2-2003

febB2003

Robert Kelly
Bard College
ARRAK?

Arrack we used to spell it
set fire to it
blue among the raisins

added rock sugar and lemons
you poached it gently
as soon as the birds stopped singing

except the owl who keeps pace
with your drinking
midnight punch and blue flames

the owls are still here
but nothing means the same thing anymore.

5 February 2003
I’ve always been good at telling you
more than you want to know,
endless proliferant detail
to keep from mouthing
what’s really on my mind.
As if I knew. Is that a word?
I specialize in questionless answers,

those wide-eyed children with no fathers
who walk along the highways
or hang out in neighborhood parks,
you see them coming towards you and you look away.

5 February 2003
ALIGNMENT

Standing behind you
I watch you watching
you lean back against me
soft and the world changes.
At the same moment
you’re reading over my shoulder,
everything I learn
you learn too,
we are lost in the physics of each other.
That’s how I know you are the one,
I read about you long ago
in the Book before the Bible,
the one I get up every
morning of my life and try to write.

5 February 2003
THE INSTRUMENTALITY

Bless you in the name
of the highest mother
this new pen
the new word
it’s bound to write
or gouge dry out of clay
or just point to
over there
when it falls from my hand.

5 February 2003
RESPONSA

sans rabbi,
lunacy with no moon.
Steeple by no church,
lunch with no lover.
Loneliness is not so bad,
a dreamless sleep,
a sleeping god.

5 February 2003
Lately people believe in angels again
or talk about them a lot.
I’m no expert in otherworldly ecology
but I have a theory about
why the angels came back.
Into view, I mean, or fashion
because they never left
or were never here to begin with
the way Oldsmobiles are
or parfait glasses full of lime jell-o.

But here they are. Credulous
agnostics watch them on TV,
and the angels love us again,
love us for accessing them, turns them on,
they love us for our appetite,
for our image making energy, our sin.

Angels love our excess. They hate
the desert, austerity, purity,
they have enough of that at home,
they wander through us,
we are their Wednesday market and their silk bazaar,
they take care of us a little bit
along the way, absent minded in their ecstasy.
Our spectacle. Lucid spirits
charmed by our thick things.

5 February 2003
THE MAN

We don’t know what day it is
until it’s done.
We’re not Indians,
we are broken men
white blood seeps out.

Nothing brought us here,
we have no tradition
of how we came to be
where we are, so here
has no liturgy for us,
no meaning in the place
always closing, a gust of wind
you feel and now it’s gone.

Stare into the morning
and get a glimpse of something
riding with the sun on her back.
What is it. We have denied
our desires. It is a comfort
at least to admit that, say it
in so many words. So many words.

6 February 2003

[When I was a child, that’s how all adults seemed. Maturity=depression. Wake up, darling.]
MEMORY IS HARD

Hard frost on beige car
teenage voices out there
sun caught in window curtain

tree talk written all over the snow.
Who is speaking?

and when I learned to read
whose voice whispered in my head
how the letters sounded, how the words
would always try to mean?

Who wrote those books I thought I read?
Can the author disappear
between one line and the next
and someone else slip in,

not him and not me, and not you, not you,
and still go on speaking?

It is like the shadows of all these bare trees
on all the snow. Sun makes the shadow
each tree speaks its own shape in, unyielding.

Yet the shapes change. The shadows
twist, elongate, recede, divide, marry.
While the trees do nothing and the sun
grinds over on its brazen track.
Who is speaking? Who is writing?
And all the scribble changes constantly.
Turning world, whirling sun, static trees —
none of these.

   Everything talks.

Reading rapes me.

6 February 2003
If I could would you be listening. If I came would you be there. If you were there
would we be together or would it be someone else we were pretending to be. If we are
who we are all the way through the afternoon will we be married. If everything has to get
translated first will we understand. If there is no question how will we answer. If the
tree bows low under heavy snow and we can’t even see its dark green color how can we
be sure of anything. If a thing has a name isn’t that enough. If a thing has a name that’s
never enough.

6 February 2003
Close enough to understand but not to touch
the circuit rider of the senses on his broken horse
knows all the tracks that lead to where you live
town square church house attic room

and sometimes he dreams of forcing his way in that narrow door
clattering huge up the dark staircase and stopping
at your doorway, the door swings open and he studies you
you lie in your morning bed and study him

two people who have something to say but don’t know what it is
it has all happened before but they don’t know when
it means something important but nobody knows what

between you and him the horse’s big head hangs heavy
in the doorway, snorting with effort, saliva creaming his lips,
eyes insane, knowing all the answers,
huge animal, little room, his own size frightens him,

it is scary to be so big, to be so huge and alone
between you and him like a stupid moon stuck in the sky.

7 February 2003
CAVE MARKINGS

Be less tentative
out there
make a big mark
lasts like Lascaux
as long as rock
just as easy to read

by touch by optic
firing but
understanding?
such a terror
in the ground
that word inspires
in me who all my life
have stood under
all the things I could

and under the place
where I am standing
another meaning
means its way to me

mooing like buffalo or
crooning like the old
man with antlers
his eyes dissolved in smoke
who with amazing suppleness
leaps out of the wall
you have heard it too
the voice of the stone

anytime you see red

a smudge of color outlasts the sun.

