

3-2004

marA2004

Robert Kelly
Bard College

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

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "marA2004" (2004). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 838.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/838

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.

=====

Precision dares valleys
but fear does mountains
however keen the granite
edges over Innsbruck even
close to the crest can't look
that rock in my eye
the living snow all seasons
creeps to hide the skin
skin of the rock from
even the noblest ascension
picking their way along the face
humans till the end

for what breaks the contour
of a smooth earth hauls
holiness close
peak
to solve and dale coagulate,
hard countries of meditation.

1 March 2004

After Oscars

Do I write in chains this morning?
Rubber bands. The prizes
have all been given, the gowns
sleep calmly in the closet
and all the jokes forget their point.
By dawn nothing means anything.
Nothing has been decided.
Names purr along your tongue
wanting faces to behold them.
You are grateful to everyone at all
who brought you to this silence.
Say something about flowers.
Something about war.

1 March 2004

=====

Wake walking
as if a servant
were my legs
or listener

only out there
did the beginning begin
secret passageways
of the light
finding its way also
around me

as air
my own breath
assimilated
the slightest move
investigates
pathways,

pathways.

2 March 2004

SUBSTANCE MEANS WHAT STANDS BENEATH THE FORM

I want it to come back
the one I love or not so

speaking from the fire
she did this for France
and because God told her
but we have no for and no because,
not even France

yet there is a pyre
in the heart
where all our martyrs
recite among the busy flames
their pilgrim wantonness
keeps burning from our mute wood
litanies of beauty and reproach
so intermingled we
don't know which comes first
or which means us
like a blind man fingering a little
elephant carved from an ivory tusk.

2 March 2004

FLEDGLING

amateur
newcomer, seal-sleek
on my latest mind,
do you think you can arrive
in my welcoming coils
as if you belonged in me,
a kind of protein wound
in my ego, do you?

It is not easy to come in.

All your differences
are just beginning
and who knows how long they'll last?
I am a connoisseur of changes too –
I might be the one that you become.

But nothing's known.
You are a snow-clad field
and spring is soon.
Who can tell what might be growing there?

2 March 2004

=====

Last as long as you've gone
and then sweet reason
prophesies a return

car doors have to be slammed
around midnight, deer
have to streak across the morning light

there have to be three of them,
and of us too, always,
me and me and you.

2 March 2004

CLOSING TIME

But have to say more,
ink dries out, the gouges
in clay fill up with dust

time silences everything except itself
so that we hear unendingly
its own bassoon

sinistering its way through
all the things we see and touch and do
with a sound like the voice of a bored guard

ushering us almost politely out of the museum.

2 March 2004

=====

All the judges of the Low Countries assess
evidence of social rottenness
mapped in one bad man's face.
All of them are his accomplices,
pebbles in the rock pile. All of us.
That man has the face of Kapital,
cog in the wheel, haughty amateur of crime
socially all too well adjusted.
In a dark time he fits right in.
And now the game of Blame the Jew begins.
Dutroux is the face of everybody else.

3 March 2004

=====

There is nothing to disturb the man
the circus has left town, the elephants
are in nobody's mind now, Uncle Jim
has gone back to the East, murderers
sleep in the newspapers of tomorrow.
He is alone. All the young animals
he cares about are sleeping too,
and he is stricken with alertness
like a midnight gas station or
or what? What is he like now, alone
and waiting for the rain the radio
promised him all day and still no sign?

Just a wheel in the sky slowly turning,
white on white, with blue a threat
of happiness somewhere far, far ahead.
He could see it best in photographs
where a neighbor tree suddenly became
an outpost of enlightenment.
He lies there and thinks about the moon.

3 March 2004

=====

He wants to but sleep won't let him in
and that's the best place for his thinking

or yours too, where the moon is meat
and they slice it for your breakfast

but won't let you wake. Read more books.
Wear a nametag so they know you.

I Read Spinoza. I Love Adorno.
Or make up your own philosopher,

someone golden and half Arabic
someone who reads Parmenides

someone who wants to tell you
but is too shy. A shy cosmologist.

3 March 2004

S T E L E

All the licit seemings
blue feathered smote
at once and some few
lewd shadows too
of a former life
unallowed but actual
measure me I am born.

4 March 2004

=====

And now time is the other
who had been Sonia's face
when she missed a return and
bent over laughing to grab the shuttlecock
now just all round me this dry
wind rushing to be done.

