

9-2005

sepB2005

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "sepB2005" (2005). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 812.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/812

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[Song from the Cold]

What animal, its
belly filled with light
releases light
that fills two worlds:
 the outworld
 the skullworld?

Joy is a balance of those two lights.

bDe.ba

To find the precise edge between
one word and another,
the zone of zero overlap (ZZO)

is arctic, where bears live. *arktos*, a bear

Where ice cliffs heap up
weird angles. Strange
shadows. A heap
of light.

Then at last to find,
discover, sail in fat ships deep into
the land between words,

das Zwischenland

where she still reigns,
my Queen of Between
whose edicts I have memorized
and keep repeating
all these years.

It is in the cold lands
two lights learn to balance best.
Scandinavia Siberia Tibet:
the shaman lands
where the clothing matters,
veil of the temple,
the zone between
woman and the weather –
the secret between,
the air inside his closes
is the shaman's heaven,

Himalayas, high

or else it is the face of someone altogether different
a third who lives between
every one and every other,
who is *the* other,

the quiet friend who comes in from the cold.
Union is defined by what does not touch.

Skull light.

The bone is cold
holds
the land, sea, between words.

I wanted to call this *Song of the Cold*
but Edith Sitwell said that long ago,
just after the first atomic bomb came
blundering down on Hiroshima
and she knew in all that blaze and smoke
(hot as the insides of the sun, they said)
the bitter cold within the hearts of
'man,' she called us, using the old name
that once meant 'people who have minds.'

But now the freezing heart made cities melt.

So I couldn't use her words, and I wanted
to love a different kind of cold, a sharp blue one,
edge as fierce as a shadow's edge,
like in Sigrid Sandström's paintings,
tumult of ice fields and deep snow crevasses,
the clear insistent place, the possible,
when the day's brief light for once shows everything,
the green inside the all-year ice,

the field that falls over the horizon.

I go there for the sky of it

to walk in winter is to walk inside a skull
walking the thoughts of someone else,

cold bright other who says everything.
A skull is a sky in which we have to rise.

North is the color of a bruise,
live flesh, of light, of shadow

and the shadows walk
holding the light in what had been their hands.

When it is cold
the rings slip off my fingers
(she might have sung)

there is a simple
explanation but it doesn't
come to mind

I put my rings off
safe in a little bowl of ice
and look at my bare hands

as if they knew what the cold knows.

6 September 2005

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Don't sap the know
pioneer on foot
to transact the mind's
business in such places
under the skirts
of the city an exchange
a hand drum rattling
all you need is trade
to find the company
your other's other.

6 September 2005

= = = = =

It' safe to believe me
now, I am the whole
boulevard, the fish market
the serene synagogues
where sleep drips from the words
I am the trees of course and the drunken
cry on Friday night
that seems to come from somewhere else inside,
who else could I be
you hear me in the socket of your chest.

6 September 2005

SPEM IN ALIUM

Can you permit me to go your way
or a way or away – so hard
to hear the world with all the words
ringing in my ears. I ask again

and all I hear is crickets katydiding
the high midsummer sound, when did ice
learn to sing so many voices all at once,
Thomas Tallis, *Our hope is in the Other*

that hymn a half mile wide for thirty
voices minus one, that one is me
and who are you, this we
I conjure with my waiting ears, speak

loud as a photo of an atrocity,
are you not the lord with his guilty lyre
or are you Lily queen of white apples
crickets in the sky, is where they are,

I live inside a dome of sound and all the sound one cry.

7 September 2005

CATAclysm CLASS

Why did this happen?

To break the pattern.

Who made the pattern?

I did with my ways and your means.

What ways were these?

The snail's path around the spiral

always tending in,

trying to find himself by following his own shape outward.

Where did that lead?

Not to himself

but to a point without a second,

battlefield with no retreating

the empty hand keeps trying

to shake some other item loose,

back of the closet, get rid

of what we don't have, the cliff

without a fall, the dead moon,

the empty door.

Did you walk that way?

I did.

Do you not bless the social wound that smote?

I should but I do not.

Why is that?

Should, because the only wound that matters is
the word of another, the touch of a hand.