8 February 2003
ODE TO CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

Is everybody under the ground the same?

Does the ‘interior of the earth’ \( \text{interiora terrae} \) have one single culture everywhere?

Why are the cave ‘paintings’ only in a few parts of Europe?

Is it we can see only Europe
or did they happen only there?

They must be everywhere
beneath us and around us.

Do they reveal themselves like \( \gamma \tau \varepsilon \rho - \mu \) when \( (gTer.ma)\alpha \)
the ‘world’ is ready for them?

Space knows time
\textit{intimately}.

Really inside itself it knows another thing.

2.
When you read a rock wall below the hill
time turns itself inside out
and puts on the garments of space

the dirty shirt the torn trousers the scuffed shoes
the uniform of childhood
time dresses as a snotty brat, a wiseass street kid,
time has smelly armpits, time reaches out for you
beneath the earth, you are Rimbaud your nose
pressed to limestone, the yellow comes off,
you are marked

we are marked by what we see.
And I who am terrified of the hallway closet
praise you down there, scrunched,
squeezing your man condition down into infancy
to unlearn language
and learn it again
from the scratches on a wall

that no one made
we know by name

that still speak inside us
where I do consent to stand
stuck inside myself the largest cavern
watching mind light break on an actual
factual wall

you are brave enough to stand against
drunk with all the years spent coming here,

delirium of travelers, delirium of language
spooling up from in us, artesian language
splaying muddy at the cattle’s feet
splashing us, wet in the garments of space.

We say: under the earth.
But most of the caves are really in the sky,
in the mountains, treasure is everywhere,

gTer.ma, treasures buried in the air,
in earth, in solid rock, treasures buried in the mind
long afterward remembered, the voice speaks

IT IS THE SAME VOICE

that is my proposition that is my prayer
the voice that spilt its blood and ocher in the caverns
speaks in our breath, whose, ours, when, now,

the treasure caves of France and Spain
are in the sky: in mountains, buried
under the ground but still above the earth

we climb up to go down.
All the under-art is still over sea level,
right, the face of the sea
is the deepest cave we see,

right? Are we listening
to Vitriol?
Or are we listening to the sky?

It is as if the birds had not been born,
a wild boar charges down the sky.

The thought I think on the hill
from the thought in the valley

the range of feeling between Sinai and Dead Sea
gives the flavor of Judaism and its little daughter Christian daughter
Buddhism is all Himalayas

we think where we are.
When a thought arises in me I am a node of space
a soft howl of an everywhere wind
suddenly locked some special place
this here

this here, phrase we were told never use
when we were children of this foreign language the mother tongue

this here.

What is the here of Lascaux?
I have never been there

it is some pictures in a book
and a terror round my shoulders
of dark rock pressing in,

have you been to Australia
have you seen the portable mountains
the caves they carry with them
a little ocher on dark hands, chalk cheek,
a barked out word, a song

bury the mark in me
so that I speak

later an ocher
hand to touch a woman
to leave my mark
on a suddenly eternal skin

Did we never know?

Did we let the eye do the work of the mouth
did we never taste the sign?

For the taste of a thing is an instruction,
an indiscretion, a doctrine of cabbage a gospel of lamb fat, of cheese,
these inscribe a wisdom of a sort in us
a wisdom I think you can get no other way.

Days in the cave nights in the sky.
The only research is what you feel

what feel entrains and makes you do.

Is that what you do when you look at the wall,
read back to feeling,

the feeling one who was completely alive
felt so strongly it left a mark
skill? skill is feeling
gouged in rock
they tell you
what you always already needed to know,
how the inside happens.

So you guessed to stand
inside and see yourself

starting in time
intime
mesomorph Mallarmé hunkering in messy cavern
reading the explicit with his fingers
to sense the never spoken never

the nevermarks that make absence
come, comes back, comes back

the god you lost by opening your eyes.

8 February 2003
TWO VIENNESE

Time to make mistakes again
we asked them why they walked
that way and why she bent to look
close at the edelsteinkette in
the jeweler’s window on the Graben
where once I bought amber,
isn’t it obvious, it’s on
display, the all of it, the day
itself is mortgaged to the night.

8 February 2003
TWO VIENNESE (2)

Try to make mistakes anew
try asking them to walk by themselves
try a gold sky and she bent to show
try a diamond necklace on
try amber
try to break a window by gaze alone
try to be obvious, it’s on your throat,
try to be all of it, the day
itself tries to reassemble the night.

9 February 2003
A WEEK BEFORE VALENTINE

When I said I loved the smell of incense in your hair
it wasn’t about incense, wasn’t about hair, it was you,
it was sudden evidence that said we are together,

we share a liturgy and a morality
a way enough akin of looking at the world
that our bodies can handle the same or similar prayer.

9 February 2003