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Robert Kelly
Bard College

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So I have hidden in my life
until the sun came out

there are differences all around me
the meat the power

of the air to make me live

1 May 1992
NOONDAY

for Charlotte

But things keep arriving—
there is a master
and a man,

a design that knows its wings
—how broken the toaster is when it won't work,
like a clock or a camel
not like a cracked tub you store carpets in
or a busted toilet you sit on to put on your socks.

Things are still things, my Lady,
mattress springs and people caught
in their ridiculous infatuations
_to be in love with emptiness_

how one body

 cringes near her lady love or model,
by springtime we have changed our shapes.
I miss you for hours half a mile away.

1 May 1992
for Colette La Canne

This is what the pencil said
I found beneath the table
the sun is green today my bird
and we are found by fable

1 May 1992
Death comes the way you oversleep
and suddenly wake where you've never been
midmorning too much light strange cars

2 May 1992
Say something. If only this.
Dream of a dragon, no, a duck.
Dream of a morning. No, a morning.

The grass wet in cool sunlight
of the first kind. Charlotte,
this is to be here for you
when you wake. All of me I insist.

3 May 1992
THE METHOD

Looking hard at what isn't there.

3 May 1992
HERE

And what is here?
Mills Mansion, the clouds.

3 May 1992
ANIMA MUNDI

_for Charlotte_

The measurement of air
needs a great counterweight
the size of earth.

All this on one scale and on the other
you with a silk ribbon in your hair.
Without you I could not breathe.

4 May 1992
THE MIRACLE

for Charlotte

Things migrate
to the furthest corners
of themselves

I come
hunting your Congo
some star
fallen
in an ox-bow loop

living systems
in their trillions
cool
spring flowers
the bronze
beech trees
by the river
coal
every
item is an answer

the romance
is to care.

4 May 1992
Keep it small
like salt
even the biggest
crystal enters

the solution
impatient
to be done
with itself

"I have done
my work"
said Milarepa
"I have opened the dark,"

4 May 1992 / Kingston
And they were drifting
not through the grace of river
but the tesla currents
speaking through the earth

the rock indifferent
to the passage of what-is-meant
as if an eagle
broke through the sky

we hear the thing
that comes to us
a fate keen with a fresh wind
reminding us

this is the way
you have come before
no one is waiting for you
and they will be there

before the sun
presumes to answer me again
I stop my asking
like a man letting soup cool.

4 May 1992
DIE WALKÜRE, ONLY THE FIRST ACT

for Charlotte

Agitation and storm and then the linden trees start to sigh into morning and there is a way again.

Siegmund finds the moon again, her all too familiar hair.

They say that ashtrees are the delicates, can taste the acid in the rain and die from it faster than all others; I say the lindens for all their lichen and glad bees dry out and shiver from this historic weather,

our seasons without antidote,

our chemistry.

What does she do then with his child in her web and a bad decade coming? She dreams of an ash tree bigger than any and in its lowest branches two crows sit talking like him and her of this and that

and there is nothing to human language except what they say and nothing to history but their wings folding and flapping and nothing to notice except every now and then the tree is empty and she still hears their clear unintelligible remarks.

5 May 1992
þæt wæs god cyning

for Charlotte

who spoke to us kindly of the beer in our brass helms
and sifted linden flowers into warm ale to cure us
of wanderlust — this drink stays here —

and whittled spear tips of poplar for the kids
soft enough to press against their cheeks
harmless while they learned their runes,

and who taught us letters, the spikes and snakes
branches shadow on the snow
the caravans of opinionated geese arrowing over

so we could write our own place in the earth
and see ourselves tomorrow as we felt today
and be glad of those strange shadow selves

our yesterdays. That was a good king
who whispered from the red osiers as we passed
carrying our little boats down to the river

and told us stories of the great differences,
those Princesses, who carve the spaces out
between the night and the day, the girls

who haunt the weather there and light the moon.
He taught us everything and shook the walnuts
down from the high branches with his white hand

and watched the wheat grow we planted by and by.

5 May 1992
The specifics
always remember

What is general
is not even a cloud

A woman is warm
under a blue quilt

Even this
isn't enough

5 May 1992 [Original at KTC, 15 III 92]
AFTERNOON

for Charlotte

There is this little piece of time
this now
I wonder
how I can bring it to you

I don't want to listen
to the messages on my answering
machine I want every word
to fall through the window

like an exhausted bird
happy to sit down
on the pinna of my ear
and breathe the truth

of what it takes to be
itself into my stream
of attention that
meandering stream

I want to talk to you
with all of me my
faculties they used to say
those white sheets

chattering on the clothesline
in the high wind
of this cold spring day
where are you

when I need myself
where are you when the hour
understands only the clock
and the lawn is empty

all right I saw a cat
it had a bib it waited
under a tussock
its master read a book

we both were hungry
the sky is far
further away every day
there is a committee

meeting in the hall
pigeons silently the sky
exhaust like calculus
guessing an imponderable

zero somewhere else
where I don't stand
even a skin's width
from your calm hands.

6 May 1992
SALT IN MORNING

for Charlotte

And the spill of the man
watching like a river
for its vast prey
the sea

to introduce myself
he might have said
to her skin
quoting poetry

into your story
and what would be the good of that
all that Mallarmé
and me no better

than to stand there
all my life
like a tree
a tree in the courtyard
a tree for you

who lives in this house?

