Robert Kelly Manuscripts

2-2019

feb2019

Robert Kelly

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The weather
is self-correcting—
what about me?

The market
was cold yesterday
I shivered
among canned goods,
navy beans, hearts
of artichoke,

I’ve been on stage
so long now
but the speeches
keep coming
I have to enact—

quando ver venit meum?

1 February 2019
The irritations of energy when it is not yours, baroque percussion of cars going by thumpety-thump, each thump a proclamation. Trees understand these things better—they have more time.

1 February 2019
= = = = =

It was just as the princess said—
one of the drawers in the walnut desk
had poems in it – not hers.
They’d always been there, she said.
They looked like poems, irregular
lines careening across the old
sturdy paper, the words clearly written
but the language was none I knew
though the alphabet had much
in common with the one I use.
Yes, these are mine, I told her,
and thank you for keeping them safe
all these years for me. Yes, sje said,
they’re from befor you and I were born.

1 February 2019
Yhe nafs
he said
(same word as nefesh
but different
as desert is from riverside),

the nafs exists.
It’s all the rest of it
(of us, he meant)
that’s open to discussion,
question, doubt.

The soul is where the light comes out
(he meant ‘when’ I think).

1 February 2019
CANDLEMAS

Kneel at rail
crossed candles
meet round your throat
Latin spoken
here a blessing
on your breath.

2 February 2019
JOYCE’S BIRTHDAY

That 136 year old man
still leads me on.
Stumbling, I follow.
What power!
The Gaelic geezer,
geyser, Swiss
keeper of the word’s
time, my idol.
You’re the only one
who let language
tell its own story,
safe a few blessed
moments from what we mean.

2 February 2019
So close to the heart
of something—the end
of it, a new beginning?

I hear the horse hooves
clopping on St. George’s Circle,
everybody means well, Vienna.

Was that music
on the other hand?
A rapture by clarinet,
a wall taught to fall,
a frozen flower left out
after the ball?

Run out, there,
try to catch
light in your fingers,
mesh them tight together.

The horses are quiet now.
Everything is sort of a hotel,
you know what I mean?
Go back to bed and work it out—someone is trying to tell you something, something that doesn’t fit on the phone.

2 February 2019
Cloud come, 
keep heat in—
all we need
is atmosphere.
And rock beneath our feet.
The glacier is still leaving us alone.

2 February 2019
Saturn godded,
sowed the seed,
kept it safe
snug in the ground.
Sang to it from the sky
till it burst
out of the earth
yelling its own kind of song,
wheat, barley,
lavender. Saturn
spread time over
all his children,
has all the time
in the world,
we at times
are impatient flowers
waiting for sunshine
before the proper night is through.

2 February 2019
Tell the Bible what it needs to know about us who read it, our guile, our gullibility, our guilt we feel at every impulse—conscience is the Bible’s secret agent, its mole in our archives. Any Bible. Any guilt. Every story tells a sin, every word repents of it—empty churches, busy brain.

2 February 2019
We heal by circumstance.
Watching the lizard
sway in the window
of the taxidermist
the mind comes to rest.
Crocodile from river to earth to air
depending in a window
of the no-longer-alive.
The alchemist hung one of those
above their workspace—
think of all the things it could mean.
Find the river
where such things grow,
learn the song
that makes them fly
harmless overhead,
still full of meaning
even though dead
or maybe more so,
a rugged immortality,
a house in the sky.

2 February 2019
I had an orchestra last night.
I didn’t lead it.
I just told it what I wanted
then to do of all the things
they knew how to do, growl
of contrabass, plaint of bassoon,
on and on.. Leave out percussion,
all you other instruments
just hum the song. Any song,
or all of them at once.

2 February 2019
I see their eyes in the jungle.
They know who I am.
They used to be me.

2 February 2019

(Darwin got it backwards)
THE SPHINX REMEMBERS SNOW.

Only my paws were curved right—
everywhere else
straight lines were softened, made
the heart uneasy to regard.
Blurring of straight lines makes you cold.
I was cold. I was glad
when the era changed and geology
was on our side for a change.
The show melted, the waters went down,
leaving interesting stretch marks
still on my skin. And then the sun
came down to mother us, she still
wamrs my old stone. In her
I move, though no one sees me,
I leave my body in the night and run
inbestigating the world of now,
tasting, touching, seeing. And then
when she comes up again I come home.
hide in my body and pretend.
Time is a little like snow that way,
coming fast, melting slow, being gone.
But thank Sun time is never cold.
SKENE

We are the wall
on which the shadow’s thrown.
We say objects, persons,
cast a shadow—
they throw away from themselves
a more or less distorted
shape of their own being—
light ___ the body
to mark, or mock,
the soul on some pale wall,
an innocent wall,
a theater of eternal judgment.

