

4-2004

aprJ2004

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "aprJ2004" (2004). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 845.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/845

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THE WINGS OF THE BOOK

Bible person, find me in a book
lonesome in your dry valley.
Sometimes the louder you talk
the better you hear, like crows,
it was in that life I learned
to understand the speech of birds
a little, their warnings, guidances.

Like candles you can hear
I heard. The old woman gave me
in those days the Bible.
I read in it for hours
about how a wall has leprosy
and when to kill a dove.

Never did it think in me to ask
what I was reading or why,
reading was coterminous with being,
how could I tell the difference
I was five with a book on my lap
and the book was as real as the lap,
realer, these knees are not the same
now, only the feelings don't change,
only the book is permanent,

the dove and the wall and the weird
old white women talking
in a clean dry smelly sunny room
and the book was between me
and my skin, and the one who wrote it
did tempt me and I did read.

This was how I learned
that hill was the same as hell
and Calvary a ramp up inside the skull
and afternoon was a kind of slope
with a man dying at the top of it
and me at the bottom
drenched with his blood
in the form of shadows under elm trees
as we walked home along Batchelder.

There may have been strange candy in my lips
or a damp penny in my hand,
things like that were transmitted
when you left strange houses.

I read the book
and the book
turned into me,
now I lean
on the iron wall

and beg my Jews
to let me in

o let me love you
in your iron garden
let me come to you again
as Ari did,
break down the Gaza gate,
don't lock the book.

26 April 2004

THE WOUND

Close to the wound
you see only landscape.
Hill and cliff, watercourse
red rock and sunset.

Inside the wound you sleep
a quiet meaningless release.

Wounds stop hurting
when you live in them
and there is no other
place, no comparison.

Or if they hurt
who is there to know it,
you are the one
who's doing it.

But nothing's done.
A wound alone.

26 April 2004

But is anybody else listening?

The curve of light
investigates each raindrop
on the window busy betweening
me with that magnolia
singing in my neighbor's yard.

26 April 2004

IRONY

Of course any man
is irony,

a lover's cruelty
I touch your body
to change the sky.

26 April 2004

<late> =====

A diorama in a silky room
animals tagged and one or two
flying kites – cerfs volants – along
the beach – Jamaica Bay –

subway not far – don't think of sun,
think of the keen grey light of after rain
when cities tell the final truth,

think of marsh grass and landfill
mounded middens and a new street
fresh laid named for someone dead in action
named for a lover or a tree,
Pine or Linden or a dead philosopher,

mere moonlight dazzling your eyes.

26 April 2004

MERCY PLAYING AT THE FEET OF JUSTICE

sometimes reaching up to grasp his knees.
The tree of life lost in its own shadows.
I thought I would meet you if I waited
long enough in your parlor. When that failed
I crouched in your enemy's boudoir
sure you would be drawn there by *Liebeshass*
and there you were with naked footstep
compelled by our interlocked necessity
for we belong securely to our destinations
and only when we fail them do we fail,
for we are of the ancientest marriages,
the bell tower making love to the sky.

27 April 2004

=====

Cold handle hot coffee
how everything is charged with life
and busy seeing,

but how can we tell except by listening
to the savage reconciliation of
everything that sounds?

27 April 2004

=====

after Ethan Abramson

The stonebreaker left the valley imprisoned

to borrow a cloud and leave money in its place,
gleaming euro coins in the upper passes
because a valley is (here comes the secret)
always a part of your own body trying to get out.
Like the heart trying to be a beehive in Germany
or the lung trying to sail over the Bodensee
looking down on children learning eurhythmy,
all the pretty Turkish children learning to dance.
Where has he gone with his stones?
I'm afraid he's getting to work on the sky now,
and strange pieces of bluish stone like slate
only cooler are falling all round me as I speak.
This is what fear is like, after all the breaks,
the broken, the names of people right and left
and all the children hiding beneath the lake.

27 April 2004

<late> =====

Who can have held more
weight could blaze the trumpet who
heard her from the Dragon's Gorge
save me save from the cleft by Luna Park

o all the old things come
back to look at us in the night
as if we were dreaming them.

But there is no such thing as dream.

*

Only some man with a trumpet
stuck to his lips
in a hard silence

his idlest breath
an insolent music,

only the things we remember
clustering around us in the night
like guilty explanations after
someone's regrettable remark.

27 April 2004

WHEN THE GEESE COME TO THE LAKE

for Vince

The man who takes care of birds
takes care of the sky

when the sky comes down
it brings the birds

and when they come down
people say they 'land'

even though what they land on
is water, a lake

by the highway, a little
bit above the river, the man

who takes care of the lake
takes care of the birds

takes care of water takes
care of the sky,

the man who takes care,
the man who cares

about the birds the lake the river the sky
the man who cares

about the world takes care.
The man takes care of the world.