6 May 1992
What one thinks about is the new trees new
sky what one thinks about is where they go
after they have come and been our summer and have gone
and all the percepts shamble through the dusk
like Lorca sauntering in Harlem sixty years ago
with a big hat on and his eyes on black muscles
and boys dove into the Ship Canal and the water was wet.
Everything is with us. Nothing came
and nothing goes, we surf the percepts
that think us onward. This wrist of mine
scarred from a tree trunk last week
is the Middle Ages. The leaves crack their throats with green.
Time's puberty and we can always close our eyes.

7 May 1992
for Charlotte
CALVARY

for my Mother

Still near the cross the rememberers wind
sweat-soaked silks around their forearms—
strange phylacteries of dust and blood
to remember and only to remember.
The crows know. Margraves from Arabia
toe nervously the silt
dried on their chariot footplates,
the treadles of the Emperor
clatter in Lucania,
the Jewish sky is dark.

I never knew what was happening,
I was a bird alone in the sky
always,
no mother to counsel me
she said,
so I worked from my earliest days
at a job ill-paid
left before daylight and walked
a mile to the first of three buses

where it was always winter
always going out from the heart of the City

the grey places.
And now on that stone hill the habit
of ninety years is to be staying.
The stones of Saint Sebastian know their own
or know nothing. Nothing but birds
and the Expressway, gulls and Shea Stadium,
traffic and rented limos
carrying people too exhausted to cry any more,

the long misspellings of the heart
have written their pages into obscurity.
What did she mean? I have no one to ask,

and that is what she meant, we have no one
to ask the main questions,
we choose our destinations
alone. Where we come to rest
baffled by the changes
that always come too fast
for even the Irishest
queen, Mairead, there are palm trees
up the boulevards of Cork
neither of us has ever seen,

there are weathers where no one goes.

7 May 1992
SONNET

for Charlotte

Now so much of it is lost inside me,
the ruby ring and wine-stained mezzotint,
the ivory god with the bananas and a republic
filled with middle-class somnambulists
carrying white beeswax candles never lit
except at noontime — these are
my livestock and my poetry, my pure
white river ducks come home to sleep.
So much of it is found in an empty hand.
There the river is still waiting for its bird,
something large and dark with never-ending
plumage and a mind full of all lost things
it knows by tune and by color and by smell.
And that's the wood I use to build my trees for you.

7 May 1992
ERIDANOS

One of the few places Franz Kafka travelled, at least in his human two-foot suit-wearing form, was (as Guy Davenport beautifully remembered for us a few years ago in "The Airplanes at Brescia") northern Italy. So far from Prague as the Po seems and the Swissy lakes of the Como region, we are made to recall that the whole region was part, as Kafka’s blackbird chattering Bohemia also was, of the great Austro-Hungarian Empire---whose subjects could, well into my own father's lifetime, travel unimpeded from Lake Constance to the Black Sea, and from Venice to the borders of Russia.

Will it come again.

Name of the river Po. A constellation.

Riots today in Dushanbe, capital of independent Tajikistan.

The Tibetans call the Persians tadhziks.

Will it ever come again, the time when we can walk with Kafka across the boundaries of human experience into the cold cleanness of the night sky?

Ironic that he, poet of bureaucratic intrigue and unexpected restraints, poet of withheld permissions, should travel unconcerned and unexamined over territory we would now need three or four passport exhibitions to traverse.


There is a song, a complex spiderweb of anthems to be sung. *How can you sing the light?* poets since Pindar have been asking.

Answering. Dutch girls with raw winds up white skirts, red knees, red cheeses.

Chestnut trees by the canal. Austria, my Austria.
Her cheekbones reflected in the lake.

Go back to love, where the snipers lie awake on rooftops. Watch the dusty road to Kalimpong, wait for the monsoon when lovers gasp in the first wet, in hammocks, silvery rain, in June.

...7 May 1992

[Originally begun in July 1989 as a review of Eridanos Press books.]

When I began to write this piece three years ago, none of those countries existed as such.

Even now I don't know their flags. Except:
Armenia - tricolor, orange red and blue, what order?
Croatia - does it have the red checkerboard it once had?
Latvia - dark blood white dark blood tricolor
Lithuania - tricolor yellow red and green
Ukraine - blue over gold.

So many things to remember.

The agitprop of memory dangling me along.

Save me from Mexico, the geologist's hammer, Trotsky's death we grieve for still, the carrying away of the man of mind, his replacement by the man of will. The bitter history of to want.

Answering: Mauve flowers heaped up cones on the linden trees.

She waits for her lover at the turn of a phrase, by the corner of the argument she fingers her hair, lightly, lightly, the streetlamps in front of the Staatsoper.

The shift of stress is delicate, like streets in the Sixth. So much to remember. The church and who prayed there, the man and what he saw.
I saw the heavenly host crying out with their throats full of gold and I couldn't understand a word, and a voice spoke:

A word is not to understand. A word is to endure.

And I passed into the spaces between empires, and I was time.

... 7 May 1992 ...
It was in Bregenz
in the little square
tilted up the street
between drunkards
swaggering
to their cars

a restaurant of brown veal
at evening
when the blue tile
of the church oven
was cool for June

Ascension Day tomorrow!
Christ's Heavenferry
up to glory
out of the fact
of all this town

I stared for my part
down at the cobblestones
lost in the discovery
of something new to remember.

7 May 1992
They move towards us
and they possess
the skills of nothingness

they wait in malls
and they scarify the hour
with invisible tattoos

they choose
from windows the exact
summer hue of emptiness

they have signed a contract
with a humble power
they can forestall

after sixteen short lifetimes
they are born as sticks
in a purple kingdom

without the least excess.

7 May 1992