junE2007

Robert Kelly

Bard College

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

Recommended Citation

http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/693

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.
A WHIFF OF NAKEDNESS

What can it mean
the moon’s last night on earth
a sparrow waiting for the bell

come watch me feed on thee
for I am Portugal beneath thy flank
mother’s here and bets are off

mink is meant for browsing in
now shape your lips to say the oo in you
but say the ee in seed instead

the sauce should hide the glistening fat
tomorrow’s weather neatly prophesied
a paper, a paper, hold to your lips!

Let your spittle mix with its ink
so understand the craft of angels
those hectic personages who pour

the essence of one thing into another
forever till we catch on—
a brother, say?  Never had one,

a target for the infant archers I was
night and day it wore me out
being invariable a butt for’s darts

sunshine and no weekend’s worse
any song will tell the truth
if you hear it hard enough.

Art these days hath certainly become
designer jeans without the jeans,
teach me better o Berenson

to touch I Tatti where the skin
flakes off, sheer gift it is to see
I mean seeing anything at all.

2.
When I was a kid they called it razzmatazz
but they didn’t know what it was either
though you always think you know what it means

when the word slips through your lips on its way to a wife
a hard zee twice, like a tongue trying
to shove your front teeth out, a fierce buzz

like Portugal deciding to split from Spain over the English question
a forlorn ATV snarling up a red clay hill in the Chablais
o soft sweet esses like a dream come true

or usefully remembered afterward in time to nap on it
and brood in wind great aspiration from sleep’s vague hatchery.
stand up and squawk, muchacha, do you think I could forget you?

Here Siegfried cuts the karmic chain and solves
the riddle of all-lives-long affinity – our eyes
belonged to each other instantly we met

and no more happened in this life or needed to,
were we foretelling or remembering each other.
only my broken sword will explain it

when the pommel finds again the point of all this rapture.

3.
Black sand like the Algarve I meant
or you spelling a German word out loud
or the sea sparkle after three days of cloud

it’s all a hymn you know just find the tune
samdhi variations off the Rann of Cutch
how do you like my hair today

tied back in a mauve bandana pale
o the tall blue sunsets of the world
a hilltop is a god for looking from

cut the overhanging branches pine’ll sting you
vocalized ell like what’s in the bottle
I have to spell it our so you don’t mistake
the sometimes shimmer of a mainland city
far away across the evening water
for an actual word an actual person

actually said to you one day it’s only angels
those persons without masks you breathe your breath
and they think with it and let you listen

ah Beethoven again you think but no it’s you
under yet another guide disporting self
shallow in the homelands of this wetless sea.

15 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
OBJECTIVE

Don’t keep worrying about the binoculars, he assured me they focus perfectly with a little patience—the knurled knob in the middle after the right eye ring maybe—then he told me that touching anecdote about King Zog and his mother, remember I told you. So if you can’t see a sail on the horizon it means there’s no boat there. The Albanian code of honor is very strict—he walked with her every day in the cool of evening in the public park right across from the palace and nobody killed him, you can’t assassinate any man, even a king, walking beside a woman. Such respect for Holy Wisdom! Blackbirds ate crumbs safely all round them too. Do they have squirrels in Tirane? God knows, stop fiddling with the focus, the sea is empty. The sea is empty. Do you understand?

15 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
They live in fire
like men lingering in taverns

when we are children
we’re sent to coax them out

tugging on their coat tails
begging daddy to come home.

dreamt:
16 June 2007, ca. 8:20 AM
Cuttyhunk
Too Many Sieges

Ottoman pirates invest the bay,
prune trees and raisin vines
cover the flanks of the conical
base of the heretics’ stronghold—
see them on the battlements
chanting obscene hymns down
onto the sweltering attackers below,
The Moon is a Young Man!
The Politics of Heaven Rains
Shit on Earth! Every Lime Leaf
is a Letter Learn to Read!
Disgusted marines clamber up
the ravelin, cutlasses in their teeth
they howl orthodox rejoinders
but when they cry out any one
of the names of God they remember
the blades fall out of their mouths
and clatter down the slopes, a hazard
to their comrades climbing.
For years they keep up the assault.
This particular day the heretics win,
the pirates go home under tattered sails,
no Iliad gets written, but safe in ladies’
chambers the heretics share out
intensities of criminal delight—
some reaching ‘Seraph’ on the bliss scale
before they sink back comatose and glad.
Tomorrow another theology, and so to bed.

16 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
See the beauty of something seen
not dragooned by daylight
just witnessed so casual
from the eyes’ slant corners
a thing asleep in its own nature
out there in a world of things
and know this sleep to be the highest waking.

16 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
ARS POETICA

There should be something to look at in every line,
something to taste in every third.
That way the reader never wearies
or if she does, it is to fall into pleasant reverie
or outright sleep. And those also she will blame on you.

16 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
Custom counts
behavior costs

I woke another voice
pyramided in me

a shaft in honeystone
a surly emperor aroused

by nothing harsher than sunshine
quivering now and then in island mist

and yet he saw.

This seeing is what men call dream
or could call so in the days before.

Before what? Before
what we had done taught us what men do,

taught we who we are.
After that, nothing is right again

except try hard.
Or not try at all.

Hope no longer works and every faith’s misplaced.
Only one thing left, and that works only one [       ] at a time.