2 February 2019
Our letters were shaped by, as, the constellations. Alpha was Taurus, but then the stars changed. The letters fluttered down to us more or less as they still are. But still when we gaze at C, say, we can still see the great sickle. When you read a page you are with the ancient wisemen of Babylon studying the sky. Now their sky lives only in books, contracts, bibles, rent receipts, love letters, songs of farewell.

2 February 2019
SHEMESH

I said it long ago:
“The Sun is a woman.
The Moon is the name of a god.”
Central to my thinking:
the sovereignty of women,
ruler of life,
the feminine Sun. —
The Germanic and the Japanese
never lost their awareness altogether—
we need to reclaim it, renew it,
it will save us in the gender wars.

3 February 2019
LES NAGEURS

Awkward people
on the beach at Biarritz.
Awkward, awkward,
their silly bathing suits,
awkward elbows,
shapeless shapes
against the living
lucency of the sea.
And then a surfer came
riding a big wave
and we had dignity again.

3 February 2019
ust over freezing at last.
The melt begins.
Do you feel me complaining under the grumbling words?
It isn’t really me.
I’m just the secretary of the sky.

3 February 2019
The wife is baking dessert for the dinner party. It will be strudel. Good craft, a good test of her skill. She is somewhat proud of her baking. Strudel requires very thin dough, sheet after sheet of thin dough, rolled out, her mother used to say, till you can read a page through it. No much stretching, rolling to get it super-thin. Like what the Greeks use for their pastries, phyllo dough they call it, phyllo must mean leaf. Can you read through a leaf? She rolls and stretches the dough vigorously. As she stretches the dough, her flanks quiver. She’s bent forward over the kitchen table. As she rolls, her whole back thrusts up and down. Sometimes she rolls so fiercely that she seems to leave the ground, feet in the air, only her arms bearing her weight down onto the ever—thinning dough. Stretch. Roll. She looks down to see how the dough is coming along. To her surprise, she sees letters through it, words, success! she can really read through the dough. She bends down, her body still a little restless from effort. She reads:
I come from the mountain
I come for you

I come fot take you
home with me

to my palace on the mountain,
my palace of marble veined with blue.

my palace built around
the mouth of an ancient cave

my father and his fathers
hundreds iof years of fathers

not one has ever journeyed
all the way into the cave

Come with me, darling,
come with me to my palace

you are the one I have chosen
I am the one you have chosen too

come with me, I trust you,
come with me into my palace,

enter the cave with me, together
we will come to the end if the dark.

She stopped reading then, afraid a little, where did those words come from? She stood upright, closed her eyes, shook her head, looked down again. The words weren’t there now, but the stretched dough seemed oddly puckered where the letters had been. She rolled it smooth with her rolling pin, firmly.

When she deemed the dough ready, she formed the strudel, apples and sultanas and cinnamon and sugar all waiting. As she put the strudel into the hot oven she felt a qualm, the dark cavern in the gleaming white electric range. Shook it off and set the timer.

Hours later, after dinner, she brought the strudel out, set it down to be admired, then sliced and served it. Her guests carried on, quite sincerely, about the miraculous almost crisp thinness of the dough, how well it embraced and corrected the softness of warm sweet apples. She blushed with pleasure, natural enough.

Her husband was looking at her from the far end of the table, somehow as if he had never seen her before.

3 February 2019
= = = = = =

Last day of all
a year knows

the sky again
is ready to begin

every crow knows it
even the cars

know it, one after another
happy, only a couple of minutes late to work.

4 February 2019
The learning lapses into knowing,
the scholars sit on the grassy hillside watching the archers shoot at clouds.

Music is noticed—horns and harps annoy the small creature life of the hill.

Nimble young people trot around, recovering whatever they can, picking up the arrows that fall back to earth, every one.

4 February 2019
Who owns my shadow?
Can some photographer take a picture of it for free?
Please, I would like a book full of famous shadows free of captions, shadows are their own identity.
I want to see what they tell us when the names fall away.

4 February 2019
Cedar chest
long unopened,
empty now—
but fantastic
the air in it
rushes out,
ten years of breath
all at once.

4 February 2019
It is the obligation, the sacred duty, of poetry to lead us from the world of opinion into the world of knowing.

This dedication to gnosis we must keep in mind, especially in these days of opinions fashionably clashing.

4 February 2019
New year
I turn around
and look
at what I have been.
Pick up that
loose thread
and weave a little
cloth from it,
a mask to let me see.

5 February 2019
Learning to praise
is learning to learn.

*  
Call me when you’re ready—
there must be somewhere
another alphabet
in my hands so you can hear me.

*  
Pieces of music
fall from the sky

*  
Learning to know
what you want from me
is deep science. Help me
master the intricacies
of another’s desires,
especially the little ones,
the pauses in conversation.

