

5-2007

mayE2007

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "mayE2007" (2007). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 688.
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Temps Perdu

Time wasted turns
around and curls
deep inside your doubt.
Later when you love,
it scoffs. When you pray
it disbelieves. Even
when you stare
bleakly in the mirror
it tells you this
is the only thing
that counts. Even you
know that can't be right.
Nothing is right
it tells you, I am
five minutes in May
you killed and now
I rise to slay you
every way I can.

20 May 2007

PAIN

It hurts only
where I'm me.
The rest of the garden's
fine. The tree
feels good. The sky
is out to lunch.

20 May 2007

Clepsydra, 5

I have tried to find you all my life, in fact
it's hard to think of my life as anything
else but trying to find you. First
I supposed you were the sky-blue
hydrangeas in the middle of my mother's
little garden, and then you were a white
wave that curled over an empty beach
on Rockaway. Then there was a chapel
with intricate holy puzzling windows
deep blue again, stained glass, understood
stains were somehow holy, well all right,
thought you were the grey stone of the church
or any church, the candle flame in red jars
flickering in the sacred tedium of Mass.
Then, dismissing these childish things,
I thought you were that drunken woman
feeding quarters into the juke box she
sprawled against hearing *Moon River*
over and over again. Then you made me
a pilgrim, reading the streets themselves
of lower Manhattan as if they formed
the hieroglyph of what I was looking for
so hard, read with my feet. Note that already
I was close to accepting some symbol
instead of the thing, whatever it was
or is that you actually are. Was I settling
for sign instead of signified? You tell me.
It might be an *O Altitudo!* instead,
kissing the essence of the essence. Whatever
the answer, I went after you, aha! Greek
etymologies, aha! Egyptian animals
parading past slim-hipped goddesses, aha!
Chinese characters, used to go and sit
in the old Orientalia bookshop on Twelfth
sitting by the fireplace in a collapsed
fauteuil with an old cat on my head

reading a huge Chinese dictionary,
where the unknown signs got explained
into language I cluelessly trembled
to guess, French, just barely imagined
to find you, Dancer, or was it danger,
there leaping out of the book. Radical
for fire, for wood, for man. But wait.
You don't have to hear my whole
history, I'm not Manon Lescaut, this
is not an opera. The ruddy leather
of the binding crumbled in my fingers,
could taste it later, time, age, learning,
strangeness, yearning, search – all
just a taste on the lips by then, a kiss
one was proposing to carry all the way
to you, and give it to you where it counts.
But the heart has bookshelves of its own
where those tiresome annals are stored
that we call years, built almost exclusively
of long afternoons, only now and then
an explosion of midnight fireworks,
feux d'artifice, oh we know that lingo now,
and sometime very rare the pale intensity
of silver-fingered dawn finding her way
through dense deciduous forest, the poem.

21 May 2007

Clepsydra, 6

Having once been said, what remains
for one to say? The wise thing
has been spoken, the complete catalogue
from amniotic accident to Cheyne-
Stokes breathing has been perused
and the man is dead. All the signs
and splendors of the afterlife begin.
Or not. Now what am I to say?
I've told you everything I know, much
more besides that no one knows,
lies, confusions, whimsies, afterglows.
The sky-form body of the goddess
stretches blue spangled over the corpse
which might still have breath in him
she breathes in to help her little stars
so far away gulp air for their song.
Osiris impatient on his throne, Mawet
with her model of the perfect heart
to measure his. Mine. When everything
has been sung, the characters all die
but the opera somehow continues,
a thing called an orchestra occurs
solemnly searching for its tonic,
that sweet doorway into silence
that only old-fashioned music knows,
end of Don Giovanni, end of the road.
Orchestra meant where people danced.
Dancing means when people move
half-muscled by the sound itself
to speak their insides out as movement,
a dance is always an embarrassment,
an intercourse. The shock of having
a body never left him. Even now
when that is almost all he is, sky over,
earth under, a little beetle walking up his wrist
like a replica Rolex come to life, even now
it's an embarrassment to be. Something,
he knows it's there, Something! he calls out

Come take me in your car, pick me up
and bring me home from summer camp,
this is a vile place and I hate the river.
He licks his fingertips as if it were a stamp
and he an envelope, void of content,
that he could mail, an empty letter
to the world, encyclical from a dead pope
nobody can read from no pulpit nowhere.
All wisdom is confused with being.
And that's what always remains to be said.
That wisdom is what never dies, and you are wise.

