

11-2008

novA2008

Robert Kelly
Bard College

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

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "novA2008" (2008). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 657.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/657

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.

... RUBAIYAT

X.

Who knows enough to analyze the gleam
Comes off the silver cup and tells us
Sun sent me, or his mother did,
To make you taste her with your eyes.

XI.

Who is the mother of the sun you say
But scoffing is too easy on an autumn day.
Keep what's in your hip pockets warm—
The wind belongs to no one still.

XII.

Everything you witness is a déjà vu,
A herd of dolphins telepathing verse,
Their minds too frisky for the peace of prose
And everything happened before you see it now.

XIII.

Nonetheless (forgive one more holy paradox)
You were born too soon. The beasts
Of burden waited, and the gizmos you needed
Are not ready even yet in time's toyshop.

XIV.

Content yourself with water: alkaline
A little, lucid often, and always, always blue
However faint your eyes are grown
From plucking tenderness out of scary wisdom.

XV.

Content yourself is what I meant to say,
Colors are enough to wear, light to eat.
Tell me what trees need and I'll sell you
The amber necklace on the lap of God.

XVI.

Too many instructions, not enough milk.
The children look up at the crucifix
Studying it for a clue to what to do.
How can they free themselves and help Him down?

XVII.

I was there locked in the room like you
When a sign first was painted on the wall.
What? we cried out and still cry,
What does it mean to point to anything?

XVIII.

Language reveals radical instability—
If you knew the thing you wouldn't need its name
And surely wouldn't need to speak it out
Like a drunk at midnight giving back his wine.

1 November 2008

THE GENDER OF IT

When there are ten of me there will be more
But till now I have been only one, grave
And beautiful perhaps but still a singleton
Mooching up time's pebbly beach – no sand
For Friday's skinny foot to leave a print—
No wonder Creeley called it *El Noche*, night
Itself is masculine, my rival, boss of all
The women he has locked away so I walk alone
Yearning for them with a vast obliterating hunger
And aching feet. The rocky road to sleep.

2 November 2008

... RUBAIYAT

XIX.

When they come hurrying close to see
A madman dancing like a bear in chains
It will be me, and they will condescend
To praise my imagery, my deft vocabulary.

XX.

The arrogance of lovers knows no bounds—
She knows her breath is dearer than my own
To me, and anything she thinks is my philosophy
And where she sits down it is my promised land.

XXI.

There is a kind of courage no lion knows.
It has to do with choosing not to kill,
Maim, avenge, devour or even criticize.
It's the courage of sunlight on the lawn: *Leave alone.*

XXII.

I'm not smart enough to say the things I say
And long ago forgot the things I know,
I can't tell the future from the past
Or what I want from what will come to be.

XXII.

All I can give you is a mess of shadows
But the shadows I give will make you live.
They have a hard edge that breaks the light
So you stop seeing what you've always seen.

XXIII.

A better prophet would rub his skin with oil
So not even the passing breeze would distract him
From that unreal kingdom where he sends his mind,
Where nothing happens and all their eyes are blind.

XXIV.

The future he reckons to be a paltry thing,
The kind of bet a child might make
Watching two raindrops wiggle down the glass—
Once we have chosen, we lose the right to see.

2 November 2008

SOLARIUM

An ugly word for sitting in the sun among old sick people glassed round against the wind. I remember from some hospital long ago. Made me understand that only when the sun marries the wind can it give us life. Otherwise it's a far-off smirk at our faiblesse.

2.XI.08

... RUBAIYAT

XXV.

I have a contract with the crows
No man must understand the terms of,
Only that something is done every morning
And something said. And they know everything.

XXVI.

Whatever you say about death, death must be rich
Since it encloses a million moments like this one,
Friendship and starlight and golden autumn leaves
And yesterday's white-columned sycamore against the sky.

XXVII.

Closes, hence encloses. The book snaps shut,
The girls in their Victorian dresses giggle up the stairs,
The fire in the fireplace stops mid-flame. I look
Around the room: complete with everything but me.

XXVIII.

Whoever thought he would be born again
Or looking at his mother's breast exclaim
O Christ I'm me again, and her dear milk
Will rot my teeth and make me toil for eighty years.

XXIX.

No, the sweet thing you taste is ignorance,
Smiling sunlight on the rippled lake
Is your scatterbrained instructor come
Drunk as usual to teach you bad Latin again.

2 November 2008

... RUBAIYAT

XXX.

You know why I feel so guilty all the time?
Because the world surrounds me with such
Wonders to look at, love, taste, remember,
And think about. Why have I been given so much?

XXXI.

It might have been he waited because another
Crossed before him that slack cold creek,
He was over and didn't even wet his feet
But now his body was made exclusively of air.

2 November 2008

.... RUBAIYAT

XXXII.

O to stay home the soldier said
And do all my warfare in her little room
And conquer silence by the close of day
And sleep the moon away with understanding.

XXXIII.

On the street the women watch their men
In pretty uniforms trotting off to war
And think: These are our liberators
Freeing up by leaving us alone.

XXXIV.

The President watches on White House TV
Guessing how many of these boys will die
“And with each death” he thinks
“There’ll be that much more life for me.”

XXXV.

