

3-2007

marC2007

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "marC2007" (2007). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 679.
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THAW. MIST.

Ducks on the pond, small
with a big head: white blaze.
Fog even. Everything flows.

The mist clean of accident,
almost essential. Thomist
morning. Winter almost

over. The big March maybe.
Comes through the snow.
Soft wet brown wood.

*

And every lovely thing around me
that I see, all the glorious
humility of the particular,
everything seems lost.
Lost to me, seen through a thick
veil of my anxiety, compared
to that portable egoism
this fog is radiance
personified. But no person here,
really. The un-me, anxious.

Take away all the people
whose love or hate induces
my anxiety and who do I have
left to tell this to? Doesn't
the overhanging snowcrust
above the stream need its
gospel writer too, its Freud
set to work to understand
with all his sympathy at last
the Oedipus of ice?

Everything needs me.
But in my craven need
for the love of my own kind

I have betrayed the silent
antiphon of trust
between me and the actual,
the spill of beauty down
under the old bridge, and
the birds, those quick specks
of meaning dart through mist.

11 March 2007

JUST LISTENING

(composed during Melvin Chen's recital, 11 March 2007)

(Bach's fifth French Suite)

Allemande

almost spring I wait to hear
one good shoe deserves another
walk in the wet woods

binah, the sad wisdom
of having two feet
of having to walk there

where the music already is
weary Germans slogging
down a muddy road

to get there, here,
where everything also
is waiting with me

Courante

We'll get there before the sun does
we were born before the moon
we open our claws like crabs
like the moon horns we grasp
everything we are everything
you ever knew and now know. No.

Sarabande

Here it is, the famous thing
the trick time plays
and no one knows
sometimes it is so much better
not to hear what you hear.

THE MOTIONLESS BALLET

There was an old woman
stood alone on the stage
said modestly "I am age"
while the music rolled
past her imitating time
while she imitated you
or me or anybody's cat
scrabbling at the window
towards a vanishing bright
indifferent bird aloft.

*

Program excludes me Franz
it's birdseed for fish

I can barely follow
the shadow from this tree to that

and you want me to hear a hero
slogging through hell with

arpeggios biting his heels no
leave me alone with the intervals

those slide rules of the soul
Strauss knows so well o me

o my his billowing yearning
desperate sensuous ninths,

*

A phonebook lined with booths
bosoms chances for selective
misreadings, I can find anything
here but you, you are always
beside the point, that's why
I struggle so hard to find it,
the point of the jest, since you
will be standing there smiling
at me, right alongside.

*

A white capsule
sinister white plate
with sunlight on it
it tells me do
something about
all the shutness
run my tongue
to open up
where you close.

from Schumann's *Waldszenen*

Jäger auf der Lauer

Going into the woods
means walking
where hunters lurk

the hunter is a lion
or thing like that
and waits for you

ambush, the leaves
drip with ancient rain.
Recent amber

baby, how can a flower
be lonely?
How can a thing not be?

Verrufene Stelle

Weird place
in woods,
not a right place,
haunted maybe

haunted space.
inside a house
all space is haunted

the walls
irrelevant

it is where the spear
of the sky
strikes the anvil of the earth

we live in the clangor
ever after
the shudder.

It is the space itself
that is haunted
in certain places.
The houses come and go,
the shiver lingers.
The shimmer at evening
when you see it, them,
passing through walls
mirrors leaves outside
the dust beneath your chair.

Herberge

Why call it an inn?
It is them.

Them with their milk
their gin

the people who keep
needing to take in.

Their songs
will swallow you

the noise that brings you
to the door

destroys you,
your delicate

little difference.

Vogel als Prophet

If a bird had the power to tell me
I would have the power to fly up and meet it
there, where its news is coming from
and break out of the circle my poor arms make.

11 March 2007
12 March 2007

[dreamt:]

a wide intention to deceive:
this is a street
it goes somewhere.

11/12 III 07

from e-texts newly found:

SUMMER'S ALPHABET

Ad for a body you can put on:
there are so many leaves on this one tree.

Depend on me, I was grammar
before you were born and music after.
]
I have murmured over running water
in morning shadow till the move of things

makes the world you found. You live
in my wide house. Birds eat at me.

Be me, baby. Pulchritude
is not an hour,
no old movie.

I want to feel
but lack the synapses
long time eras'd in mental War.
Swing me how, to teach
sagesse in Matterland,
transvestite in deep music.

How could I give you more than you are?
Take medicine. Wrap it
in the skin of a little animal
you found on a road in France.

Travel silences the body.
Wear it on a leather thong
around your neck, let it
sway and pounce between your breasts,

be mad at me. For I
was lunatic and free
and never stop whispering in you,
listen,

I am with you forever, me a
hedgehog crushed beneath
a sky blue camion.

