

4-2011

aprH2011

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "aprH2011" (2011). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 81.
http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/81

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On the day Knife
be ready for a fight.
But on the day Star
I am what you are.

There is no day Star.

That light you see's a
crack in the curtain
a split seam
in the mirror tugged
too tight over the
curves of the world:

I am hair and you are skin
then we are the other way again.

29 April 2011

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Birds are building nests in our eaves.

If you believe in the world too much

it cracks open and lets you see

the other animal it is trying to be,

not just me. It is water in the sap

of maple trees, shadows in the grass,

children playing with knives...

and you thought you were the only beast!

29 April 2011

MIRANDA

1.

That letter from Prospero you found
seemed at first remote from our concerns—
that's what makes love possible,
almost inevitable.

Every bird at all
misses its third wing
so he runs down the hall
squeezes her waist
and runs away—

history
is made of this,
glad sorrow of us
always only one love at a time.

And *every third thought*
he'll think of dying
and all the other two
continue to be you.

2.

Watch watch.

Break breakfast.

Lift your wrist

and lick the wound.

A day is more

than beginning.

Clouds are fugitives

from a cold night.

The cause is the effect.

The woman understood it

all too well, forgave

his intimacies now as

all her life his distances.

“Father, what aileth thee

that thou need’st me again

who once for all did pour

out of you into the silent

nameless personage who made

my body, my lady Mother?

Wouldst thou retract me

into thine own solemnity,

ambiguity? O the brazen clock

Giulio Romano made for us

displayed the Goddess Vesta
her hips swaddled tight as Ægypt
and no celebration!”

3.

But he was silent then
writing one more little prophecy
he’d leave for her tucked
snug in the crook of a hornbeam tree,
low woodwork of that island.
He heard her vaguely
but only one thing clear to him,
They are all my daughters.

29 April 2011

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The important thing is to have something to worry about.
The gates of hell stand open night and day, as Virgil
reminds us, the man who stood in a friend's vineyard
listening to the ragas bees hum in sunlight, all ears.
Easy to go down there, hard to come back this way out.
Or up. We are only what we hear. Without worry
we would (and who is this 'we' we're speaking of?)
just laze in laxness like a water-logged summer novel
all mildew and intrigue, pages stuck, a butterfly goes by.
Things do dry out eventually, Hell does freeze over,
well-known fact. Lie there thinking about Vikings,
names of your friends, smell of freesia, creep of history
towards tomorrow afternoon. It will get there surely,
never fear. Now find something new to fret about.

29 April 2011

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I once knew how to do something

I can't do anymore.

Something to do with washing dishes

or watching a friend do them,

wet hands, soapy water rinsing off

fluorescent light and sunlight mingled,

something to do with rye bread on the sideboard,

moss on the window ledge, sleeping late.

29 April 2011

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The clifftop hurries to the horizon
on the cliff a young man stands
who takes charge of all this
who is the lord of childhood fantasies

he acts them out, here, on earth,
between air and ocean, himself
a piece of the sky—and he too
once bore your name.

30 April 2011

[The first four lines intact on the way from dream.]

AT A READING

This next poem

is silent.

During the silence

I will say some words

to help you hear it.

30 April 2011

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How far can I trust
my hands to say
what you need to hear?

Come back to me
who never left you,
you are the shape of time

when all the lilacs
understood eternity,
and space itself

needs us
to shape it—
that's where you

come in,
I saw you move
when all the rest were still.

30 April 2011

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Where did the beginning go?

I was sleeping

the sun was shining

things do what they know how to do

the wheel was turning

and then it stopped—

felloe split? axle

shattered? No, this

wheel has no axle

it stands still all the time

and things roll round it,

We are wheel and it is waiting.

30 April 2011

BOSTON TULIPS

for Betty



Wild as weather
they hide in color

the street knows nothing
of them, the tree
is like their sentinel,

the Wren Street bus
goes by and early Monday
picks up half a dozen

quiet children
who have nothing yet
but yellow tulips

with brazen hearts
and small purple red
ones that hide

even from themselves.
Which is also
what childhood means.

30 April 2011