2.
What fills the brackets, I asked the voice.
Ask the stone or your fond mist, it said.

One situation at a time, it meant
but there’s no word for that, never a word,

street comes close, or heart, or flesh
or casual encounter or aged relative

all of those have to find room in the word
to speak the sphere of operation of this verb ‘love’
so many people shove into their brackets
it said. Compassion has to be in it

and fierce determination, and some intelligence.
Plus the two rabbits chasing each other on the lawn,

now let me sleep.

17 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
A polter of philosophy cumbers your head.
Agree. David's not a very
Italian name. It's Welsh. The Welsh
is very Jew. Can't hear? My blood
runs true. That's not what you said!
Who? Too many mishearings.
Missionaries? Their little cardboard boxes
candle-yellow to put our greasy
pennies in for foreign parts,
heathens and lepers and such, angels
were the accountants of what we gave.
That's just childishness, can't measure
religion by what a child remembers
later. What else is there to go by?
Which one of you hath measured God?
Sure, coma or dream or rush we spot Him
sometimes deep in the mind's eye
flashing all the prism's colors, the robes
by which we know Her, yet strange
we lick the milk from His teats
before we even see the naked sky She is.
You've been peeking, not listening,
that's vision, not religion unreformed,
don't change the subject to stuff
we actually can see, material pearl,
thin locket of a world around whose neck,
eh? And round whose breath what
sculpture's wound? Wave readers,
all of them, parsers of bird paths,
smug as dragons in their algorithms,
doctor's on the way to mind your hallux
hallux sinister in mentulam portavit vinum
is that what vision comes from, a drafty
window, a vein up your front end, a star's
blink caught in your windowpane
between the sash and the Venetian blinds?
Keeps you up all night? What window,
warbler? What was that one, caught
in yellow moult on yonder twig repining
lifting its little head to tweet like Lord's
own chorister, who's that? Look it up,
the book is right behind you, breathing
down your neck like Rasselas, who’s that?
trespassing in a philosophic kingdom
where reason rules and wit’s the only weather,
who? who? Dumb enough to ask questions
not dumb enough to answer them.

2.
But this was hearing we were meaning,
a new word not an old one, shiny
like licked leather, right? Night
he meant, when rubadub’s hullabaloo
welcomes homeward nurses. Hallux?
Leave your toes alone. She moans
like a seashell, recall your eyes
from a former life but when was she?
Were we married then? Did anything at all
come before the world we know? No?
Echo is invidious. Us? Stop it.
The boat comes in midmorning, go down
and see who’s on board this time,
arrogant energy of the believers, ach,
you wouldn’t believe it, storm for breakfast
Calvary for tea, we ate our spinach
all day long. No, that was a woman
she bore a bird on her left shoulder,
not a parrot as you’d expect, a common one,
dove or such, trained to do uncommon stuff
just sit there and say nothing, like a man,
sometimes they just like it, what they do,
then the doctors think up a name for it.
Liking anything at all is the first perversion.

3.
The amber seal
is in her grip
her alternate identity
on the other hand
in her nude lap
a rising sun
runnel of light shows
where the child will lie
after the ceremony
of roses and Sufi angels
there is a simpler
clamor in her bones.
You’re sure of that now,
you really hear it?
I’d hate to be wrong
where no means no
when high above
the greedy dove
whistles down the light.

4.
Amazing what you can listen
when you let yourself hear.
White alabaster churchy places
luminous along lagoons,
that’s all for me. All yours?
In a manner of speaking,
a fetch of Scottish magic
brings me my old slippers
a burnt barn up in Maine
my Pantheon – see roof hole,
that’s God up there
in any weather, all I care
is what’s above. O your
poor wife in such abstraction!
Distraction, Men get thinner
near the sea, you notice?
Sunlight on clear wood’s
wife enough for me.

18 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
There is an arrow in the air
still flying. Market Bosworth
or Little Big Horn. Soon
it will find its mark
and I will fall. I will not fall.

18 VI 07 Cuttyhunk
The riddle of persistent identity
is like a peach. It is sweet,
every kiss drips down your chin,
needs a sink to catch the juice, this
sink is history. Your arm
is tense to write the easiest word.
There are no easy words.
Speech is terrible. Its sign
in ancient art is the acanthus leaf,
grows in dry places, bitter,
murderously sharp. My hand,
trembles. I think I’m saying
something but nothing gets said.
We are all victims of this trickery.
Victory ode: Himeros in his brazen
chariot’s a whole week faster than
his nearest love still loses.

18 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
That this mind is prism
to be its own colors
to an ownless light

or speak a semaphore
to shore, a spoke
of light now from no

ship furrowing hereward
and this! be mainland
you thought an island

it is Atlantis new arising
in every in between
crosswise up:

between a thought and its
thinker or between
each thinking and the next

from such wave
wallowing it comes it comes
natural to mind

and no never to do it in.

19 June 2007
Cuttyhunk
Stones, bones, driftwood,
old plastic bottles, wave
smoothed glass: the sea
makes everything its own,
its own color if it can.

19 VI 07
Old shirt
color of time
that fugitive
dear cloth
a love ago
you knew

or someone
like you or
someone else ago.

19 VI 07  Cuttyhunk
One thing to say
and no me
to say it.

I need you now,
come out
and let the morning

speak for itself.

19 VI 07, Cuttyhunk