By the little glacial river
falls a beaten trail and by the trail
humans have been crouching
for ten thousand years.

To crouch in bushes
and breathe experimental words

while the body struggles to forget.

Clean folk are best.
Who wipe with leaves and bathe
thereafter. Cold drench
and shiver. Never forgive me.

Never forget. Our money
comes from the sky,
this was language speaking,
it talked until we understood
there was a tale to tell with us
morning is meant to say.

Everything flows down through us.
Mont Blanc up there a part of your head.

Cantharides they used to say
when Mary Butts was swinging in St Johns Wood,
spanish fly and opium and ballet,
the risks of culture in an alien skin.

Culture is ninety-five percent disparagement,
the rest is grace. It falls on you
sometimes in St Paul's, a mist
of meaning gathers in the dome and lets you feel.

Or afternoons in Pimlico
overtaking some rare pedestrian
and looking quickly at her face and knowing
this very woman could unmake your life.

Eye contact and pass by,
a word will do you in.
Keep silent, your tongue
heavy-freighted with the drug of time.

20 June 1997

Desperados we have known
at four a.m. hanging around bars
in hopes that tipsy Ishtar this
one night will come
who never did and always does,

all sexes and all natures to disclose,
nude at the gates of experience.
Tolerate me for all my appetite.

We need to know. It's all we need,
truly, that lap lights up the world.
That's why they linger in their sweaty clothes
forgetting they have a body of their own inside,

though not much good—
what value has one's own?
Only the other
has color,
only those other eyes, other-colored eyes
are wide enough to see the truth.

Not that we need the truth.
Four-thirty, and dawn insinuates transparency.
Soon this hunger will
be light enough to see
the cars of morning coming,
headlights on, the bridges full of hurry.

Escort service is what the stars provide,
the Arab wizards said, the daemon of your Natality
to keep you company. So when you say
Egad it's hot today! your daemon understands
you better than your skin. No smile is needed.

And certainly no word.
Words have better uses: threading pearls
to loop around a no less sweaty neck
but this one smooth, sleek as an idea,
shapely as a shift of wind,

serving as the little waxen string they use
to tie clematis or roses to a latticed arbor.

Why is a flute? Why does the earth
answer Sun with such appalling heat?
Now just here the daemon could be helpful
but is not. Sometimes he says
important-sounding but elusive things, as:

In Baltistan there is a kind of sheep
whose wool is rough enough to tear the shepherd's skin.
(Pause for effect.) Or Mix bromine with 3/4 time and see.

Sometimes you come home and he's playing the piano,
some tune you can't name and can't get out of your head.
He looks at you and speaks with his absurd accent
and smiling swarthy face: Language is only meant to praise.

20 June 1997

NATIVITY

Escort service is what the stars provide, the Arab wizards said. The daemon of your horoscope is there to keep you company. So when you say It's hot today! or I feel bad, your daemon understands you even better than your skin. No argument is needed. Certainly no word. Words have better uses: threading pearls to loop around a no less sweaty neck. But this one is smooth, sleek as an idea, shapely as a girl's shift fondled by the wind; it serves as the little waxen string they use to tie clematis or roses to a latticed arbor.

Why is a flute? Why does the earth answer Sun with such appalling heat? Now just here the daemon could be helpful but is not. The daemon never seems to say more than you knew already, but often shifts the emphasis, so you're not sure if you know it or not. Sometimes he says important-sounding but elusive things, like: In Baltistan there is a kind of sheep whose wool is rough enough to tear the shepherd's skin. Then he'll pause for effect. Or he'll tell you to mix bromine with three-quarter time, and you almost know what he's talking about. But not quite. Beauty is the light of *almost* that shimmers around a clear meaning, and makes it more and less than what it says.

Sometimes you come home and he's playing the piano, some tune you can't name but can't get out of your head. He looks at you and speaks with his ridiculous accent and never-smiling face: Language is only meant to praise. Any other application is just sheet music, or the evidence of some ancient spiritual crime.

12 March 2007

[recast from a text of June 1997]

THYMOL

properties of
never get around in the first place to
ride the wooden horse
goes up and down around

to be as a child
in a nest of motions
teaching stillness in excitement
the gift of later love
half asleep on the warm
pillow of eternal intersections

this was that child
this floor that animal
this square room filled with sun
that whirling circle

when where was when
it all began.

12 March 2007

AuCl

Salt in everything.
I would clean
my system of

all save the salts of gold

Aurunculeia he wrote,
encoding the prescription
so those cut-rate Pitkin
Avenue drugstores
would not decode it,

every medicine is encoded in weird words,
which is why I or such as he
exist to begin with, to bring you

dripping with fake etymologies
the actual chemical

I say you need, firmly, my hand
hid in the hollows of your frame.