Not, because I have not learned to visit in catastrophe
the snug bungalow appointed for the mind
fleeing from its circumstance.

When will you learn?

First the sky must stop burning,
the building stop tumbling down,
the towers stand up straight again, stiffen in soft cloud,
the luminous waters recede into the lagoon,
then sex comes back and politics and crime
and the next wave we wait
praying for the wind to crack
and a little knife fall out.

I do not think you are learning, I think you are remembering.

I think everything I know is a remembering
plus a noise in the sky
that seems to be now.

7 September 2005

Working from a line by Grace Leavitt

You have me everything
the rice they threw
grew up instantly
out of the deep paddies of our tears,
juice, champagne, remorse

and then the fire came
up through the water itself
and sucked the sweet grains down

“the stubbled honeymoon of answers”

you wrote, meaning
to make me get in the old Volvo
and find you, live fast as I can
till I grow old enough to find
that nowhere west of the river

where you are busy living
alone with God.

You fool. I love the way
you bend to drink from the faucet
as if you were born and bred

before there were houses
and there were no vessels but ourselves,
our poor little bodies.

I watch you drink.

You must have married me,

I am good with rice,

I have my own fire,

an acre or two

left over from my mother.

7 September 2005

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But call
as if the bird knew
more than the sky did

spoke Scots from birth
and drew white horses
with flint into turf cliffs

but mostly as if even
a very young man could hear
something waiting so long for him to speak.

7 September 2005

ARSENALE

in Venice long boat ride
quick little motor the spray
baptizing to the oldest

brick, I am low and large
half water and half man
tunneled and caverned

built to hold everything
hold me now, I am built
I am a construct,

am not natural
I am low I enclose the sea
everything runs out of me –

it says this in me. I say it
bold, old as a brick, color of roses.

*

Shaky footstool the man shivers

pockets full of dried apricots
sun-cooked the word says
and the beasts of the woods
hide from that luminary why?

Only a lion dares lie in the sun.

Venice was cool that summer,
seawind hexing any haze,
no miasma, nothing
but light and cool Adriatic air

but people, people are that city's weather
I was hidden in the Arsenale
I pretended to be just one more art
to hide there as a thing, a thing, thing
between weathers between women
between words

*

Never found a construction so
much to my taste, these old bricks
taste like me, he gasped
and he was me, like Henry

James in shabby clothes
chasing his vocabulary
down a quiet alley ran from the canal
inland between yellow houses

yellow house of Sunday.

As he ran so I sat
moment by my moment
among the Doge's empty godowns
filled with the momentaneous forgettables of the Biennale

and me
suddenly home
among damp brick

the hidden chambers
tubercular recesses and gasping darkness
I had found a structure that looked like me
low and large and empty
and filled with the sea's
more than rational conversation
ill-muted by the pottering visitors just like me.

8 September 2005

= = = = =

This isn't me
saying these things
this is him
with his head in a kerchief
and a lamp in his hand
a hatchet in his other
his mind in a lap
and him on the midnight road
looking for a piece of wood

to split and find his deity
a hen to have for supper

But he will never eat again
he will dissolve
into the breakfastless condition
of the virtual,
a 'character' is a seal pressed in
a word written on the air

and nothing lasts.

He is gone now

with his little lantern
his dew-soaked socks
his faint Welsh accent
his damaged starlight,

we knew him by
the feel of the shape,
a little we loved him, he
blocked the cave
mouth for a minute
then became gone.

8 September 2005

= = = = =

Knock on the door.

Be home.

Trifle with me.

Leave your footsteps on the stairs
so the maid will know
you've come and gone.

Be gone.

I will wait for you over and over
fingering the piece of jade

you left me once
in place of you,
intricately carved to seem woven

in the pattern called Eternal Knot
no knock on no door,
can I unweave the stone

and cry out against the temporary
creak of the wooden step
the hardest thing about missing you

is that I don't miss you
I miss the wanting,
I miss the waiting.

Now I would never
answer the door
now I would tremble

three rooms away
with the lights out
weeping for the want

I had of you
but not for you.
A doorway was ours

only, our little bed
and nothing we ever said
made sense except goodbye.

8 September 2005