21 May 2007

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Doesn't matter
how many acres
or hundred acres.

A corner of an acre
is all it took
even I could find that.

A snake would lead the way.
Follow the snake
not far, to a place
in this little trine
of grassy land
the *corner of the corner*.

He came to the wet spot
turned to look at me,
make sure I'd understood
then went away.

A bamboo pipe
a foot long or a cubit
long, just work that down
and in, in not much time
clear water lipped
up over the top of it

slow at first then
a decent flow.
The fountain
had been found.

The happiness of this
is hard to say
but it was the color
of grass shadow

on water, this
happiness.

Sometimes
a pump has to be
primed to augment
the flow but as it was
just as it was
it was enough,

Here, I felt
later, the new
life begins.

21 May 2007

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The still furled irises
show purple now.
Cool Gemini upstarts,
my life for theirs.

21 May 2007

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On the track of lost weather – that’s what
I look for, the salmon sunsets the quicksilver
sequences of winter dawn, high noon in Hell
by which I mean Washington DC. What we
mean by weather is the people of the world
who knew us when we knew the wind or
rain came by or the snow piled up around
the creaking porch and everybody was a grandpa
then huddled against sheer downcomingness.

21 May 2007

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Waiting is a wilderness.
I hold your hand in my mouth
like a dog. You are a newspaper,
everything I need to know
is in you. But I can't read.
A dog again. But my mouth
is wet with you. You
detest it like this.
Everything should be otherwise

and often is. Gilt chips off the ceiling
stucco, drops on the artificial whipped cream
—war has always been like this, does
terrible things to names. Allies.
Your body is my friend
no matter what you think.

22 May 2007

Clepsydra, 7

Looking closer, the phone was ringing.
What happened to your name, lose it again
in some dockside estaminet? Words you like
but supper rarely. Who is it? Who at this hour
neither blue nor wolf would call me,
does a fox have fingers? Forget it.
The wag of the tail implies the dog.
Or it could be cat but only if angry,
watch out, his claws are still where Satan set them,
Uzzums le chat. Who is at the door?
The one who said I am the door?
Trying to remember my own names
all of them is a tedious exercise
like a crossword puzzle in a foreign language
not too far away, Spanish say, that lingo
of conquistadors. You understand I'm sure
that all my rhetoric is that of subject peoples,
supple suppliant, kneel-adept, cringing
lyrically to seek the right to lick your name
secular with my lewd fountain pen.
I keep answering the fleshy telephone
for all the good it does me, bring food
in brown paper sacks you call them out west,
bread and so forth, I forget the names
of what I used to like, Liederkrantz,
ox tripe in the Norman fashion spiked
with applejack, not quite right, an egg,
what could go wrong with an egg?
What about the one who said nothing
when you smiled at him, not even a smile
back to change the tension of the situation,
the kind you had grown up enduring
in the speechless households of your long
infancy, never know what the other's
thinking, the other ne'er knows you
and so on, round and round, the bright May
dances round itself outside whilst here I glum.
Who would dare amuse me, he thought,
frowning at the sunny lawn, the trees
stand abashed like clowns, he fires them
from his circus, he closes his eyes,
is it the Protestant Reformation behind all this,
or just vexations of metabolism, names?
Names is the answer. All my names
I never knew, the ones they gave me
sealed somewhere else, names heard

in a dream or a dakini whisper, names
stored in a mind not mine, but all
of them are mine. Or not yet mine
he thinks. Of all my names I like
left-handed best, since it's not true,
or most like you. They were gentle then,
they said You have come to the place
where you lay your names down.
Even before you remember every
last one of them, all is easier than every,
set them down now, set them down.
And he did. Then there was twilight
and a kind of twinkling in the woods
till a ground mist rose up faintly,
couldn't be sure in fact if it was mist
and not general obscurity born of night
augmenting, darkness comes just as
daylight does, bit by bit, feinting
here and there among the pines, reluctant
across the dappling lawn and there it is,
a person in the trees, beckoning
and he stepped towards it obedient
as usual, only a little grumpy this time
because he forgot again to wish
upon the evening star, forgot to wonder
was it Jupiter or Venus this time,
as if it mattered, it matters, here we go,
the forest creatures who mostly live in books
are really here now, sprites and fauns
and dryads slipping nervous nakedly
yet why should they be anxious
they belong here don't they, but here
is the anxious energy of pagan earth,
anxiety is part of the process, we are fire
and never still, what you call nerves
is the flesh exulting and the song of skin
and horny aegipans to whisper trash
but ancient lovely trash in your shy ears,
still shy after all these years, and in
your brain the phone is always ringing,
you can answer it right now by walking
foolish holy into the clutches of the dark.

