

3-2002

marE2002

Robert Kelly
Bard College

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

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "marE2002" (2002). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 938.
http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/938

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.

TRANSLATING A POEM

Translating a poem a translator should live with his translation all his life and review it time and again, till all the things the sounds and resonances and mirrors in the original text have had a chance to work in him and his text, and given them a chance to explore *those resonances* in the new language. Let the translation be *Nachlaß* then, a bequest of the translator's life, these few poems in the new language the translator's whole life has translated.

On the other hand, a poem too is a momentary distillation of all its sources and come-uppances, cast into the moment, and true only to it. Only what sticks to the words, stays. Of all that had been felt or meant or known, all the unintended references, the half-conscious allusions, resemblances, the enamel figures on the patterned lute, all those — only what sticks to the words comes through. Grace abounds in any text.

So maybe the translator, doing what he always does anyhow, no time, no time, tries to operate outside of time. The translator cobbles something together quick as can be, gets what he can get and says so, and moves on. In the resultant text, however flawed, Grace must operate all over again, to build a background, a vast building full of echoes and shadows. Of course it's supposed to be the same size and shape as the basilica behind the original poem, but it won't be. The mosaics will be a little different, the saints in their niches may not be the ones in the original author's parish church, but something will be there. Some structure transcends its instance. You can walk in it and listen.

18 March 2002

RELIGION

what can they swear to when they know
or when nothing strikes them
then their fancy cracks open like the fesse
of an old marble Venus
defined but impenetrable gap

so the imagination looks like an idea
but nothing moves in our out of it
a shapely futility swollen in the life of things

most people's idea of deity
and I would love that too if I could touch
Thomas-wise the fissures of the real.

18 March 2002

FESTA DI SAN GIUSEPPE

Because you did the thing I dare not do,
tool-wielder, shaper
of common properties, acoustic
engineer for what the heart
of wood will hear, can bear,

that tall pine on the Apennines
you never saw, that stem
that was a ship that came
and killed your son tree after
tree, because you could
still take wood in your hands,

the carpenter's son is nailed to wood

we have to be replacements here
everyone must be his son
lacking one, how can a father be?

because I must be all things to all men
and inherit every absence, taste every death
(why do I think the crow out there
knows what I'm writing down?)

and where is the woman in all this,
sprawled on her belly in the sand
head raised cupped in her palms

reading a magazine, this one,
while the light walks up and down her back

she finds distraction in the language written,
this one, the one you're reading too,
the words are soaking up into it
from wet sand, be there,
impersonate her, read your way
out of this agony, we all do,
reading or hearing or some such thing
and then the spasm's past but he
still has the rough wood in his hands.

19 March 2002

POEM IN FOUR LINES

At least he was an angel once
my fingernails are weird today
new maps of old city and I'm lost
this is where I happened and what then
the girl on the bus the gull on the fence
everything was a different color then
and there used to be rain. What is this now,
this delicate grease from heaven
that gives a sheen but no answers
who is she now, every object of desire
remorselessly eroded into common names.

If each of these lines were worth one syllable
eleven of them together might lift a real line
such as the poets of old could wield
easy on the out of one breath and here we are
packing our trunks for Disneyland as if the sea
had finished its business with us whereas
Coltrane's still in ambush past the cypresses
somebody's sure to make sense of us someday
and offer fire to the right god and learn how to live
with a lady and touch the night scales gently
so all the glitter of our desire makes us beautiful.

I'm sorry for all my rodent humility
I meant to be a policeman and arrest you
for being so unfathomably other, I'd drag you
to my jail and question you all night
and by dawn I too would know the mortal answer.
But I was meek and let you get away with it,
what, that aluminum behavior, that earth-
to-earth messaging, your sleek piracy of my craft
that soaked up everything I thought was me
and left me lawless in an empty book
with plenty of friends and none of them have sense.

