

11-2004

novH2004

Robert Kelly
Bard College

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

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "novH2004" (2004). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 877.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/877

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.

MERCURY

The faces
fondle us.

Mercury runs out of the thermometers
and all mercury is the same
each rivulet joins to every other
to be the same,
it is never more than a distance
apart from itself

no feeling and no being comes between
mercury and mercury.

Mercury blackens glass.
The opaque side
lets the other see

me and me.
It fondles our faces while we watch.

This self-perceiving
we think we do
is just Mercury.

A living current. Pills of mercury,
immortal poison
turns the eyes and hair blue,

the teeth fall out and lie about the ground
showing the way.

At Kandy in the island called Sri Lanka but that we used to call Serendip, the Buddha's tooth is venerated in a reliquary. He left a few, and ashes, scattered ashes, a knob of bone here and there, a pearly knuckle. Iridescent scraps sacred from the fire.

He left his body for us to use.

Already the mercury is running through me,
through so many orifices absorbed,

a man has so many mouths.

Quicksilver, they said, quacksalver,
the man who made such pills, peddled them,
mercury-monger, quack.
Every physician is a quack, every quack a healer.

It is Mercury that makes it so,
the breathing metal that silvers through my veins
and makes me see at night
even if only dimly
the real people who move around the world,
the ones the light hides
and the mirror shows

and they see me,
the ones we see in the mirror
not the one in the middle
I think is me

but the others, at the side, always watching,
a fleck of Saxon light
that is a cool face watching me
from the doorway of a house

that sometimes looks like mine.
My house, my face,

but she is gone of course when I turn away
to look right at her,
Mercury's hidden sister,

dancing in the mundane shells.
Arcane bells. Grass wet
silvery snail-print, her quick feet,
the mist is gone now into the earth
that had made the morning silver,

the thing that sees in us
could see an oak leaf move a block away
but nothing moves.

22 November 2004

=====

for Charlotte

If I could look you in the eye
after all
if I could know you
the way your mother knows
her Asian chrysanthemums
sky-purple blossoming
even now on the porches of December

but that kind of knowing
is not given

has to be won
delicate tendrils of ice
imagined in the sound
of the slowly turning gear
that winds the ribbon up
on this old Remington

with a human voice, sounds
like your voice
calling me
by a name only you ever use—

everything has your voice.

22 November 2004

=====

What is the shadow of a shadow,
what is it called?

Is it cold
when the November wind
chases the dawn mist and leaves

only you, only you?

22 November 2004

=====

At four o'clock the circle's broken

the rope won't hold the steer
won't come to the altar
won't sparkle with burning life
for the gods won't remember the earth again

how could they when the circle's broken?

(from months back)
22 November 2004

=====

As often as I've tried
to ring in some new year
with an old seedless gourd
rattling silently in the meek holiday air
I still make noise

I make noise

I am one of those
for whom the silence came
but I would not let it in

I wanted the one in sequins
sleek and voluptuous noise

she owned me by ear.

22 November 2004

THE PRAYER

Now then determined
determiner you mark
the boundaries of my be,

the frontiers of my from
the goal of my go.
Who hark you?

Where is your listening post
to overhear me how?
Far from easy far from Nile

it must be to be me
I know you've made me that
but who? Who's glamour,

who is gale? Does all my grass
bend down but my tree stand?
My holy fall you habit in,

impossible I be but I am.

23 November 2004

BAD HYMN

We gather together to
fifty years pass the grey
flicker of old video
Jussi Björling the
greatest tenor of the century
bundled in an overcoat among
stifflingly phony congregants
summoned by mock-vicar to
tumble into phonier nave
while choristers sing.
Jussi's voice is lost awhile
inside the horrid anthem,
that musical split infinitive
that sentimental temple and
I can't get it out of my
head today and the way
his voice belts out the end
gleams with inane glory
he made scant effort to
pronounce. How thick
he is in his overcoat,
his accent, his clarity the
sudden platinum ardent sound.

23 November 2004

=====

I will answer you when crosses come
walking out of the desert one by one

they stalk like broken trees
dried blood of all our soviets
lustrous in the corrugated bark

we have only one savior
one voice raised to represent
the shape of sky on earth

sky is never there
is always here
as inside every woman is the father

judging every move she makes
waiting to be said
served, worshipped

the way it is
no one can untie the father from the cross
no one can let the cross alone

they stalk out of the desert and inhabit us
your father owns you and there is no way out.

23 November 2004

=====

The polished place, cenotaph,
ne'er do well, I'm waiting,

say it *is* an opera, say we do need
all this random song

just suppose an anemone
from a hothouse

dappled with those famous wounds
the way the woman said

only a woman would know them so well
the purples the dark entrances

the final doors.

23 November 2004

=====

Listen: the far away companions
caress your skin, their fingers
seem of local air, their thoughts
your thoughts. You are never alone.

24 November 2004

=====

A package came.
It understands me.

I bend to pick it up
from the porch steps

it has my name on it,
could it be me

come home from the Indies
after so many years?

I thought I was bigger than this
but memory deceives.

24 November 2004

How much does it want to reveal today

of how the world was made? *It cried
out a name, and the one named
came.* Every piece of bread
(you don't eat bread) repeats
this difficult history. The mystery.

Every stone says it also, in two ways:
by crumbling; by standing still.

Only one word
that said all this!

Imagine what will happen
(*befall* used to be the word)
when the answer comes.

There are as many world
as there are words of course
they all knew that
and some of them told you so.

Thistledown dictionaries
the stars all night –
but all we see from here
is just one neighbor word.

Already the breath rouses
(rises) in us to answer.

Will they finally manage to ask the question
before the answer bursts out of our mouths?

24 November 2004

THE KNOWING FAMILY

not in Dearborn these al-Arifs
but right around here
impersonating my heart, your wavy walk.

Where ordinary people like ourselves
have shadows, they have animals.

So when you see an animal
they must be nearby.

And if you ever become one of that family
(by marriage, say, or impersonation,
or repeating certain phrases over and over)
then you'll see animals everywhere,
with no night free of their suffering, their howl.

24 November 2004

RAIN

It's raining on the downward slope.
I want to go out there and review it
before it all falls. Interview water.
I will publish you in *Elle* or *Vogue*,
be careful, I will tell all your wet secrets,
what you did last night in the cloud.
And I will try to hide my own biases,
the reader will never notice but you
because you have been everywhere
and touched everything know how
much I want you to fall.

24 November 2004

=====

but it was the cause
not the consequence

just a little worm
nestled in a pear

and the pear dropped
and rolled along the floor

who makes things happen
who is there

24 November 2004

=====

Can it say?

Nay.

Then can it strife?

Knife.

Know?

No.

Can it become?

Comes.

Can it breathe?

We.

24 November 2004

OLD PEN

Does it work?
The dear does.

A thing
is fond of saying.

*

What it wanted was to write

and now it feels just like my first pen,
the fine-nibbed Parker 51,

writing, writing even
what I want it too

in hopes someday soon I'll write
what it was made to say.

24 November 2004

∴ με—τογ ∴

But what name
that flower,
the one from Paradise
delivered in a dream
and brought back offhanded and by chance
through waking
and here it is?

Tibetan *metog*, flower. Me is fire. They
know the petals are flames.

And what do I know?

24 November 2004