

11-2007

novC2007

Robert Kelly
Bard College

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

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "novC2007" (2007). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 714.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/714

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.

THINGS FLOAT

Saber blades of a dead war
still glints on the wall,
who knows where light comes from
to prick a memory
 of what steel means,
don't ask some scientist,
he's just guessing,
 science is guessing with numbers,
don't ask poetry,
 poets
 are just liars with lutes,
 light, light,
don't ask, darling, it's not
that there are no answers, darling,
there are no questions.

 They dance
in one another's arms
occasionally switching partners,
 occasionally sitting a dance out,
close-eyed, sniffing quietly against some wall.
 And there's no reason for that too.

To buy a half-frozen pear
from the Korean fruit stand on the corner
and hold it in your hand for three long blocks
to warm it before the first bite,
 o darling that is the dance too, corny
old word for it, corny old thing
for it but o the first bite
when the orchestra stops yodeling
and the singer stands alone
with nothing but the whimsy in her throat
to make us weep
 or hurry home to mother
or give everything away and follow Her.

9 November 2007

= = = = =

But how much do we know?
A name scratched on a rock,
where, in the quarry above Lacoste
over the lavender fields, on the wall
of a tunneled arch a name
I couldn't read and would not remember,
for the mind is a stone too
sometimes, resistant, not yielding
any of its ancient chemistry
to mere information.

Or these crystals
are its message, forget
what Luc scribbled with his greasy crayon
two hundred years ago and hoped, Christ!, hoped
his name would somehow happen to the world.

9 November 2007

= = = = =

Escaping from space you try
hanging a picture on the wall

line it up with the rail
prime vertical, a picture
analyzes space.

 a picture
on your wall becomes your world
be careful, anything can be a star
a nebula whirling your wits away
until you gawk and gaze at it
and live in the spell of it
and move around the room
only as it lets you move,
a dumb tree on the wall
and a deer under it with eyes too big
or a lake with nobody in it
cold as November, leaves
tell you what is happening,
your first love lived there
right over the hill
but you can no longer remember her face.

9 November 2007

= = = = =

A woman with no memory
what would she do with a knife?

and who would help her
in such a long hallway?

sometimes we're always
together like a dream with no explanation

or a surfer vanishes
in the smallest wave

how can such things be?
what might have been

crowds around her
we try to help her

we try to find anywhere her door.

10 November 2007

a Galliard for Patrick's Sixtieth

1.

A round
of strumming
loosing Bach.

(L.Z., in eternity)

Be a marvel
while the lake lasts.

O blue soon,
old Maumee riff
coasting a leaf down
in the wood of Scorpio
still lost,

wild, floating down the sherry of the light,
more leaves than sense more sense than pence,

us world gets so much younger,
who knew girls had such taut tummies
before the Nineties,
who knew that all
that music *led* somewhere,
wasn't just scrapple in the diner, wasn't
just Shriners getting plastered,

it was *time*, Lady Time
of all our Happy Hours, with slim
wrist in its Rolex, pacing our afternoon
and sentencing each to death
by drowning

every mortal day and then the night, *(la volta)*
man, we liked that best, the tune
called midnight

and muffled moans soon after,
we hid it safe in music
and lost it in the alphabet
yet there it was again,

where It came in,
the big it, big if, and you could see her eyes again.

2.

This is where the Mason part of the song comes in,
the come-stained apron,

(*Vanity, 1982*)

the trowel
every man uses to unbuild her wall, bizarre
Kabbalah fantasies uncoil around that wounded
veteran from Gettysburg,

(*S.J.M., 1863*)

nothing but war,
he made me,

love, there is nothing ever but war
and all our words come part of it,
little bullet syllables, little Russian pistols,
assassinate the Chief,

(*1963*)

suicide splendors,
nothing but war, we sprawl in the mud
of the moment,
dream ridiculous archipelagoes
sick with guava maidens, cocoa men,
nothing but war,

every moment music
is a horn cry, national anthem of hell,
we break our hearts to play it, the full
hour and twenty-two minutes
of Wilhelm Furtwängler's 2nd symphony
raging against the only land he knew,
raging against their war and our war and the war to come,
all music breaks us till we break free.

So there is a place to which any music comes,
strum, Bach or null-Bach, Biber or fever,
where *war* turns into *ear*

and happy drunks look up
the girls are all gone now, only that ghost
of a woman we call her voice

summons us from the jukebox,
dear god, do they still have jukeboxes,
do men still have throats,

and still pour down them
what they wish they could instead
be baptized with in god's mother's dawn's
small hand full of simplest water
but all they have is voices, and all we have is word
this sober word to keep us drunk forever.

from Robert, with love & hum

UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHY

You know the pictures. Life below the waves, skilful divers with their flippers and their Nikons in watertight housings. Coral beds waving gently, odd-looking fish schooling by plentifully, eels emerging shockingly, sharks on patrol, sea anemones seducing. Nightmare creatures from the deep, delicate angel-like finny things of near-surface sunlight. Well. I'm here to tell you that all that is illusion. Illusory too are all the oral reports exhausted divers gasp out, or stepping at ease out of their bathyspheres declaim. Illusion. Specifically: hallucinations fed by pressure on the brain, the inner ear, the palate, fed by physics and fueled by gossip and folklore. They see what they expect to see.