How breathless these inscriptions run
just like the old days silver marching band
with wopperjawed trombones would trot
fast down Crescent Street in purple
autumn for festa, even the oldest sexton
was young as his cigar, nothing hurts
when the music's right, *Va pensiero*
mostly, and movie music from Mussolini's
golden noontime when he ate Africa
it was the beginning of my life how dare I question
the girl in the white silk blouse, the cauldron of oil?

20 March 2002

EMERGENCY TEXT

If you can read this
your chair (the one
you're sitting on)
will take off
and sail past Samarkand
to a secret landing strip
on the backside of the Moon.
(If you're standing up
this is the time to sit
down fast or the effect
described will be lost
and you'll be here forever
staring out a lifeless window
thinking you're in Illinois.)
On the moon a patinage
in dust is planned, the skaters
fall and are not bruised
even the shape their bodies
give the dust is not permanent,
the least word breath sweeps it clear.
The sun is bright all night
your mother doesn't know where you are.
You're a special person,
yes, you are,
ten thousand years ago the woolly
mammoths were dreaming of you.

20 March 2002

ASTROLOGY

Do my chart, will you?

— But you're not short, or not very short.

Who said I was?

— And besides, I care about the way you think about yourself, your self-image is part of me, somehow.

What are you talking about? I just asked you to do my chart.

— Do it?

I don't know how you do it, you look it up, or you figure it out, where my moon is, that kind of thing, Mercury, Venus.

— Your horoscope.

That's what I mean, will you?

— It's easy, actually, I have software that computes it, what's hard though...

What's hard? Is it something about me?

— No, I mean it's hard if you want me to interpret it.

Isn't the interpretation sort of given, I mean this means that, Scorpio means sex, Leo means show-off, that kind of thing?

— No, it's all just numbers, numbers and thinking and feeling and remembering. That's what's hard.

NOVENAS

Suppose this were the very place
and no more bitterness. The
sun balanced on the world
like that sponge on a stick they gave him
to suck verjuice from
there is so much detail in dying
and causeless blossoming all around
thank god my father was no farmer
so I get to thank everyone for everyone else.

Exciting when a day comes to talk —
I never really listen till it speaks —
and there you are, dressed in ice cream
and key lime pie, wearing the hard words
critical theory gives us to soften
into the easy practice of our daily sin,
that violin, all night the hallways sobbed
with pennywhistle tunes from heaven
that green saloon across the wordless sea.

21 March 2002

AFTER THE TEMPEST OF THE TRANSFERENCE

If the Subject outlives the object-status of the object of desire,
is there still speaking?

Do words have a music of their own still
that carries?

Language *conveys*. But does it carry by itself,
can it carry a whole person
somewhere, *praeter necessitatem*,
beyond the strictest sense of need,

out where nothing is needed and perhaps nothing *is*,
but if there is, it is there
that the *unimagined* stretches, the most distant of all possible others,

the Other's Other

in other words
the words carry him to

that needless speaker
falling water echoing in a rock cleft

where the actual desire itself exists.

21 March 2002

Kingston

What I remember from those years.
What goes up and disappears inside
But leaves unquenchable desire behind.
Desire for desire. I want your wanting,
I deposit everything thickly deep
Into your treasury, lucre house, afterthought.

Some people will always be younger,
Some people will do it on the telephone
Some people stay in the mind no matter.
Whereas there is a seawind that I know
Clears the streets of such newspaper,
Newspaper's what it is, old info
Cluttering my fragile actual.

Of course this doesn't say clearly
What bothers me in all this insertion.
I don't want it to be clear
I want it to be gone
This is exorcism not translation.
Nail up the door and paint the window blue.

22 March 2002

PRESTER JOHN

Prester John sent out his legates
to test the metal of the world.
Bronze they found, and silver
but nowhere gold. Back they went
through his secret mountains
to make their report: when it gets
to be gold it has no uniform,
no name. Just weight, and gleam.
It is the same as we have here,
relax in the simple doubt called
Being. The king said: next time
bring back a glass of water
from a town where no one ever
saw the moon. Then I'll believe you.
Till then I trust the far side of the hill.

