

10-2006

octB2006

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "octB2006" (2006). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 752.
http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/752

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= = = = =

To look back at the white page in front of me to see it
over my shoulder as I run away from it

away from you to meet you
as anyone who is running has an *away* and a *to*
built into what is done run

lonely joggers on a moonlit road who know
not that they are lonely barely know the moon
are in denial of from and to they are caught
on the altar of effort moveless inert
in their rapidity rapture

rush Rausch means intoxication
Rauch means smoke in fumes of laurel
the oracle endured the words that came through her

barked out wild cries in the python's cave
we do words to the air any air we do something to
becomes us the child hyperventilates on the backseat
in sunshine the car goes the jogger a word

a word is a yelp the jogger says nothing with her breath
the altar of effort stills its victims
the priest of time presses his blade against the heart

how many breaths does a man have in life
how many heartbeats two billion so far
knife peels away from artery the priest too
is weary of murder murderous time breathe

breathe slow look back at where you've been the page is done.

8 October 2006

= = = = =

in memory of Oskar Pastior

Obverse destinies and their backsides
are such that we can never be sure
about which kind of fame will whisper our names
for a curse, a blessing?
Beautiful ivy that men rip off old walls

so there's not much poetry left,
Maybe color by itself is adequate,
I sort of doubt it, sort of suspect
that only air ever cares about us enough to
murmur still around us in alleys and underbrush, always inside
things, as if people just existed as vibrations between clumsy old
unchanging stones and bones and fossils, only an occasional whiff of rose.

9 October 2006

TO BE CONTINUOUS

Stock prospectuses and insider tips are the pornography of the elderly.

*

Futureless pasts and pastless futures – nothing reminds me of myself.
Or itself either.

*

How hard it is to be continuous.

*

Nothing wants to answer.

*

Apart from me, a volcano in Mexico in trouble or a desert on Mars. Otherwise not.

*

I want to find a trace of her teats
where the milk fell
stored so hugely behind closed eyes.

*

I am crowded with small cities.

*

Every one a bank of Tyre.

*

Speciation is the darkest solution. If only the problem were real!
Then the geneticists at last could heal scraped knees. Everywhere around us
children fall.

*

The falls of the elderly are trying to be young again.

*

There is a grammar of it, but the names get in the way.

*

Just past full moon on lawn dappled with leaf shadow just before dawn. Time is such a cocktease. No assent is final. No darkness lasts. Yes means no.

*

I could call you up now and say that I was sleeping. Didn't know what my dreams were up to. Are you sleeping too?

*

I am suspicious of answers that come before the question. Like a smile with too many teeth.

*

Abdicate while you still have no chance.

*

Every town's a little like Varennes. Our appetite for ordinary things lets us in for extraordinary downfalls.

*

No one ever choked while fasting.

*

The charm of Lent. Lent is an old word for springtime.

*

δεδυκε μεν σελανα – on my mind all day. And now the moon really has set. And I wake alone.

*

Dark lawn. Difference.

*

I keep thinking of Paul Valéry. Who never even for one single second thought of me. Difference is strange.

*

A syllogism should repair rotten teeth. Precarious logic. Thought as amalgam.

*

But Psyche has no teeth, or perfect teeth. Like the butterfly, she feeds by casting her shadow on the flower, and letting its fragrance rise into her dark underside. Then she flies away.

*

Gandharva. Means 'fragrance eater.'

*

Arrive. Arrival. Arriving. Asterisk.

*

At the river bank the woman found him weak with fasting.

*

What is the name of the woman? The river? The food she fed him? The cow from whose milk the curds were formed? The fish in the ford? The tree that cast the shade in which he rested?

*

To be continuous through all the interruptions. Nothing, nothing lasts. But still, to be continuous.

*

Sometimes I barely know my own name. Sometimes richly.

*

But it is a flag. The kind that sticks out from the faux-Roman peristyle of the bank. Something about money woke me, the way it vanishes, wastes itself, as we sleep. Or accumulates. And me no wiser. The moon was still bright. Relieving me.

*

Mary Eddy asked: Where does the pain go when the sufferer is asleep? Where do I go, I want to ask, but am afraid to, afraid to know.

*

Courage is all very well for cowards. As a brave man, I flee all risks. But also know my flight is futile.

*

Impassive excellence. A judge. Or a thornbush.

*

Usually, things use me.

*

Hazzard: "Literature makes a good servant but a bad master."

*

I mean the names of things.

*

Hyanas like dreams. And conversely. Like is not a verb. Though it could be.

*

I am trying to say that dreams are actually tigers. What they leave uneaten is scavenged later by hyenas who prowl – cruel, timid, relentless – the borderlands between dream and waking. These beasts are what is called thinking.

*

Later, in full waking. The analysis of the dream, *Traumdeutung*, is another animal altogether.

*

The hyenas woke me. Euro exchange rates, dollar bills nailed together the way 100-Rupee notes are in India, bundles of money, bundles of time, pension plans woke me. All held in those unyielding jaws. Dream jaws never let any money go.