Priests imams and rabbis bless them
With ritual smiles as they go oft to kill.
Maybe a few of them at times recall
Nowhere is it written that God has enemies.

XXXVI.

God who made us made us prompt to kill
They think, and go home to their dinners
Careful not to remember how their income
Comes in from calling prompt ones ‘sinners.’

XXXVII.

But I know little of these matters, might be wrong.
For me a church is just an artful stone
Shoved up against the sky to notify
Whoever's up there how beautiful we are.

XXXVIII.

When I say 'we are' I mean 'we do',
For all of us brides married to some work
That lifts us by our rapturous assent
Towards some new wit or word or shape or song.

XXXIX.

Sleep now and let your anger sleep,
You know nothing worth hurting for
And all your politics is just a baby's dream
Your mother tries to wake from time to time.

XL.

No need to take them at their silence:
They mean something and mean it at you.
You can't help their hair, the stupid clothes.
But you can listen in them, you can fantasize.

3 November 2008

.... RUBAIYAT

XLI.

The horror of getting old is selfishness
it's all about me and what I need
and people are good for what they do for me
and I can hardly bear sharing my food with my mouth.

XLII.

Bad enough they say to be old and sick
But being old and healthy seems a kind of crime.
I'm twice the age they told me I would die—
Should I laugh at those doctors or at me?

4 November 2008

PILGRIM

for T.D.

You walked alongside the men
Who walked beside the pilgrims.
You noted what they noted down
Of what they saw and could not see

But wanted to, the way men do
Who write their poems, men,
Always men, who trail alongside
The action but do not act

And call their inaction by some high
Name like satire or politics or truth.
But you know what they really are—
Men afraid of God embarrassed into song

By acts of unquestioning devotion.
Or do they ask questions too, the poor
Sore-footed, bad-breakfasted pilgrims
Of the actual, do they doubt too

As they clamber up the scree
On bleeding knees, their lips mumbling
Prayers children learn and grown-ups
Can't forget? Pilgrims and their poets,

You watch them with such kind eyes.

4 November 2008

XLIII.

You're not afraid enough to understand.
Only a coward dares to walk this street,
Head teeming with images, eyes on fire,
And by the light of that anxiety see God.

XLIV.

The voters crowd in to fill the urns
With white and black opinions.
I put my stone in too then sit outside
Trying to make sense of my hand.

4 November 2008

.... RUBAIYAT

XLV.

But was there a man here before me
Who waited on the line and left a thought
Behind like a fleeting scent of aftershave
That asked me: I understand the world—do you?

XLVI.

Morning I marvel how people seem to know
Their places in the scheme of things and hurry there
Brisk as breakfast to the task proposed.
Sluggish, confused, I know only what I feel, if that.

XLVII.

It's weary work saying what you feel,
So much easier to just feel something else.
A feeling passes like a jet plane overhead
On its way to a city I will never see.

XLVIII.

All of a sudden it was time for something else,
The zebras scattered and the dancers fell asleep.
I pulled a vast tower up out of bedrock
And called it Dawn. Be alone with me.

II.

I was the sky then, and then I was a little boy
Frightened of the brick wall of my house,
Scared of ivy, robins, the angry cloud at evening
Was there a blood stain on everything? Was it me?

L.

A bell goes. But who listens? After,
There is just the sky. Which is why
I think I hear what I hear. Something,
Then nothing. And here I am, still me.

LI.

Thinking I can outrun my fears and desires
I come to a river that laughs at me.
I sit down and try to outrun my thinking.
Nightfall. I think I hear the river crying.

LII.

An eyelash caught in my eye—
Is it mine or someone else's?
Hurts just the same. Who owns the pain?
Body is the first trap, we squirm to get out.

LIII.

The leaf I carried home to look up in a book
Is dry and split wide-open now
Still unidentified. A man like me
Could manage to forget a whole library.

5 November 2008

= = = = =

I'm left to carry home
The chariot meant to carry me—
Remember old music,
A pattern broken
Till the heart hears.

Bach or before.
A brook in springtime,
A leaf landing on your shoulder
Light as a shadow.

Fear.
A continent uninhabited.
A rose on the driveway, intact.
The natural virginity of light
Does something to me.
Forgives.

5 November 2008

.... RUBAIYAT

LIV.

Our karma brought us to this room,
You to mock me and me
To be mocked. Or maybe you to listen
And me at long last to be heard.

LV.

All the little words could just as well be wrong
And the big ones float away like milkweed floss.
Then you'd know how much I really know
Has contributed to this endless conversation.

LVI.

Thinking of all the things that come in two's
Then in three's, four's, pick any number—
What do all the *n*-habited things have in common?
Then thank god that doors only come in ones.

LVII.

Did I wander from the path because I walk
So often with my eyes closed, my brain fixed
On something I once saw? Path
Is an uneasy concept. No journey. No goal.

LVIII.

No one ever told me why sad stories
Are so popular. Don't we have pain enough
Without watching Lear sob over his handiwork?
What you squeeze out of the heart can never come back.

LIX.

The idea behind all the other ideas
Is a quiet place. An empty room
In a white wooden house. Grey day
Out there. The mind at rest alert.

6 November 2008