

2-2019

mar2019

Robert Kelly

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

=====

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, she said,
they're from before you and I were born.

1 February 2019

=====

The *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 snow 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
investigating 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.

2 February 2019

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

J= = = = =

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

STRUDEL

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. So 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 for 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 of 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 of 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 weace a little
cloth from it,
a mask to let me see.**

5 February 2019

SHRAPNEL

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 pf 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 it 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
but 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,
bruised into difference,
now they have faces.

Each grain
a name,
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,
wet 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
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 creaking closet door,
the lepers on the steps of the basilica,
oh 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 listeing
if only in your sleep
where old French novels
saunter over meadows
;ooking 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 atme 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
akes 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
couting daisy petals or what-
ever 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

