

6-2007

## junG2007

Robert Kelly  
*Bard College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "junG2007" (2007). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 694.  
[https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts/694](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/694)

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](mailto:digitalcommons@bard.edu).

= = = = =

What one gives away one strangely has.  
Reading between his lines you feel precise  
and formidable intelligence working hard  
to efface itself in genial embrace  
of the frivolous. Scorning the deadend  
hobbies of intellectuals like art,  
science, politics and such. He wants the real  
to bite down on, mind-chew, something  
fierce. You could hear the italics,  
and how much he liked the sound of that,  
instead of the usual piggy snuffling  
in the library a huge tiger. A tiger.  
Hard to be indifferent to one of those.  
Enough to see it, that creamsicle pelt  
and bloody fangs, gazing green at you  
from the underbrush where your native  
bearer's mangled bones already  
attracts squadrons of afreets – they too  
are scared of that rigorous musculature,  
the animal, patient, willing to kill  
as many as you bring along to him,  
his all-purpose, unprejudiced, efficacious teeth.

23 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk

## WHAT IS MISSING FROM THIS PICTURE

Can one eliminate a brother from the story? I notice with dismay this morning that in all my haberdashery of texts and excuses no man at all has a sister. What does that tell the curious? Aux armes, critics! No sib, no Abel, a name the lexicon suggests means vain or empty. Just Cain, me, alone: a name that means strong, enduring, upright even, like a trombone, a column of red sandstone in the desert, inscribed closely in an unknown language. Cain alone, cruising the terraces of Provence, waiting my turn for glamorous suicide. Semiology: study of the mark upon Cain's forehead. Every human is protected by his own sign. Totem. Told him off in wilderness wrong side of Eden, where art is born, and crafts and music and limping poetry, shaded by the shrubbery along Tigris. Signs: man, learn this stuff. It will make everybody want to love you, to hold your tongue in their honest mouths. You, Byronic honeybunch, Teslated geek, Beethovenish grumpster, all Cain's guises, poor dead Keats. Not a sister in sight at least.

24 June 2007, Cuttyhunk

HILL

What do you do  
when you get  
to the top. Now

what. You  
          have found  
the entrance  
do you go in.  
Do you dare.  
The road is blue.  
Everything is down.

24 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk

= = = = =

It's nice to live at the top for a change  
and watch the weather struggle up the road  
lured by blackbirds, they make it look so easy.  
The ospreys swoop close overhead,  
the miracle of a door bangs in the sea breeze.  
Start now. Everything was waiting for you  
forever. You chose your own mother,  
endured the rest of her choices. You chose  
only the hill. The adversity to climb.  
You keep having these weird dreams  
of being somebody else living your life,  
messing up your furniture, being scared  
of your wife. Meaning anything  
is a fool's game anyhow, interpretation  
is the last ditch effort of the God in you  
to make sense of what He's made,  
as if a dream is a kind of scalpel or a rose  
the vernicle that stanchd your wound.  
Everything does it. You can almost forgive  
drunkenness and basketball, almost consent  
to do a lot of things that people do.  
When the day comes you go south in winter  
you'll know that interpretation is no more.  
Wisdom is wasted on retirees. Eat fast,  
even the blueberry muffins are soon gone.

24 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk

## VACANCES

To know so much  
and just want to look at the sea.  
Listen serene  
to some child crying,  
young sparrows chirping for their chow.  
Hear the grass grow.  
Smile at the horrible dog.

24 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk

## ALIARUM CORPORA

Other than what. Whom. Who  
are these persons who have lips,  
who possess personalities that feel like names  
I dream of they recur,  
cameo appearances in genial nightmares,  
I wake up afraid of whom I've known.

Curious social life of dreamtime. Dreams  
not meant for telling but forgetting  
soon as I can into the tilth of mind,  
let it die into what comes next, knowing only  
some thing has been you don't need to know  
but you are what it knew into being.

Something like that. Let the next  
come next, let some living strength  
struggle out of that muddy commonwealth  
from which I wake baffled  
reaching for a hat I never wore  
licking off my lips a kiss I never kissed.

24 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk

= = = = =

Work on this: it's all  
just sunshine on the beach.  
Pebbles. Intensities.  
Luminous detachment.  
I have used all the words up  
and sun's still warm on the back of my hands.

\*

I have told my whole life  
and never told their names.

\*

In summer islands nice  
dogs follow people.  
Who do people follow?  
Are they no different from cloud?

24 June 2007



## MOEURS CONTEMPORAINS

It's never now. Have you ever noticed?  
The fact that this is a conversation  
does not imply somebody's actually there.  
Either end of us might be missing –  
permanently, as when one falls off a cliff  
or is pushed, or less radically, say,  
just gone to Philadelphia to see Duchamp.

And stands there at the knothole squinting  
into the exhausted thrill of someone  
else's naked mind, complete with gas light  
little flame in memory of all the fallen  
in the wars of art. Praxiteles. Ruskin.  
Bell invented the telephone but who  
invented the thing in our pockets we  
actually use? Sunrise over the moors  
o ease my questioning. Who invented  
the language we mutter into it?

And why is algebra like a bicycle,  
I used to know. I thought it would be  
both exciting and honest to expose  
my radical frivolity, then suddenly  
it seemed a permanent mindset  
and what does that imply? Celebrated  
for my attitude, I just sit on the deck  
and the intellectual tourists jog by  
each waving a tentative salute that I  
often good-humoredly return. Fame!