23 March 2002

[on Psychogeography]

“ The word psychogeography was coined by the situationist poet Guy Debord around 1950. It describes the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.

The sudden change of ambience in a street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance which is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the ground); the appealing or repelling character of certain places - these phenomena all fall into the field of psychogeography.

One of the basic situationist practices is the *dérive* [literally: “drifting”], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.”

To which we have to add the other side, the who, the one who walks there, the ones.

Driven by fate was Aeneas (fato profugus) into Italy to find, to found, the city of Rome. To find is to found. Each of us is driven by personal, familial, societal, karma, and driven so much so that we can't walk free along the streets or roads. The streets compel, as Debord suggested at the start of the radical age, but we provide resistance. The streets that cast their spell for me, opening, closing, will do otherwise for you. Hence we go as teams as we walk (in dream or waking) through known cities.

23 March 2002, continues

Maybe I fell
out of some world
into this one

second crop
of what I was
a desire

redistributed
over the flame fields
old monks

burning heretics
the lovers the faithful
ones of the star.

23 March 2002

Poughkeepsie

ad altare Veneris

You bet on birds. But civilization
means repetition, to be able
to do it and do it again
just like the first time, dependable,
true. Itself, in other words, and not
just you. But you bet on birds.
Birds come and go, are winds,
dragons, airs, leaves,
shadows. You built on shadows.
We tried to build a culture
on desire, desire is a bird
that comes and goes, whereas of old
China and India and Africa
built on order, on what they could hold
in place, in mind, the end
of oracles. When the cracks on a
turtle's shell in fire, beast scat
on the lime cliff, bird flight
through the rooms of heaven
stopped being how society
understood itself. Obsolescence
of oracles. Old Rome had them,
old China, but the risks of sky
turned into system, tamed chance
to *I Ching* and the birds were gone.
Or they had brought the birds
deep inside the system. Empty sky.

But you bet on birds
where they come and go
you believed in the deepest
order of the world,
the one that rises in you
or falls, you
are the bird you believed in,
you are the desire
and the desired all at once,
the three of you in one
all walking with me
to the altar of Venus
the god before the world
who waited for us
and we are.

24 March 2002

THE ASSASSINATION OF RENÉ DESCARTES

Men are infinitely subtler than the great ideas
they're famous for, with dirty feet and day dreams
and warm fusty mornings under blankets when they wake
and for a moment know not who they are,
no more than you do at that moment
when the day itself might be one more trick of dream.
So when the fusiliers came and took him prisoner,
stood him on the church steps and shot him down
Descartes hardly noticed, in a sense, that he
no longer was happening. At least in any way
he could evaluate or explain. He fell
and rolled down the steps, just as I do when
I am shot down on the steps of the Stock Exchange
in shadow on a windy day, just as you fall
when they knife you in the Russian baths.
Gunshots reverberate through the portico
startling the pigeons as in every movie
and the sky said rain. His notions groveled
while the government assassins marched away
and the government garbagemen took their time
coming to fetch his corpse. In between
these historical events, outside of history
a man was bleeding, not quite dead yet,
stuff going on in the head, images, words,
prayers, reminiscences, the firm resolutions
of a dying man, the holy baptism each thing
in the world had given him, even the off-blue
paving stone an inch before his eyes
was waking him now to some new meaning,
a gift of presence, a comfort to the mind

that there is something there, this insoluble
mystery of anything at all happening to exist
and we also are. At the intersection
of desire and understanding a man lies dying,
that crossing point the Jews called *Binah*,
Understanding, sad sphere from which we come,
whose number is 67 and that tastes
like sugar and ginger and burnt things. Descartes
is there, I am left with the numbers
of his expedition, his slowly opening absence.
I think he wakes and thinks he dreamed it
but then I think I woke and wrote this down
imagining I'm not actually at this moment
dying on the steps of the Church of Saint Sulpice.

24 March 2002