5 February 2019
ECHO

Sometimes an echo takes a long time coming home.
We wait a century to hear what Mahler really said,
or Steiner, or Freud, or any of those mysterious Austro-Hungarian mages, crazies, sages were trying to tell us.
Really an echo is the longest song.

5 February 2019
Waiting on the corner,
he’ll be here any minute—
or every minute if you choose.

Toss a coin
into the air
let a bird
catch it and carry
to that mystery place
where later an egg
will be found.

A traveler will pick it up
on the way to Canada,
look at it, lick
the blue shell so smooth,
then put it back in its nest.

She washes her hands
in a quiet fountain.
Now there is no more history.
Just a little more waiting on the street.

5 February 2019
Straddle
experience,
ride it,
get over it.
I was wrong,
it went away.
Guilt lingered,
grit in the gears
of ordinary life
that miraculous thing
full of renaissance.

n Renew me—
from the ashes of my remorse
fuse a clearer mineral.

6 February 2019
Wrong decisions
sometimes choose us.
For our own good.

Carpenters trust their hammers
but nails sometimes
have ideas of their own.

You call it a fact
only if you find it.
Otherwise the ferry floats
steamless in the harbor.

We wait for guidance
and our guide is the event.
If youre wise you call it Angel.

6 February 2019
Asif I still had something to say!
I never had. Poets have nothing to say. That’s why they sing.

6 February 2019
Let language liberate you.
A river arrives.
A star stares back—it is all one
so you are always and never alone.

6 February 2019
= = = = =

Shadow of my house
on the snow across the road.
Yield me the science of that—
how much a shadow knows.

Wait, we will
get long again—
quick shallow
breath’s best
for winter—

dreams are our Pindar now,
the long lyrical excitement
of what somebody else
seems to be thinking in your head.

6 February 2019
Well, trying to find the way is as good as getting there, right? Only the Greek—
those godless northern radicals who swept down into the divine sunlit maternity of the Mediterranean picking up gods as they came—would have thought so. But we whose ankle bones are still scarred from the Pyramids, whose fingers yearn to cover walls with language. Infinite alphabets, but we know better. Being on the road is just being on the road, citizens of no place. Decide. Decide this is where iy is, and be home.

6 February 2019
Cardinal perched
in a blue hydrangea—
what island
could be better than that?

I looked at the photo
till I remembered
and was glad. But what
I remembered I couldn’t say—

liberty is like that, a keen joy you hardly notice
till it’s gone, and the bird flies away from the bush.

6 February 2019
DOZENS

Dozens want
pole star
I need you.

2.
Member of another
sound vibrating
deep. Machinery
of alone.

3.
It rolls by it turns
it pivots
the think
you’re thinging.

4.
Cause it comes real.
The reification.
Every child
knows that
much, shadow
of its mother.
5.
Ineluctable gender of the obvious
I pray forgiveness
for such a long time I thought you were you.

6.
First phase
a cable
stretched
below the sea.
Suddenly space
had conquered
time again.
yet again.

7.
When I heard you in Europe
I was so happy, Europe
is always answering.
For a little minute
I thought I was more than me.
A black rose. An ordinary swan.
8.
Scotch mist
shimmering
in the porchlight air
mild enough to breathe—
but in dreams I kept
looking sounds up,
yearning for the name of music.

9.
Simple as holding hands
you just need hands.
Simple as listening
you don’t even need ears.
The message knows
you inside out.

10.
Vegetation
on the lunar surface
of a bad idea
can sometimes be
scraped off, distilled
to yield an oil
they call essential.
Only then do you know
what you were really thinking.

11. But where is the alembic
for such scrutiny,
where is crocodile,
the shivering apprentice,
the pin-up on the wall,
Mendeleev, last year’s
Palm Sunday cross,
the water glass, the little
flame that needs no candle?

12. So it really is
all about you.
I mean it.
In the old days
wee spread ashes
on slick ice,
now salt.
No coal, no ash.
Only the truth
of taking care,
watch your step,
tread softly
on the apparent.

13.
I walk with you
I never fall.
A bird settles
on your fingertip
outstretched,
I watch, life
has never been
so close. And then
it flies so
naturally off
vut the sight of it
stays with me
always. Your hand.
A small bird,
about the size of history.

7 February 2019
IN FEBRUARY

Are you here yet,
is this your city?
I watched men with bare feet
pulling and pushing a stone uphill,
the ordinary Egypt of anything,
each person their own pharaoh
choosing the color of their afterlife.
So I call you on the phone,
you speak to me freely
in Canadian, I whisper
a few ordinary words.
Distance makes security—
who is your Valentine?

7 February 2019
Women wear clothes
to conceal their power
and spare men the shock
of that terrifying inward
mountain from which they
and everything else
actually come.