4 March 2004

NOMINA NUMINA

Nobody has had your name
in fifty years. Names are not free
there is an angel or an arbiter
who arranges what we think is choice,
who takes some names away
into the ark up there
to breathe new history in them
and maybe bring them back
full of prowess their bearers
get to wield, names that dreaming
parents fasten on their kids.
When will you come to me again
Violet, Loretta, Muriel?

4 March 2004

TRANSFIGURATION

The times I tried
multiplication table
Averroes answer
street corner suicide

no it has to stay
right here pretending
penetration
pretending to be us

school of medicine
dream of a donkey
indifferent to carrots
roses but roses

across the street
a sandwich waiting
pale cheese and gherkin
and still more roses

the oldest sign you
were lifted up
into the mild light
calling her name.

4 March 2004

=====

Probably enough
to write one word
dividing in roughly
into ten or twelve
words names breaths
so that you hear
the single thing I say.

4 March 2004

=====

Why can't everything
take a different door?

I want to eat the book
and drink the music,

everything come me
new ways in.

4 March 2004

=====

Now we know everything

again. The loss

is permanent.

Memory is always true

only to the moment of remembering,

never to the remembered.

Memory always and everywhere lies,

white lies mostly

to help the actual along.

There is no past,

only these scars.

That tattoo

growing paler every year.

Nowadays

people pay to have them written in.

5 March 2004

=====

It's so hard not to respond
when the weather works it
animal by animal along your arm.
Merciless journalists arrive
in smudged Aerostars, fortunately
you are disposed to welcome them
preferring the pain of exposure
to the comfort of obscurity always
just like me, when I was in fourth
grade I set fire to my red tie
just to get attention, the best answer.
Yes we wore neckties in those days
at least I think we did, mirrors
were rare then so I'm not certain.
Or even what you're asking. Yes,
I'm the lucky dad, I trained her
before she outgrew my limited
musicality but never my ambitions,
sang in the choir at Saint Barbara's
just like her sister Vesta but she
took off for parts unknown
maybe she'll see this and come home.

5 March 2004

=====

Never forget anything and never remember –
that's the golden rule around our house,
spring in the trees and the shades pulled down,
maybe pull them up at noon to keep an eye
on the girls next door having a precocious picnic
when it's almost raining and it still is Lent.
All I can make out is a big jar of mustard,
can't tell what they spread it on. Mustard in March,
holy shit, and there's a robin on the maple branch
before there's even a lawn for it to prance on.
Sometimes I fell like an old opera ready to explode
with dueling and mad scenes and suicide,
sometimes I just hear the music far away
and forget the plot if I ever knew it, people
shouting their hearts out and girls eating bread,
what a weird planet I wound up on this time.
Clueless in Rhinebeck. Who'd pay to see that?

HISTOMAP

Kids are right to feel – as they clearly do – that history is only the story of their own time. What other time is there, or could there logically be, except what we experience now? Now includes our memories – and of such inclusive nows all history is made.

The only time history as such knows is the time of its own writing. Our Own Times.

It should be a crime against the state to write a history of a time before your own – which is always an exercise in romanticism (Kantorowicz) or slander (Gibbon) or crowd manipulation (Michelet).

When I first came to the small college where I still teach, freshmen had to buy and mount on their walls a five foot tall narrow brightly colored chart called Histomap. It showed, like muscles bundled together in a great oblong arm, the flow –now thick, now thin again, now dwindling away – of individual cultures over a grid of time. Down meant closer to this hour, bottom means now. All the cultures were falling into our hands. But falling.

Each culture looked out of a different color, and each color was smudged with names and local dates, battles fought and books published, within the general flow of time.

Of course I wanted them to learn all that too, as we did, those who had been already trained in the imputations of pastness, of years assigned to people and people discovered like frightened wayfarers in the wastes of time. But how sad it is, that all their Christs and Napoleons and Newtons were just names of fantasies, shared perhaps, but far from their own hands still soft from being born. I wanted to tell them: learn all the names, dream all the battles, but that is not history,

that is folklore or ghost stories or something that has no name, lovely tender stories, stories to hold and remember, but not history,

history is nothing but now,

investigate now. Investigate what people are thinking now, and why they're thinking it. Investigate what people who live in Red Hook think Red Hook is, and how it got that way.

History. Istorein = investigate. What is there to investigate but what people say?

And if the past concerns you, read only texts written in those days. Don't dream a world to hold those things together,

or do so as novels. Novellae, news from nowhere.

5 March 2004