28 April 2004

=====
In the old Chevy at the stop light
beside me on Route 9 just south
of Poughkeepsie heading north
is a face I recognize, in profile,
smoking man, his hands light
on the wheel, waiting, his face
jowly a little with prominent nose
and a long sloping brow, I know you,
I know you, and when the light
changes and your car and mine are
mixed irretrievably apart, seeds
in the cauldron of traffic, at
last I know who you are, a man
dead forty years now and as close
to me as a name could be Jack Spicer.

28 April 2004

<late> =====

And what is here to take me to the wall
where I do not pray, do not
even pronounce the language right
that might have a prayer stuck in it

I do not know their gods, père et fils
et sainte-marie et la sage-fille
who breath is in my hands now
I feel her when it speaks

she is praying in me.

28 April 2004

<late> =====

How many people live in the tree?

I guess I must know the answer
since you're asking me.

Always I feel like an envelope,
people put words in me and take them out.

I feel their tongues licking me closed.

28 April 2004

=====

I wanted to be clear
his hair
around my shoulders
how
although it is still cold
magnolia petals fall

29 April 2004

YIPS

Golfers call them yips
when a little tremor
spoils the shot,
spills the sugar
from the loaded spoon.

Emergency in the nerves.
Ambulance means walking.

I'm all right, it's just
the skin around my body is too tight,
my nerves remember previous rush,
drunk without a dram, staggers
home because a habit has it

and now all the sugar's on the floor.
The neighbor's boy fell down in a fit,
someone had been making him read poetry.

29 April 2004

<late> =====

And all the wool
got worried off the sheep
and red-haired Susan
waited for a farmer—
the milk flows from the mind

cobalt blue bottles
of colorless events
from which all colors
take fire and burn

a kind of al-Cohol unknown to Arab chemistry,
a notebook fluttering in the wind
a rock waiting on another rock
and an empty palace full of newspapers

things in their valiant timidity
go on meaning what they mean.

29 April 2004

TO THE FRONTIER

Just pine
from the old
thinking

two

chariots took
one me to the place
the palace
where there was no place
the a

and a person stood
ish or *aner*
who could tell
with all the brightness

aglaia of the old
story also
shone around the Head
sh'china or *shrin* or *scîn*

*

whereby I was whirled or tousled
as if I were and all I was

is somebody's hair
in the wind of wild transactions
afloat and a tangle
and this knot, this little
knot was me
they told me

and nothing smaller
than this little knot
was likely to be found
on this journey

*

but I was not going
I was hearing

I was not straying
I was giving off

a little light of my own

*

while your heart has the weekend off they said
and the wheels of both chariots they said
(aleph bes, resh, tav)

spin in the mud of your character they said
the grass is walking up the hill
and the stone is thinking

*

was I sure about the number of chariots?
aporia
was I knew how to count?
was
when I read two is another?
is
how could two vehicles take one man?
aporia and
I wasn't a man I was me
and even if I was it was a boy that was

a boy saw a porcupine
its quills went backwards
and he went forward
he climbed a tree
with some ceremony
of rustling left and right
and left and looking back

and all the pins and needles
were pointing down at me

and like any traveler I wondered
what he was after up there
doing business in a tree

and with the natural romantic disposition
of a child who never missed breakfast
I intuited a heaven or whatever
up there where he clomb
as one said in those days,
Gurdjieff was still alive
and it was Pennsylvania

*

yes pine
yes up
yes quill
yes bird
but the bird wasn't there yet

it was romance
a dance in the head
a lust in the bone

it was whatever
is not here

suddenly
made here

for example
there is this

*

then the bird came
crow over Crescent Street
low, on the grey wood
of sea-wind-weathered fence
stood

corn and tomatoes
corn and tomatoes
corn and tomatoes
corn and tomatoes he saw
corn and tomatoes and corn he said
corn and tomatoes and basil
king of green things
he said
and flew away
to this day

a crow lives so close to forever
you could never tell

*

what grows
is what goes
 they said

what doesn't
is what is
 they said

these chariots
go no further

you have to be
your own wheel now

they said,
when the yoyo at the end of its string
spins and shivers still
it is said to be sleeping
and one makes it *sleep*

this Philippine amusement
is how they told us
make a world
then make it sleep
and while it's sleeping

make it dream

and this dream you give it
will be me

but I still didn't know who is speaking,

is me the speaker
or the hard of hearing
is me?

I am a coven and a covenant
I am born in transaction

I never saw anything
I didn't become.

30 April 2004