22 May 2007

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As if there were soft things
likes Janes or Emilies at bay
in every shadow, come out, girls,
I know you're in there, training
to be old-fashioned damozels,
dimity and god bless me,
I need that old American softese,
summer's coming and my neck is sore,
I've carried this strange Cross before,
we all are weights on one another.
Down the Delaware in spotless underwear
you float, fluttery little fetishes,
divinities of sticks and stones, or
tightrope walking down the common street
all virtue all the time
and high above the rest of me.
It's the old time religion, a girl in gingham,
tourists worshipping Niagara Falls!
I sound like Charles Ives with a cold.
a brass band in my gonads
is marching on its way to you,
I am the tuba, I am the trombone.

23 May 2007

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Any plan is ornament.
Any idea
is just a decoration
of the void.

So said Rubricius.
Who's that?
A late Neo-Platonist
active in Alex-
andria, I made him up.

“Thoughts
are the corpses of meaning.
Meaning is the corpse
of will. Will
is the wounded
body of desire.”

I lived there once
an animal was the form
I took, and I was in love
with whatever happened
just because it did.

There are pictures of me
still to be seen
on many an Egyptian wall,
tall ears, looking
straight ahead
but never at you.

23 May 2007
Red Hook

THE LADDER

the ladder leaning
against the garage
wall up to the roof
why bother, all that's
up there is the sky.

23 May 2007

THE GIFT

As if there were this
I give it to you
already, like a swan
just there on the river

already, like a river
there beneath
and a sea for it
to run to, romance, union,

as if there were this.

24 May 2007

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And I thought
looking at the window
then through it
onto the neighbor lawn
and the neighbor beyond it
soon I will be gone from you
and you will have lost me

and that makes me sad,
sad as a cello in the corner
of some room with a sunbeam
on it, silent,
no, just sad,
no images, sad, the word
is enough, sad not for me but for you,
as if I were briskly taking
away from you something
neither of us knew you had.

24 May 2007

SET THEORY

The surprises of travel are rarely
welcomed by strenuous passengers
—voyagers are few— on thorns to get
somewhere at some special hour.
Oh we have our occasions! Objurgations
arise from the waiting room, departure lounge,
the breakdown lane. Dawn of an ominous day
over Goville, and you didn't sleep all that well
and now it has come, the decisive time,
the line between your whole life till now
and this budget flight into you never know.
The chances are. You'll get there. Soon
forget the deceiving techniques of going,
coming, soon, chances are, you'll be pretending
you speak Spanish again, or trying to buy
hashish off the Herrengracht. But is it
really you? Isn't this busy traveler a ruse,
a virtual shopper shuffling through the Vatican
while the real you lies trembling back home
in the comfortable despair of domesticity
waiting for his doppelganger to come home?
Just look at any traveler and see there
all too empty eyes sick from what they've seen.

25 May 2007

IF ANYBODY ASKS

If anybody asks, tell them: we are operators in a vast and specious mathematics. No one makes it happen. Numbers run through all their possible alignments as simply as raindrops fall. And there is zero. Numbers know us. It's what we know to do.

Tell them there are irises in shadow, and a man is dying, there is music elsewhere, always elsewhere, but they should feel free to count the petals. And that you haven't.

Tell them one came from Devon, six came from Ireland, you don't know where the eighth arose. Ask them: Do you?

A traveler is the kind of person who would count flowers.

We usually call people 'unspeakable' only after they have spoken.

Tell them: a good woman writes her name in the air, and the air remembers.

Tell them: when they have finished counting, they should come find me by the fire.

The Lord taught me how to fry fish for weary men, but I have not yet mastered it.

25 May 2007