

10-2008

octE2008

Robert Kelly
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "octE2008" (2008). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 655.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/655

This Manuscript is brought to you for free and open access by the Robert Kelly Archive at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Robert Kelly Manuscripts by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

= = = = =

he gives you the go-ahead to write about death
—Kimberly Lyons

It's not as if you're waiting for him to come home,
you're not Penelope, you're not even a girl.
You're more like God here, patient if angry,
waiting for him (who's made of me and everybody else)
to get tired of haring around, and worse,
and just come back to his own mind.

Waiting for him to sit on a chair by the window
and watch carefully the nothing going on outside.

My secret name for this has long been *Bergen Street*
in rain – you know what I mean, you made it up.

You made me up too, as far as that goes, I mean
as far as making and things getting made. The moon
and all the nightly personnel. Where do
people live anymore? And what are they supposed to do
when people die? When Guillaume dies
and Gérard reads the end of *The Little Prince*
at the funeral and says not a word of his own,
I know the French dress down for funerals
but I'm a little *choqué*, you know? Death
is the one thing you can usually get into
a decent conversation about, I mean everybody
talks about it and nobody actually does it
so we're all at liberty to think as we please.

Till you get into the act, then I don't know.
I want to survive till more people love me—
is that asking too much? And bread and cheese,
you know me and cheese. You made me
different from everybody else, just like
everybody else, as Debussy sings so softly
at the end of the piece, I even like it sometimes,
at dawn, when the light's coming over
the hill and the music is ending
and how will I ever get up and go to work?
What do you care? You didn't make
work. We did that. We were finished
already, perfect, when you got done.
And left us to play with what you made
until we forgot to look out the window.
Even though in fact we never left home.

20 October 2008

LIABILITIES

1.

Something nearly nearby
just heard it
uneasy making, mouse in wall,
something wrong with heartbeat
heard, how

 you can't trust your ears
anymore than an old man

what a young one wants to do
as if someone just once
turned and said
I am the Grand Canyon of the Colorado
come take me to bed.

2.

Unreliable labels

liable to be liabilities.

Headline. Enough is too much.

Satis nimis.

Link more, lease less.

The lees of lies

embitter my cup.

Whatever you really need

is there in your garage already.

Ah, those French, they were the first

drove around Europe like mice in the walls.

Even if you don't have a garage

you know how to say it.

The label is what matters. The label

is matter. Whatever it signifies

is just an accident.

But the accident outlives the car—

philosophy is just a wounded snake

won't curl up and die until we do.

3.

But the mice need us.

The wall the pantry the tasty glue.

Sharing a table with eternity

it's like.

Redstart,

field mouse, sparrow, shrew—

eternities of slowly changing different ones

populate the tender recent æons

of our observation.

You and me I mean

as long as we were gross enough

to stand there and be counted.

The weight of air

pressing on the ears

incarnates

all too specious evidence

that someone *spoke*.

Desperate

inferences,

from sound to word from word to

speaker of the word,

as if the island

really is inhabited.

Every day is Friday. Footstep in no sand.

4.

Evidence, that's all

I'm asking for.

You know how hungry we can be
for what seems.

A two-foot shimmer on the wall
with a face in it five hundred years
and we bow down.

Or sometimes on Mary's cheek
in some Slavonic church a tear rolls down
and that's enough to keep me from my sins.

A while – and then a whistle
and all the other evidence floods in.

And Pindar's ode takes flight
against the common sense
that holds all things equal we can touch or taste
or see or hear about and sell our souls to have,
leaves us damp-thighed in high poetry instead,
the only piety

the heart can't break.

21 October 2008

= = = = =

I've been licking your ears
for fifty years
and you just think I'm talking

and from all my deep breath fussing
tongue-tip round your sacred whorls
you fancy you hear words—

it's not me, love, it's language talking.

21 October 2008

= = = = =

We know only what we think you mean.
We are patient, your patients, and we think
if we wait long enough you will explain
yourself and ourselves and we will be at peace
or war or in love or other namable condition
and our minds, weary of indecisiveness
and all that guessing, will sleep in certainty.

21 October 2008

**SPEAKING FROM A LINE
IN EDITH WHARTON'S "ARTEMIS AND ACTAEON" (1901)**

Luring thee down the primal silences

she says she says,
Wharton speaking, her mouth in Artemis or
Artemis in hers,

what can a poet do
when all the words come hurry up inside
find mouthpiece ready

so where are those golden silences
then, when goddess whispers to him, my votary,
my victim,

no way you can look away,
you see me in everything and everything kills.

21 October 2008

= = = = =

The light is different on the trees
I mean the light itself keeps changing
not just the way we see it through the leaves—

in groves there comes an exhalation from the earth
that seems the conversation of the trees
with the darkening sky, a welcome or a marriage

or growing old the way we do and then reborn
as the air moves through the air. Did you think
light could ever be alone? Nothing

is ever alone. At certain hours even
you can see all three: light, breath, leaves
deciding something with calm hands

we'd say, that's how it feels, they're
doing something, air and light and woods,
deciding, doing, and we're what they're doing to.