Even an apron
is merciful, witches wear one
until the Moment comes.

I only wish I had read this in a book,
Greek or Babylonian, read it long ago
so that by now I would know it’s true.

7 February 2019
he city is the language
speaks me still

but the green river says nothing
so smooth, it could be oil,
the trees are not near the banks,
the trees are stripped of leaves

but my mother was a calendar

we live in estrangement
that’s what breaks

a cucumber lying on white plate:
what is the sound of that

if you lie down in the water
the water knows it
and knows you

I still don’t know how to talk to dirt.

7 February 2019
ISLAND

Wide raft of sea comes
rough arrival
smoothed by sand
itself, the worn-down,
the much-divided
into—look at me
through your glass, it says,
glass made too from me—
infinite differences.

Jag of crystal,
light in the sky.
The stars were one of me once,ruised into difference,
now they have faces.

Each grain
a name,
itself, the worn-down,
its own Hesiod
singing how it came to be

identity
the gem of me

be my island!
Archipelago.

The sand between my toes
Bruckner’s last symphony.

Too many griefs
the wombs wrath [?] in
and out away again
but leave the tune of them
to haunt the head

your beautiful face
asleep beside me

I cling to the light
the sight

And here
where the sea’s so far

we can be island
to each other, yes?
¿Si? In the lap of language to be spoken and healed?

There is no weather in my play. The characters struggle only with their feelings—long, long ago the theater moved indoors—when was the first roofed-over? Since then it’s all about the voice that’s speaking,

no shadow of the outside real falls on the scene, skene, the wall that once by shadow made the man.

This wandering along the beach when every morning’s Christmas and every wave a messenger.

Tell me again how you curl up and rise and fall
and what it means
when you retreat
and leave me alone
with all this
and this and this.

O Love I need my island,
be!

What has not said before,
union and shell,
shelter and shimmer—
*from my ruins shape an image*
says the shattered shell,

mosaic. The sun at midday
carapace of sky

when we have learned to be kind
they gave us an island
of our own— strive to remember
why, kindness, the
kindness, the only matter.
Sand song
grit
under thumbnail

Shout year after year
trying to be bigger than my skin

and then the wave wades out.
We are where we were
only more so.
It all sounds like a chorus now,

unfound language,
wert whisper.

8 February 2019
CLEARING

A hint of blue
grows through the fleece,
the trees too
begin to show
their colors,
winter-mute
but actual.
And now the whole
horizon is.
This is called
‘clearing’ but really
it brings everything
back in,
crowds us with
light, leaves,
the particulars.

8 February 2019
With littlest sword
wage the biggest war.
Smile, smile
and turn away.
Your back
tells all
ey they need to know.

8 February 2019
1. I didn’t think you’d be listening as broken bone from a chicken platter on the edge of the table fell, with a sound no more than Santa Claus coming down a million chimneys at a time, a dog might have worried it but there was no dog.

2. this is what fate is or is about. The missing animal, the vreaking closet door, the lepers on the steps of the basilica, o yes, I have been a bishop too and know the broken world all round the peaceful icon of the Madonna holding a drowsy little baby who turns out to be all of us.
3.
But you were listening
if only in your sleep
where old French novels
saunter over meadows
looking for the fountain
but always only finding the river
and the river always hurries past.
That kind of sleep, no wonder
you couldn’t make much of my words.
my armchair theosophy,
my home-schooled eternities.

4.
But something came through.
You still smiled at me in the morning,
sleepy, a little, your shoulder
pillowing my cheek. It happens
that way. I get up to let out
the cat we don’t have, milk
the cow a thousand miles away,
patrol the sky a bit, . That’s
what men are for. And drawing
pictures of the life to come
just around that tricky corner
with the non-stop blinking light.
5.
Does that help? Does that fill out the magazine with glossy ads of things you really want? I’ll buy them for you, I promise, in this dream or the next, or whenever the music starts again. My Tenth Symphony. Your island of pure grace.

6.
But while I can, I try. Tuna on rye. a toy cannon makes real noise, they used to say *phenomenon!* when such joys befell. Berose? Where is the other side of a word when we need it? Can you speak backwards too the way you can lie on your belly counting daisy petals or whatever it is we’re supposed to do with all those miles and miles of grassland.
7.
You catch my drift
like a disease.
I am lonely
in the best of ways,
all violin solos and dirty jokes,
you know my kind.
Weird ideas about everything,
probably right but too loud about it.
Or probably just charmingly wrong.

8.
Then the ferry nudged against the jetty
and we were invaded by friends
and other problems. Fishing rods
and other goyish pleasures,
hairy dogs, a sack of US mail.
This is the end of the world again,
the furthest place any ocean reaches,

8 February 2019   Shafer House