It's not all bad. The primary colors  
are a little brighter now, now lime-green  
is off the menu. Somewhere, in some gallery,  
is the knot from the knothole Duchamp  
punched out or the sawdust left when he  
simulated a natural vacancy, sly boots.

Even the hole is one more fabrication  
I now suspect. Just more art after all.  
But as we agreed before, there is no now.

25 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk

## THIS QUIET MORNING I HAVE TO SHARE

with a noisy cardinal and a mourning dove  
they tell me is taking over the avian biome round here—  
revenge of the passenger pigeon? It should be  
just me and my sunlight and my banana  
and a beach stone painted with a map in yellow  
of this green island where someone found it,  
the stone, the birds, the idea. Or is it some  
other planet where the sea is made of stone  
and the land is a quaggy place where no one  
sleeps easy? When I was green, like the banana,  
just the bird and sea and me, but then  
those dreaded polysyllables butt in: other  
people. travelers, cloud inspectors, fishermen.  
So I abandon the whole project to them.  
Let them build 7:30 out of plywood, carve  
Monday out of sea foam and sunlight.  
I've done my job, opened the windows,  
even opened the door, smiled at the rabbit,  
frowned at the neighbor's little boy.

25 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk

= = = = =

Everything depends on the weather.  
My state of mind especially,  
from which my Fate emerges  
with everything else, stately  
as a hanging judge swaggering  
into the courtroom, weeping  
over his propensity to kill.

25 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk

## AN HONEST HAT

Heartfelt insincerity yet  
a disgust with innovation  
for its own sake. Nicely  
dressed, adverbial haberdashery.  
Gents' suiting. For whose  
sake should we all be? Gosh!  
You're asking a lot from your  
binoculars. Telephoto compresses,  
telegrams are obsolete though  
the distance is still there  
but nobody notices it now.  
We get to walk as far as the neck  
then everything is private.  
Turn back. Be a common witness.

25 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk

## THINGS TO PACK

My spotty collection of Patristics  
—good on the Gregories, poor on the rest  
though I have a soft spot for Origen.  
Sunshine. A box of 5000 staples  
in case I meet some sunset on the cliff  
a pale romantic with a stapler in her hand.  
A sheaf of rose leaves. One thorn  
wrapped in waxed paper. Snug things  
around anxious things, socks in crystal,  
tide tables, that snapshot of my daughter  
where she looks like Lana Turner. Who?

For the 72 hours before leaving anywhere  
at all for anywhere else, foreign or  
familiar, easy or risky, makes no  
difference, my dreams turn frightening,  
vexed. Dreams that I remember if at all  
like the taste of spoiled milk  
still in my mouth at waking. In daytime  
my right hand, the so-called dominant  
member, feels cold, even numb at times  
like the hand of a man midway in  
writing a suicide note I imagine. Never  
have I written one of those. My own  
suicides are wordless, strangely incomplete.

And I would never come right out and tell  
what I thought I was up to. Never apologize,  
never explain. But isn't that just what  
I'm doing now, going on about sick dreams  
et cetera before leaving, isn't this explaining?  
No, because nobody's listening. This  
is just talking when nobody's around  
—it's what's called writing. I dreamt  
I was in the wrong body, and all the math  
was wrong – not much of a movie in that.

Yet it hurts. Unclarity is the worst pain,  
so humiliating, as a society woman would say,  
to be baffled by your own mind, baffled  
and irritated and bored and confused.  
If it even is your own mind. Whose else

could it be? If nobody is listening, nobody's  
talking into me, my head the Dixie cup  
into which some bored child is mumbling  
words and situations he doesn't understand?  
I wake drenched with his spittle? I wonder.

26 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk

## MOVE THINGS BY EXPLAINING

Structure is inherently unstable.  
In any given day breakfast  
is a fracture zone. A clinamen.  
O dearest friend I yearned for you  
to experience me so I could learn  
myself in that exchange. But a self  
is a kind of simper, isn't it,  
one word too many  
in an otherwise faultless argument.

26 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk



= = = = =

Who will one day watch this mind at work?  
And say how it is if it is different from play.  
It needs to be studied, spoken, quietly known.  
A painting of a lagoon at sunset might serve  
just as well, three girls in an aluminum canoe.

26 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk

= = = = =

Her smile becomes  
a point of light  
that shrinks  
without dwindling  
into immensity.

26 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk

## OPINIO

To be for once the message  
itself. To come to another,  
a listening woman, ear pressed  
to a lamppost. A priest  
pretending to be the sunset.

How does the grass grow?  
Is everything the same as it always was  
only we keep losing our place in the text,  
changing our minds, feeling differently  
about the tulips or the Dolomites?

Is it all just thinking? We are born  
between sixes and sevens  
some famous saint remarked,  
Original Sin, the one  
without a sinner. Just the wind  
hissing in some woman's ear.

26 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk

= = = = =

The minute you sit down the wind comes up.  
Springs out of the hill behind you  
and rushes into the sea. Something to do  
with temperature does it, gradients,  
pressure, the whole sun. The ignorance  
of mortal mind. Means me.  
Wind brushes the fog off, shoves it  
back a little, heaps it on a neighbor island.  
O charity will we ever learn love?  
Even the dogs don't know what to make  
of all our music when they mosey along  
by the window and hear us playing Brahms?

26 June 2007  
Cuttyhunk