

9-2008

sepB2008

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "sepB2008" (2008). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 645.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/645

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Castrati singing the night away
into a king's bad ear
how old we everything are!

but if we castrate a soprano
do we reach a timbre no ear can hear
young or old

and then emasculate the silence itself
and hear what lies out there
screaming on the other side

Higgs' boson clinking
against diamond chips caught
in the gizzards of singing birds

the world is beginning again
every blessed minute and we never notice
why should we

there is nobody there to see.

5 September 2008

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Can I caught me?
Like those Milwaukee
Polish so long a-
go she told me cried

caught him caught him
he couldn't flew!
of a parakeet escaping
from their Oldsmobile

and they knew
to use what in Slavic
would be the perfective
or definitive aspect

that in English just
means past, forever,
God looks down from heaven
and sees one more bird is gone.

5 September 2008

THE ACOLYTE

When I'm close enough to the book
to smell the candle
or the broken window still keeps out the wind
I know that magic is.

We falter
by design: someone means me
to stumble, fall, recruit my earthly force
from sudden contact with the earth
on knee or pulse of wrist.

Abaddon
maybe, or Belial belike, or a better angel
meant to prophesy in me and catechize—
so there I stand, a bit bruised naught worse
and what's to kindle up my breakfast fire
but a bird!

Rubbing the shadow of his wings
over the gleam of broken glass
he makes smoke rise, and from the risen fume
steps forth the shape of the one I love,
come to me at last, my lust
is all of love now that I hear her speak.

6 September 2008

OF REVELATION

Aleph. Or bet
your life on a camel
lurching through a door,

your door, your house, lover,
and the toes of its soft feet
spread sand on your red carpet,

lover, magical sand the way
the whole Sahara
blows through your little window.

And some people don't believe
in ghosts! Every word
we hear is spoken from the grave

and by the dead, their voices
agitate our mouths
with what seems like sense—

the intellect's
interminable propositions
from which we guess at last

the nature of the dark from which they speak.

6 September 2008

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Orca. Or belua. Or a sea
monster girning
its fangs at me or the claws
of a dragon guised
as a backhoe but its groans
mornings lets you know

the truth. The truth is a monster,
it wakes you from your bed
as if your body were a nasty thing
your mind is all allergic to

and no way to get away from it.
Belua. The sea-beast
risen horror-fold from deeps
to be around me and be me.
Orca. The whale or sea-mount
with eyes and swallowing.

Truth is a monster. No way
but today. The clammy feel of now—
some mornings the sea
is a jungle and strangles you with vines

instead of just drowning you serene in air.

. . . . 6 September 2008

HAPTICS

Break this. The encroaching.
Intrude on yourself. Be a border
then cross it. Science of touch.

Is a border the same as a boundary.
Boundary to or of me.
Do you cross. Or is it you who crosses.

Guesses, so many guests.
If it breaks it was a border.
If nothing happens you haven't become.

It is still where I am
unbroken. No kind of flower.
More like a shadow

broken by what lets it be. Move.
The ground the back part beyond the scene.
Are you part of the scene.

Am I the boundary of a valid region?
Why does a flag humiliate?
Because we carry it.

A flag doesn't fly by itself.
Break a flag the field doesn't feel it.
Or the wind. But break a cloud the rain falls.

Loving you is all about difference.
War makes everything the same.
Break it again. Small pieces.

Fingernails are vestiges of footsteps.
Bird flights. A new kind of animal
would not need a heart. Air is enough.

We're just trying to mend the edge.
Numbers, help us.
Shadows flee before us back into the light.

Some men with no bones of their own
want to break the bones of other men.
Break this instead of war.

I am no Stalinist, sweetheart,
I do think the syntax of how we speak
controls the syntax of how we live

a little bit, what goes with what.
Who. Who goes down to the cellar
to bring up an old chair we need.

Who gets to sit on the chair.
Later, who squirms in the chair
and the chair breaks, the lovers fall

laughing as they hurt.
Break this and this is always left.
When something breaks it takes no time.

Break time instead.
And what comes out.
A feeling like milk in the quick cut air.

But all your life you've been trying
to break milk.
Who are you now?

Who has crept into my mind?
Why do I even think it's my mind
when there is speaking?

When I say you I see no one.
No one in mind. A door
in the middle of a field.

Break the middle.
Find the boundary. Here.
Edge. Rim. Border. Limit.

The frontier. I cross
into you. At last. It is said.
A word once broken,

twice broken. Never been good
at boundaries. Ask any of them.
There is an encroaching in me

that is a good part of my charm.
Harm. Break this.
A boundary is the delicatest touch,

a quiet mistake. A prince
in disguise. A bird full of skies.
Lies. Break what I see

and what is left. It supposes itself
to be me. Break that little word
again. Then break the least of all.

The smallest word that rules the world.
I am no darling after all.
The word is Stalin. It destroys.

Not good at the frontier. Hide
from the crevasses, make love
to the casual patrol. Chair.

