10-2004

octE2004

Robert Kelly
Bard College

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NAMES & ROOTS

In a country where no one knows what their names mean, you are
in a country where every name means the same thing.

Rise up, reject that nominal ignorance.

Fowler, train your falcons.
Kramer, pick up your pack.

Etymology is not simply the history of words.
It is setting words against history,
using them as our weapons to fight back

back to the country of “time out of mind,”
“long ago” mapped as a perpendicular from time,

the meaning of the name is not primitive but radical.

A word is always a stream.
Row back, or with a fortunate wind play the passage up,

amount, return to mountain source,

spring. Wade home to heaven.

The roots of word always reveal what society (usage) is always
taking away.

In the gloomy same-light of commodity capitalism, a word visited
is a chapel with a mysterious (=unspeaking, unspoken) gleam of
another kind of light.
A chapel of otherness.

Not that there is an ‘original meaning,’ not privileging some putative first or primal meaning – not at all. What the etymon shows is other than now, other than ordinary, something in what you’re saying that you don’t mean, that you don’t dream, something the word is dreaming onward – hence, something free. It shines with a light (as if of faërie) that may be deceiving, but that at least differently deceives.

23 October 2004
NYCTHEMERA

my sly bird
an adjective
slipped between friends

a little verb

I try to tell you
I feel abandoned
and find myself talking to the kitchen
the clock listens
talking to the spicebush in the woods
so yellow

but nothing’s missing
no one is gone

only the feeling’s wrong
that runs me.

I feel like Atlas
looking for a place to put it down,
the earth, just a minute or two
to catch his breath

but that’s just a feeling too
hence wrong, hence me—
and I have plenty breath,

nothing missing but everything gone.

24 October 2004
LILA

remembering Joel O’Brien

Explicate the rock
surfaces that face us

with gravid questions
like who and me or

how does sound go
and where

but all the time
we dream we hear

an answer, some Viennese
tree in a desert dream

a Pontiac run wild
the moon with rabies

your littlest red wagon even
out of control, a rush

down the cobbles
of San Marino, communismo,

maybeismo, sounds
something like what we mean

one hears another
tuning the irreconcilable
differences among men
and so making music

so someone says I
heard this man play.

25 October 2004
(from notes of a month back)
Not sure if close or far
not sure if bird or blue
low mountains russet close

purpure far the slants of light
we are. On Burger Hill
cast down by openness

to see the whole broad valley
of every day now all at once
the distances come home in me.

25 October 2004
Compress a mile
meek before Ceres
no names a love
left before you spotted her
in rain in autumn
the stem of history
wound till something snaps

a splurge of narrativity
to hold your life together?
there is no secret
only mystery, the famous
“whereof we must be
silent” honest
etymologists watch
girls eat chocolate in Vienna

what else is new?
what else is you,
crescent over cathedral,
no more travelogues
the minster is forspent
with ladophiles and ivy
you have to look home

to bathroom nook and
fever bible and watch
the snail shells dry out
the starfish remind you
of your mother
who could never speak
properly if that’s the word
all absence and seafoam

the Turkish influence
writes blue letters buried
in the sands gone mile
of Mitte, thought experiment:
be someone else a while
while I be you, at least
once a month be a different one
and have a special day
between the weeks
you dream towards with your skin.

25 October 2004
It takes an old man
to know what’s in a young man’s horn

des Knaben Wunderhorn

sometimes I think he needed words
almost as much as we do

ey held him to the fabric
of the other’s mind.

The last gift
the world gives a man

to let him wrap
himself in another’s mind

against the cold music he outlives.

25 October 2004
retaining fire till the wall of water pleaches the surrounding air: how planets form. from words alone.
to make everybody
look at this

stages of a revolution broken
into sleeps and deaths

the sad commas of imperial history
to tell you this

a woman in the power of her dream
belongs to some man

slavery of imagery alone,
dreams come from the other side

we have all day to try them on
and then the sacred interruption comes

like a starling falling silent and a wing.

26 October 2004
You find out if it’s true
by saying it.
Otherwise
silence nurtures all the lies.

26 October 2004
If this were Arabic
you couldn’t read it
I could not have written it
there would just be sunshine
dust a thin layer on
field notes of the dead archeologist.

26 October 2004
I’ve forgotten all the names
I whispered in your ear
in the days when trust
was our exquisite chemical
exalting us but you remembered.

26 October 2004
Everything forgets.

That is because
it is a thing. In Latin
neuter plural nouns
take singular verbs.

When I forget in turn
does that make me
a thing? They say of old
old people they are vegetables

but never say which ones,
they don’t say the old cabbage
in the corner, the carrot
staring out the window

maybe they too forget
the names of things,
maybe we forget the things
too, not just the names,

and then the day comes
when the things
forget us too. Forgetting
is a political act,

forgetting is the blood
and milk of politics,
they rule us by making us
forget, and I forget

if ever I knew who they are.

26 October 2004
Dying is a lonely life
it said, it said
don’t worry,
all your Novembers
are intact, the blueberries
shriveled on the stem
yesses everywhere,
milkweed fluff
pilgrimng the lower air
everything seeks home.
The loveliest thing
is to be part of everyone.

27 October 2004
MYSTERIES OF THE MIDWEST

catfish determinants
I am calculus she said

I was born in bottom lands
and the tribune never came

I reveal to you a slim secret
I am the Emperor

the one you thought was
lost as an imam in hypertime

over Tigris a blur of smoke
lasts 3700 years,

Emperor I say, enemy
of the white race

my knee hurts
and the Day of the Dead is on the horizon

one syllable in my mother tongue
when the lovers lick each other’s bones

and the wine drinks itself
and the man gasps like Xmas morning

his old teeth full of new air
and I am there
all violins and chicken fried steak
moldy fig music

the lord of the trapeze my husband
slips smooth as the insides of a pocket watch

but no man knows the hour.

28 October 2004
When I say once I mean twice
When I say you I mean you
When I say me I don’t mean anything at all.

28 October 2004
When we keep coming
towards the end of something
the bird walks out of the sky

a hawk usually
towered round by three crows
keeping him in line

then the whole episode is done
our hips press together
on the narrow bench

but that is all,
you talk, I watch the crows
drive the sly intruder home.

Later I learn you didn’t
notice the birds, I notice
I don’t recall what it was

you were saying, something
about your grandmother,
something about Germany.

29 October 2004