

5-2004

**mayA2004**

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, "mayA2004" (2004). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 846.  
[https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts/846](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/846)

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).

## M A Y D A Y

I want to know what it means  
this May this might the roman road  
the left and the right  
the blue hibiscus  
blossoming dew-drenched in the lost garden,  
ivy ripped off brick, old black car  
full of the whole family on its way into exile  
with no dog, exile is rudimentary,  
exile is the most common flower,  
what does it mean, the empty basilica  
the beggars on the steps of every building,  
the empty beer bottle at roadside  
under the hedge by the whippoorwill's nest,  
the birds and their restless upward home-  
careening Jerusalem pilgrimages,  
can it be that some of them never come back,  
is flying as futile as it seems, is beauty,  
up and up and always fall back, groundling  
drowned among the nenuphars, are you,  
are you beyond beyond, the one I mean,  
what does it mean to be a mirror  
and have somebody look you in the eye  
and say I am fifty years old today or eighty  
or finally I turn thirteen, and it's the same  
someone, the same one, woman or man,

what does it mean to say I as if  
that little word was question and answer  
all complete and good forever,  
what does it mean to open a mouth  
and say something and wait  
and wait for an answer, o that gap  
or yawn of time when your mouth  
is open o that is good, that is gap  
and time rushes past unchanging,  
and who is speaking, and even more  
tragically, preposterously, protestantly,  
who could possibly be listening,  
are you, does the tree bark listen,  
and why, what does it mean to be  
moved by another, what does it mean,  
this one dove on one lawn, and a  
green leaf rake leaning on a linden tree,  
to get there without seed, without seeking  
and be greasy with sheer finding,  
lamb fat and basil, warm yogurt sauce  
with olive oil attuning the fragments,  
salt and cinnamon, to examine the leaf  
until you forget all about death and the crow  
hollers at you from the hill don't leave yet  
the movie is only beginning, just cup  
your empty hand over your empty ears  
and listen to the dancers, their heavy grace

pounding on the stage, on the hollow ground,  
listen, and what does it mean when birds  
start talking and you start understanding  
and the subway map seems unfamiliar  
and the gorgeous overpass at Smith-9<sup>th</sup> Street  
looks out over endless Ukrainian grasslands,  
and you wake up before dawn at all asking  
suppose all this while I was wrong, suppose  
everything really is different, I was born  
with the wrong bones and don't have a clue,  
and you get up and stare out the window  
we all have windows, I pray we all have windows,  
and you see something out there, anything  
a cat or a fence or a car singing to itself  
and you say this is my clue, this, and go back  
to sleep and never know it and you wake  
with us in a world full of clues, everything  
everywhere gibbering and making signs  
read me, read me and weep, read me, *omnia  
exeunt in mysterium*, everything that exists  
is grounded in mystery and this mystery  
holds your hand and kisses the nape of your neck  
and whispers Darling, there is a whole  
number smaller than one, there is an animal  
you can catch in any woods, you can hitch it  
to a wagon you can learn how to build  
and it will draw you slowly to a place

with no shadow where you can learn one  
other thing, and the very one you love  
will press that beloved hand of theirs firmly  
on your bare skin and tell you yes  
you love me for a reason, I am your reason,  
since every secret is hidden in the other,  
begin with the other, the scary person even you  
can hear at night rummaging around and moaning  
under the ruins of the burnt down church, no moon.

1 May 2004

## ROMANTICISM

(for the reading at Poets Walk, 1 May 2004)

Romanticism is the root (not always conscious) conviction  
or working method  
that the world around us has something to tell us.

That all things of the animate and mineral world are not chattels or  
provender or raw material but interlocutors,  
mysterious other parties  
in an infinite conversation with themselves and us,  
a conversation into which we are born  
—it takes years sometimes to figure out what the subject is  
that all the things in our world are talking about  
and we talk too

Romanticism asks  
and its truest way of talking is always a question

Keats (who gives now and then some resounding but troubling answers)  
knows (in his great Christmas letter) that the answer killeth but the question  
giveth life.

Romanticism at its best resists closure.

If the truth is in the other, then *this* (however comely, shapely, compelling, comforting), this can only be a station on the way to that. Which in turn will be a waystation.

Assertions, in other words, really make sense in the context of other assertions (in other words),

like Coleridge's great unfinished (unruined) poems, Novalis' aphorisms, glints of magical gemstones bedded in the unreliable visions deep in the mines of Falun,

romanticism is ruined by rhetorical finish (what Olson called the 'smooth'),

and is reawakened by wonder. And wonder is confusion, bafflement, not just kidlike awe.