Chair creaks under sudden love.
Memory you cheapest movie
you cost all my life.

Break what I remember.
Find what I forget.
Isn't that what the doctor said.

Break the doctor. Swallow the bill.
No one has ever escaped his shadow.
Sell it. Sell it to a man you think is there.

Sell it to a mirror.
Just give me anything that breaks.
Then you'll see.

7 September 2008

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There's no such thing as a parrot
and no such thing as a cage.
A deer is stepping through the trees
daintily. So much I'll grant you.

The rest is sort of television,
a black eye. A hangnail of the mind.
There is no plot. People
are just things to one another,

mostly blond. I smell a skunk.
It is afternoon, no electricity,
dappled sun on apple trees
that bear no children.

Sleep now in the blue sky
flutters through leaves. Sleeping
by woods is halfway home,
a really different kind of night

show itself shamelessly in light.

7 September 2008

PASSACAGLIA FOR THE DAY TWELVE TS'IQU'IN

1.

Twelve birds.

No matter what color they were
knew what the color of my house was,

*green under red, red under white,
white under amber glaze* and no name yet.

In the pagan crayon boxes they called it Flesh.

2.

Sat in the atrium reading a book
and shadows whirled slow
upon the wise or witless page
till I looked up and saw

a dozen vultures, slow enough to count,
drawing a big circle over me,
me and all my buildings,
me and my book.

3.

A man doesn't know whether at all
he's a part of something or a whole.
Didn't even think to notice even
what words he was reading when
all those birds were busy reading him.

4.

I suppose they were linked.
I suppose words can summon
birds from the empty sky.
I suppose birds arriving
suddenly can make a man speak.

5.

And suppose a feather had come down,
let fall in gracious gift or courtly accident
while they're jousting up there, ancient
dignities brokering their rivalries
into a dance, the oldest battle of all,

*strife of oil'd bodies in noonday light
where none may touch the other
they strike the blow of foot or hand
against the partnering air, we bless them
for their misses*

the space between
the quick dancers is what gets written
into the reverently observant heart.

6.

Yes, that feather.
You picked it up
from what bears us.
Yes, from the lawn.
I lied. There was
a building but no city.
A dance but no one there.

7.

The blind man knows the bird
is passing overhead,
he knows the color.
Take that as your topic
sentence, class,
and parse the dark.

8.

Time to shake a tower.
Alight on rose bush
lightly, you.
Pretend to be just
a piece of color
making sense on the lawn.
Dew, wash my face too.

We are caught
in all this clearing,
this strange habit of
every day begin again.

9.

Like a politician with hard words
but honest in this one's heart
though Suasion was strong in him
as if an official eagle perched on his head
shrilling out commandments.
O he meant to mould tender minorities
into blunt majorities
and voting was the prayer he bade them pray.
To have opinions about things,
he sang them, is to be a man.
But the eagle had two heads of its own.
To feel nothing of what you feel
is to live forever, mortal.

10.

Twelve men turn into eagles
you know how it is
you sit around the campfire telling tales
then one by one you start to fly away

something about fire, or the fish
you caught and fried,
I warned you to avoid the liver
but you wouldn't and now you're in the sky

where all strange changed things are
almost transparent unless you look real hard
but you're not doing the looking
you're doing the god dance on the cloud

and your wives look up wondering whatever.

11.
Sharing too common
and a word overhead—
I have to stay
far from crowds these days.

My talking exhausts me—
think what it does to them!—
so in mutual consideration
I stay away. Because

I can't not talk. Even
when no sound comes out
I'm talking. Everything
tries to get said.

So today, tomorrow,
I stay home and leave
the phone alone. I care
but from afar.

I need you, but not now.

12.

Or is there a quiet
word knows how to say?

Imagine the long
forgiveness of the stone

on which we stand.
A continent of lust

engulfed by the sky.
The cities sink above us

far, until the stars are
all that's left of our dear streets.

8 September 2008

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In the last light
a little bug
springs into a sun patch
on the lampshade
housewall, leaf.
Leaves. The forest.
Everything is a door.

8 September 2008

COURTLY LOVE

Finding the again inside the way,
like flour in stale bread.

Remembered
things are evasions of something
mysteriously near at hand.

The weather
loves you, Lady, is how the trobador began
and then he whistled like the wind,
hopped up and down on the table
like thunder, winked like lightning,
kissed the nape of her neck like rain—
ready to die for that water.

I do not love the natural, she said,
show me the better. So he wept
like laughter, fell on his back
like a priest chanting, hit his head
on the wall gently like a flower
coming out in April. *Better, better*,
she said, *but you're still in the world—*
I want to go out of it, can you take me?
And she was weeping too now, pressed
against him. *I knew the language*
of it long ago, but now the sky
is locked against me. I love you
but promised you nothing –
only the words did
and they betrayed us both.

8 September 2008

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Could I hold your street in my hand
and open all the windows.
At last the red cat on the fire escape
sleeps on your sill.
At last your meaning squeezes me out.

8 September 2008