3.

**In the waiting room I sat next to
a pale young woman pregnant
to the max, she rubbed her belly
from time to time she read
flickering images on her phone,
rubbed idly, softly as if to calm
already the life inside her.
I felt blessed to be beside this
miracle, life-making at my side.**

4.

**For she had gone through
the open door
and the door was herself
now and she stands
ready to open up again
and set the ancient message free.**

4 September 2019

=====

**Where would all that beauty go
if it had no redoubt to shelter in?**

**I am a mountain tunneled by truth
follow my dark to find where it lives.**

4.IX.19

= = = = =

**Trees toss
ideas around,
catch what we can**

4.IX.19

====

**We like to dream at night
about ordinary things,
foods and friends,
modest welcomes,
amianle exchanges
because waking life
itself is very strange
there is mpt much
normal in normal life.**

4 September 2019

MAN PASSED BY

Put the age
back in agency,
let the man
stand
by the pond
even in winter
as long
as it takes
for him to become
the ONLY one
he means to be
by standing there.

2.
I see him
from the road
again and again.
I think:
Is he dead
he stands so
still,

every time I pass
he is the same,
one leg bent
as if he leaned
close close
to see the water,
I fear for him
yet there
he is and there
is agency
in standing still.

3.
Day after day
and at night
I see him
moveless in dream,
he wears red,
cold weather,
sometimes even ice
around the margin
someday should I
call for help,
help him I mean,

**I fear to trespass
on that wintry solitude
over the drystone wall
a hundred years,
should I do
something too?
What are the bonds
of agency,
how far does it spread,
how deep is it,
can I help him
and still come back?**

5 September 2019

=====

**Some light in the southern sky—
the protectors come from the Southeast
how dark the mornings already are
east is wherever you are facing
east is always straight ahead
the protectors come from your right hand
even when you sleep you travel east.**

5 September 2019

ECHO CARDIOGRAM

**Today they will make me listen
to the sounds of my heart
bubbling and chirping in a language
of their machine—
they can understand
what my heart is saying,
I cannot.**

**How did they learn
the language of my heart?
All these years it has been
speaking in me, isn't it time
I learned it too?**

5 September 2019

=====

I want to see
a stranger in your face,
I want the bridge
that crosses our river
to lead to another land.
a third shore
where the sun is born
and everywhere is always east,
every way you turn
i turn to you.
And then the stranger
knows me as only a stranger
can, and calls me
with your voice
and I am who
I can be at last.

5 September 2019

POSTAGE STAMP

Two lovers
sit quiet
for once
at a table.
On it a single
postage stamp.
One lover thinks:
Remember
how what I felt
used to pour
out of me in words
and the words
poured onto paper
so everything I felt
came into the world,
thought became things,
ink and paper,
scribbles, scraps,
feelings became things,
fell into the world,
floated, filled

**envelopes, waste
baskets, desk drawers,
flares in the fireplace?
The other lover
thinks: I want
to pick that up
lick it and stick it
on my forehead
and send myself to you.**

6 September 2019

ESCAPADE

Orpheus our friend,
our ringmaster, rival,
way-shower, elder brother,
god on a visit—

women and other lovers
got angry at him
because language knows
so much about them
body and soul,

how dare you know
so much about me
they cried and came
angry at him so he
hid himself in the sea
where he goes on singing
and you can hear him easily
if you open your mouth and sing.

6 September 2019

THE VOCATION

**Ink of the sky
(*of means from*)
ink of the sky
runs down my arm—
Write me, Write me!
the world cries
and life after life
we try to obey.**

6 September 2019

AUTUMN SOON

1.

**First night sleeping
with windows closed.
Surprised after waking
to find blue skies.**

2.

**The quiet road
leads everywhere—
the emptier the road
the closer you are.**

6 September 2019

=====

**I spend an hour thinking about you
and I don't even know who you are.
You walk ahead of me
up the mountainside. On a level
spot you stop, turn round
and have something to say
I'm still trying hard to hear.**

6 September 2019

=====

**But nothing has been said.
The dream words
shuffle off the stage
and leave it bare.**

**I wait
for Mitzi to come dancing in
or some booming baritone.
But the preacher waddles on instead
heavy with sermons.**

**Go
to the mirror, he says,
go to the mirror and study
your face not your scars.**

**I hate his habit of intoning
but what he says is right.**

7 September 2019

HUDOR

The main thing is liquid.

We are water

mostly, still the sea.

We solve. Dissolve.

We are water

with some salt. Soul.

Soul is solid,

sunburn, interlude,

aftershock, songbird,

tiger, tune.

The soul dissolves in the self

a while. The salt is always there,

even when the water evaporates

from the goblet the salt skin's there,

clinging to transparency, claiming.

The soul is a claim.

A name.

*

And it tells time
a thing or two
because it can.
Stone caryatid on Acropolis,
a Roma girl seducing businessmen.
And suddenly it's now—
the opera is over,
the museum's closed,
bend over, drink
from the water fountain,
it's all in you now.

*

It can be the old fountain in the town square
or the bubbler in the movie theater.
A freshet in the Catskills
or even, if you dare,
the Danube's source up in the Schwarzwald —
but bend to drink.
Bend and drink.

7 September 2019

== == == == ==

**I want more than I am.
Is that a ticket
to heaven or to hell?**

7 September 2019

=====

**Autumn on the windows
scribbles sunlight
through the leaves**

**everything moves.
The wind, she is invisible--
but Botticelli
shows them plainly,
the fawn-haired girls
who puff the air along**

**and turn the trees
into dancers and their dance
leaves traces, leaves leaves**

and sun romancing the window glass.

7 September 2019

== == == == ==

**At least taste it
before you throw away,
every culture
as its milk
just on the edge of spoiling,
turning, as we say--
is it music, is it church?
Only a taste will tell.**

7 September 2019

=====

**Was there an Eastminster
to balance the West-?
A monastery maybe filled with monks in
silent meditation
or even quiet chant,
not raving politicians,
prelates in the church of greed?**

7.IX.19

=====

To see and not be seen
is the mermaid's art.
to be the river and pass by
having touched the lives
of everyone and be gone—
is this the benign dictatorship
of death, the landscape over?

Seems right to worry
about such things near a lake—
a lake gets fed on secret
waters, a lake swallows
every cloud that passes,
drinks all our weather. even
takes us in, swimmers,
floaters, boaters fisherfolk,

**all silenced by the shimmering
sheen of surface, pure surface.**

**For we must learn the surfaces of things
because we ourselves are surfaces
and God knows what beings live beneath.**

7 September 2019

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At any moment I may lose
what I have said.
The submarine fills
up with ocean and will
not come again. The punctuation
falls out of the document
and ambiguities arise
not even talmudists can resolve.
Silence always wins (quiet
surface, cool day, quiet lake,
the honor of our ancestors
preserved in bony knees.
Ibn Arabi writes some love songs
Dante overhears. We copy
birds as well as we can.
What will happen when these words
lose what little sense they make?
The lake is beautiful today and calm—
that is enough for me to know.

7 September 2019

=====

**When you have counted every leaf
on this small bush, deciphered
the rune veined out on each
and set them all together to make sense,
the song or story or sermon of that tree,
then you may enter the pyramid—
you know the one—and fall asleep.**

7 September 2019

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