Romanticism intuits that the world as interlocutor finds in us adequate respondents –

the romantic presumes to ask and presumes to listen to what is spoken in any voice in response

and if our voice can be lifted (*voce aliquantulum elata*) a little to respond, then we have fulfilled Romanticism, and with it the great hope of the Enlightenment that the nobility of the noble savage be reincarnate in the modern human, *Edel sei der Mensch* cries Goethe, Let the human be noble!

the first Romanticism discovered Nature as a presence and a supreme value,

now the second Romanticism, now, must discover that we ourselves are  
Nature,

we have no other.

The natural is a word that can be spoken only by us.

Our romanticism vitally abandons the appetite for answer, and indulges the  
passionate addiction to response.

The characteristic product of the first Romantic movement was Marxism.

What will be the flower of our own?

May Day 2004



=====

poetry a payback

old debts

unspoken

old grudges

paintballed on

so many enemies

1 May 2004

=====

This blue

I know

you be

an a surly

o

man wai

ts for th

e bus

last man in

Peru who

smokes your

cigarette

ROTA

my nude book

*The Bible*

*Abashed*

to tell

the tru

th at

last

here be  
she  
be  
ginning

here be he who  
her hod  
held

later be  
she  
be firmer

turn is  
to ry  
round

and see.

1 May 2004

## **THE MYSTERY**

What the mystery  
really means

a color picks you out

a lover handles you and then

joystick and crucible,  
a mind at the door.

1 May 2004

**MAH JONGG**

*for Roger Deutsch*

When you come back to America at last  
you'll be able to speak Hebrew right to left  
like a middleweight Chinese gambler  
listening to Hank Williams all night.

1 May 2004

<late> =====

Night has or any

could tell a story

**a girl throwing a diamond ring**

**away twice**

but keeping the third one

the henna'd hair

veil of the Temple

1 May 2004

<late> =====

**I was an alphabet**

and people kept moving  
the parts of me round  
to make me say  
what they think they mean

I was weather over the prairie and a hawk  
I was a man remembering too late  
a ship he meant to sail on

but the ship sank on its voyage out  
and he's busy writing letters now  
explaining to all his friends  
how he's still alive, wondering to himself  
why death suddenly left him alone.

1 May 2004

=====

And then the new seed remembered its song  
and the city started uncurling around my bones  
full of sophomores and scientists, a new Bible  
was at everybody's doorstep I had written overnight  
because the night gods let me and the day  
gods were still fast asleep. I am language  
in your lap and on your scalp and underneath.

Now what are you going to do?

This book won't close.

2 May 2004



## **CARWASH**

The least I could do is translate  
every word and every thing  
into something else  
on its way to the opposite  
then bring each home safe.  
Then we could really begin.

2 May 2004

## IN THE GARDEN

As if Easter again  
and who is the rain  
this time, Gardener,  
to kiss me awake?

A fox prowls on the hill  
it is too hard to understand.  
Blue jay on new grass  
is no easier.

For a moment I thought  
a wind from the south.  
To be with you  
is be unbounded,

busy, busy things  
so quick around a moveless soul  
deep in the bone  
no god can touch.

2 May 2004

## **THE ENEMY IS RATIONAL ADVANTAGE**

Christ's mind was slain,  
he woke triumphant  
pure flesh and soul.  
He had defeated the alien  
enemy, cosmocrat, organizer.

2 May 2004

## OPENING THE TRUCK WALL

ram the bad thought home to  
kill this animal the broad  
horn splitting the same rock  
you are mistaken in the web  
too heavy too thick. You rut.  
You root. Come rain beggar us,  
come ice & shave the sky away  
here huddled in the moan  
an old man with funny things  
coming out of his head teaches  
us to be stone. I found this  
by the water when there was water,  
I wanted too few things too much

and that made me a sailor,  
to crack the horizon, to jam  
myself into the places you lost.  
A park bench in the dark B.C.  
an aurochs cowboy on a *straße*  
bent across Brandenburg  
through grass made out of fire  
leaves the sand beneath it  
turned into glass. Natural  
and green and hard and dead  
a tombstone for Christmas

and over the soft anvil of  
a woman's middle Ludwig  
Klages broke the mind.  
That thing that came  
from outside our natural space,  
archons wielded it, to trap  
our natural energies into *willed*  
*patterns* favorable to their design.  
Every sign reminds us of their rule.

Language is the muttering of slaves  
bent to their oars churning  
a dark ship through incomprehensible seas.

2 May 2004

=====

The French say *abîme* the Irish say *ocean*.  
It surrounds us, unbound it bounds us,  
we drown in it to survive.

2 May 04

=====

This last dawn

I wake to see

the other one

the face

sometimes at the window.

3 May 2004

(dreamt)