22 October 2008

OLD SONG

Prerecorded mysticism

but I want a dance
around your hands

a thread of light
unclosing circles
of ordinary need
our dreads and all our musts

what kind of circles
can I spill you back
wetting the green a deeper curve?

a circle that has only names not numbers in it

and all of them wake up and tell me you
are my only geometry

21 October 2008
(23 X 08)

WHAT SEEMS TO BE A LETTER BUT TO WHOM

Having discharged my obligations to church and state I rest, rewarded with an ordinary Thursday. I suspect it is secretly the princeliest of days. Or not such a big secret, since it is named even in our language for a powerful god. Or god of power. Is there a difference?

Blue birds are in the air though I can't see them. Their commentary is unmistakable, peremptory over by the feeder, over the fence, over the sawdust and woodchips where a maple went down.

You would think from all this that I'm in the country. Perhaps, but it is more evident that I'm in the world. Your world. Yours. Scarcely mine, hardly mine, hard and scarce and yours all the time. The only part of it I share with you is this habit of saying so. Of all that timber, only words belong to me.

Wood chips. Words as chips of something else?

Query: what tree is it that, felled, turns or can be turned into words?

You see my problem. I know you do because you know everything.

Query: how do I know that you know everything?

Because you always answer.

Query: how do I know that your answers are correct?

Because they are always relevant, pertinent, interesting. As we say in the blissful vernacular of this pleasaunce, you always give me something to chew on.

For Adam and Eve were gardeners, the book tells us. I find that very interesting. Adam delved and Eve span and who was then the Gentleman? I can read that riddle.

There was a garden. It needed gardeners. And so...

But why did not the One who made it, in just one blink of the sun's eye, made the whole garden and the plain it lived on and the desert all round and the mountains that hemmed it under the blue sky and the land where Cain would later flee and the sea around him and the stars up there, why didn't that One just make a garden that took care of itself, the way the stars do, the way our weather does to this day?

Or did He actually do so. Then A & E came along and meddled with it, and we've been meddlers ever since?

I'm losing the thread here. I meant to say or ask something common and easy: were any gardeners really needed. Did A & E take a look around and decide they'd rather play with flowers and bushes and

trees and fruit *instead of* some grander enterprise of light-drenched liberty.

Was the forbidden fruit no apple, but agriculture itself?

The Arabs say the forbidden fruit was *wheat*. Can't be a nomad and grow wheat. Wheat is food for the sedentary. Our sin was to settle down, settle for. Our sin was to sit down.

Looking at that conclusion, I know one of me must be wrong. Not the logic (specious as that science is) but any conclusion at all.

A question is always only about itself.

A question is more like a piece of music, or a sonorous poem in another language.

Be glad, a question tells me, I have something to think.

But you, it seems strange that I'm telling you all this, since you know it to begin with, since you are the beginning of knowing.

But not, perhaps, the beginning of telling?

Query: is that where I come in?

Query: what were Adam and Eve *for*?

Query: what am I for?

This is perhaps just a modernish version of the question mentioned above in Eden: if they weren't put in the garden to garden in it, what were they supposed to do? What was the work, luminiferous or carnal, they were intended for.

. . . 23 October 2008

PERPETUAL WAR

How big to be as one is!
Exclamation point a child
stands on his head

just long enough for the earth itself
all of her
to creep up into his head

through the foraminal suture
(the soft spot on your head)
and make him her own.

Now let him stand up and sing
or sling balls around or sulk
like you-know-who in his goatskin tent

too warm in this southern epic
where death's little list keeps growing
him with a bronze sword in somebody's chest

to be a mockery of a man.

War is the song of a common mistake,
blue flower stamped into mud

but it did its once work
we saw it for a minute
and what we see once lasts forever

in us so what were we fighting for?
A slave girl or a slave economy,
skip the sermon, last night he saw

dancers whirl white-skirted on the plain
and all he could think about
was The flowers finally learn to dance,

oh lilies turning in so much dark
when will I learn to move
into the person I'm supposed to be?

24 October 2008

= = = = =

Poetry is always Remedial Writing
teaches
what a thing actually means
by saying so

not what you think
but what it says
true beyond meaning.

24 October 2008

= = = = =

November mist here in *Oktyabr*—
something with the calendar,
rue Revolution.

24 X 08

TWILIGHT

In this big light airy room
the mist surrounds
at last the tempered spaces
where the imagination
becomes actual one
moment deathless a soft world.

24 October 2008

VALSE SUITE

What a waltz
understands is
everything,

the buzz of music
on its round
to create us as we are

what the waltz
here understands
no one does

and its flees with me
into the muscle forest
where men come to life again

and water trickling
through fallen leaves
is music enough

for me to be me.

24 October 2008
(to the *Valse suite* of Prokofiev)

DEATH

One thing I have against death
is that everybody goes there.
And I don't like what everybody does.
I'm too snobbish to die.

(Or death is the final cure for snobbery.)

24 October 2008