For gold will not rot will not wither,
gold is soft and will not stiffen

it will find your marrow and bend your knees
nimble by bedside
clean stream between tall trees.

12 March 2007

= = = = =

We always need friends
to take our adverbs away.

12 III 07

ALL BIRDS ARE A WIFE

someone made of rain
is better, the spill
along horizon, ramps,
the raunch of weather.

Crows first from all,
the eldest. Every
thing else is a failed crow.
Or failed duck or phony eagle.

My three wives, the planet said,
Egypt, and what did Egypt know.
Egypt was a goose only,
anser niloticus, or a hawk, a hawk,

branded neck, temple wall,
slide fasteners any age now,
Pharaoh's icebox.

A duck. A ruddy duck.
Another, a bufflehead
so small, on the beaverpond,
one more wife.

*

Did he love Bird because of birds
or viced that versa? Did he?
The double dumpling version
of his sauerbraten, hold the cabbage.

Everything he loved was 86.

*

There were Parisians here
smart as teenage Mozart.

And Chateaubriand
came up this road
and stopped before my house
suddenly, as if he heard
a trumpet call.
Asked for a glass of water.
But there was no horn.
Only the hammer
of a pileated woodpecker
in what would be my woods
later, when the king was dead.

*

Dragons are just big birds that nest on gold.
Girls have a natural affinity with gold and birds.
So there they are, frequently found at cave mouth
of the dragon's nest. Stupid young men
in metal suits sometimes clank by
and misunderstand the situation, usually
catastrophically. The birds flies away, the girl
helps herself to some jewelry and goes home,
the boy stretches out among the rocks and bleeds.
If he's lucky, he'll get reborn as one of these.

*

So he wound up composing at some cost
a systematic ornithology of West Village
drinking spots in the endless decades
that crept along below the War.
A streak of grey in one young woman's hair.
A slim young man at the jukebox
of the San Remo playing Nessun dorma
over and over and over. He remembers
this so vividly it has to mean something.
He sweeps the dust behind the door.

13 March 2007

PELERINAGE DE LA VIE HUMAINE

But what actually is it, this waking up
and putting one leg out of bed then another
and toddling up or down the hall to meet
yourself in the mirror, who can resist
that devilishly handsome face, even now,
puffy from sleep like a line of Rilke,
warm and lovable and inimitably you
and here you are again, watching the stream
of morning water (as the Mongols say)
color with pale amber the simpleminded
plumbing that still seems to work, works
probably because it is so white, white
as Ellesmere Island on a day in March
and it's always Mozart somehow
when you flick on the radio, that almost
by now archaic solid on the side table,
it makes noise a little like the music
the announcer claims you're hearing.
Why do they always say Amadeus anyhow?
His name was Johannes Chrysostomus
Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart for those
who want to get technical, Amadé
he signed himself with Frenchy swagger
and Amadeus only was a joke he used
to sign smutty letters to his friends.
The end. Something new comes on
you were too busy grouching about announcers
to notice what was being announced—
there's a theological parallel in that
to seek, something Auden said maybe,
but you weren't listening then either.
Why isn't attention easier to pay?
Theophilus means god-loving or God
beloved, cunning amphibolity
as Empson would have said, likely
the nicest thing he could say about God,
given the Cambridge debacle

and his long exile among a people
who didn't care much for this idea of
God, just one of Him and there He is.
I think I'm still talking about Empson
and I don't really know what Wolfgang
means, it sounds like Wolf Path or
Procession of Wolves through the Woods
planning to meet up with a whole
parade of Little Red Riding Hoods
naked under their frocks like the fierce
little girls (they look like girls) of Henry
Darger. Christ, is being alive just
all this endless namedropping?

14 March 2007

= = = = =

Cut something. What? Midnight.
Raffle. Sound of tin struck.
Miner yielding graphite near.
Galena. Near neon. Some new
decision the nuns made
to write with pink chalk. Blue.
The sound of you. Radiator
music. Men tying red strings
to bare trees yes. The bore
of ancient weapons. Smoke.
You saw one there, felt
a smattering of sympathy
wake along the base of your spine.
Where someone sleeps then wakes
to climb you as you climb. Where.
Who. The erring animal of you.
The blinkered eye. The comfort
of your hood. Shielded from chance
the deck of cards scattered
in your lap. Twos and threes
I like those best, unassuming.
But every number from them comes.
Even one. By magic, or *subtraction*,
the mystery that the nuns taught next.

14 March 2007