There is nothing down there. That is the truth of the matter. The sea is dark and cold and empty. Silent. And when the diver takes a deep breath and crosses himself and topples backwards off the gunwales of his little boat into that immensity, he enters into a condition he cannot imagine, and hence falls prey to all the things he can imagine, the easy specters of millennial myth. In fact it is a dark cold opaque nothingness, that leaves no part of his body or his mind untouched. He sees what his mind projects, he sees the luminous whimsies of his mind displayed.

The ocean is dark and cold. Any images it sustains are those it leaches out of our warm brains, exchanging our bright images for its opacity as it chills us towards death, sucking out of us bit by bit all the little gods we see and pray to in our heads. The diver sees the ocean full of life and color, morphological infinities, forms of life never known – and that's a sign he should be coming up now, death is close now, death, when a man belongs to nothing but his images, and the body is no more.

Think then, before you swim down there. The sea is black and cold, like an inkwell, nothing there but cold blue-black opacity. But from it and in it every proposition in every universe can be written down. Or seem to be.

10 November 2007

= = = = =

Lost without the music?
Has wind. Has now and then
tree. Has always in between.
What more he wants?

Memory is an atlas of clichés.
Like all clichés, memories are efficient,
concise, do their job,
poke you in the eye, finally
don't satisfy. Don't get you anywhere.

The *unremembered* thing – that's
different,
a new thing is a sometime street,
a street takes you to a sometime house
where sometimes a wife is waiting all the time.

11 November 2007

= = = = =

Woke up planning as I had ere sleep
to sit with a fat pen revising yestreen's
text, bluing the hell out of it, leaving
such heaven on earth a word is bond for.

11 November 2007

= = = = =

Am I ready to move onto now?
So many sly, slim letters
hijack the alphabet—
only in English are they so slim and quick,
leave their scent on everything
and make the broad world mine,
wind today, whirling around my leaves.

11 November 2007

THE SQUARE

the occult square
inside which every
Chinese character is sensed
as being inscribed

the unwritten limit
inside which a word takes form:
make it happen in the world,
on the floor, in your arms

enclosing firmly
the meaning of my face,
an audience enclosed
snug in the meaning of the play.

11 November 2007

see second version, next page

A SQUARE

there is an occult square
inside which every
Chinese character is sensed
as having been inscribed:

the unwritten limit
inside which a word takes flesh,
takes form: makes it happen
in our world: a woman's arms

enclosing firmly a man's
face: this is speaking,
all the watchers held
snug in the meaning of the play.

11 November 2007

16 November 2007 *2nd version*

= = = = =

What are they shouting, those Italian
birds inhabiting this skinny soul?
O it's all opera on the inside, honey,
swords and tubas, curtains catching fire,
and Vesuvio rumbling outside,
gunshots, high C's, thousands flee
trying to reach the mind before the heart explodes.

11 November 2007

= = = = =

Main marker. Or market
he said. Or Maine, a month
among moose she admitted
spitting pine needles out of her soup.

This is Christian life,
this is automobile, the stress
used to be on the penult
for rustic speakers

whether they drove to church
or not. Shock. Stumbling block
for the youngsters, what we
now more wittily call teens.

You've got to learn them
they are the sour socks
of the future treading out
the damp corn of the past.

Dismay of magnates.
The police are servants
hired to protect the rich
from their countless victims

Amen. Now we go
fishing for compliments
among Aunt Sally's dreambooks
just tonight Raccoon Tycoon

opens trading posts all over the moon,
a girl eating jelly with a fork
a high school principal
reciting Shakespeare with mistakes

o night is good o night
sneaks away the day's
old pour-boires of the mind-police
we call our prayers

and leaves us raunchy

with egregious satisfactions
before the somber morning
eats grapefruit with a little toothy spoon.

12 November 2007

= = = = =

Less said
the better.
That
sort of morning.
Too quiet
to think about.
Silence
he obeys.
Like a river
with no boat.

13 November 2007

= = = = =

I know my measure
it is mother
it is meeter to feed
than sermonize

little by little the tender crops will blond the field (Virgil, Ec.IV,28)
and each of us
will be allowed to be another,
da lac! Da uinum!

13 November 2007

= = = = =

Weakened in rivalrous
or ate too much
certainly grumpy homed.

Now when?

 The hum
of a hand on paper
is neither skirt nor skin.

Maybe not an anything.
Or an early pastor in a parlor
baptizing meat?

 Salt!

All that jack and no Jill.
Appetite just means willow tree

and all that ever was was
river flowing up to heaven.

14 November 2007

= = = = =

How dare the newspaper
read me back?

Right in my face
as if it actually knew
me right here right now.

You and I have a lot
to blame old Whitman for,

“you who are holding me now in your hands.”

14 November 2007