*

Nothing you can spend in waking. Or you only spend by waking.

*

But I haven't said it yet. How can I say it?

*

Not every tree turns scarlet in October. Even the euonymous, whose name means well-named – not every instance of it blazes, though in English we call it burning bush.

*

I shudder. The names of things will be the death of me.

*

Imagine this for terror: you say something to a pretty girl, using by chance a word she doesn't know. She answers, making a reference to a song you've never heard. There are so many songs. So where does beauty go then, the cheekbones of her face?

*

What is this about pretty faces and songs? It's almost dawn. Her husband, still living, is long gone.

*

Neither boast nor confession, the truth blames only itself.

*

But Epictetus, in a passage that made me sob the first time I read it, not so many years ago, in Oneonta, Indian country, strange symmetric hills left by an elder race, one bright morning, in the college guesthouse, autumn, red and yellow trees, wind, Epictetus said Blame nothing. Blame nobody, not even yourself. No blame.

*

And Rilke answered. He was standing in the white and leaf-green Baroque basilica at Sankt-Gallen that morning, and we were looking up at the ornate stucco-work, flowers and leaves, high up the wall. He answered, Praise – praise is what it's all about. Praise!

*

Then coffee was served. I served it. To myself. The formality of morning. Must be observed. I was alone. Epictetus was right. I drank to him. And ate the soft muffin from the convenience store last night. Can I eat to another? Crumbs on the table, elm leaves outside.

*

When I was a child, poor people had torn curtains often. They let the light in.

*

Demi-monde. Not even half. All the rest are *always* sleeping.

*

Even if you look the word up, don't write it here. The sentences already have heavy burdens enough. Just getting across the desert even barebacked is a big job for the camels. Let alone carrying copper. Or copal. Or copra. Or coal. Or cameras for Sir Simon, who plans to document one more trip into the unknown Hadramaut. The region called the Empty Quarter, that sounds in Arabic like my own name.

*

Words are like fruit. Juicy and sort of good for you. They soon fade and rot in the sentence, leaving a smell, a stain. A sticky passage in the mind.

*

So any proposition rots from the inside out.

*

You don't have to contradict anything. Leave it to time

*

A stain. There it goes again. A thingliness. A comparison.

*

I don't want to name things. I want to *speak*.

*

Names are useful though for those who want to speak when no one's near. To hear.

*

Want, want. Have done with want! Try let. Let. You used to see that sign in so many windows. A bare infinitive to which you were the direct object. To Let.

*

To let me what? To let what happen?

*

Could that be daylight at last? Another name for something else?

*

A name is never here. And then a thing suddenly is.

*

Then the name is suddenly there, its shadow. Its little dog.

*

There, there and never here. That's why we look at something named in a letter,
and sometimes begin to cry. Bronze peacock feathers. Red combs.

*

Something is always missing. This.

*

How little I know, I think.

*

What do you do when even the authentic turns against you? Before you even
have begun to say it.

*

Say it. You have your chance.

10 October 2006

= = = = =

The absolute waits
without waiting

magnetizes
without meaning

to. The absolute
reckons without counting

holds without keeping
remembers without thinking

thinks without being.
The absolute stays.

11 October 2006

= = = = =

Or I sent a letter to my friend
and in it a picture of me.
Keep hold of tatters, these rags
of color were my face once

or what it did to the camera.
With the light. These words too
are scraps of what it meant
to write them out to you.

11 October 2006

= = = = =

Cast a word of some sort
into the mistake. The breath
of a wrong one
lets us breathe. After all.

A sign on a pushcart
in a language I can't read.
But I can see the lemons
some almost still green.

Money for these. For those.
And a brown paper sack
to bring them home.
This is poetry, ancient Greek,

a man waiting at the dock
for a funny old boat
wallowing low in the stream.
That I too must board.

Then the mistake is done.

11 October 2006

HORN

1.

Walking to Paradise
carrying a knife in your hand
bone-handled horn blade
can't slice, does stab
dull intrusion, mostly points.
Whose horn has it,
the right direction built in?
Grown there like skin.

2.

The child has a rosary
 with beads made of horn.
Every Hail Mary said
 benefits the cow. How?

Because matter as a whole
 not just human flesh
is the garment or vehicle of soul
 for whose great sake

the cow in her day too eats grass.

3.

And as I walked along that way
Paradise came walking towards me
swinging its trees and lilac bushes
and bougainvillea scarlet and plum
and eucalyptus fragrant gum trees
like January in the Berkeley Hills
and autumn sugar maples yes
marble fountains full of plash
and silver and eloquent lucidity
hurried towards me with them,
all coming to meet me, taking me in:

 We smelled you coming
an elm tree cried,
 and when anyone tries to get to us

we run out to meet him halfway home
and welcome him and give him milk
and tell him Here we are, right here,
the shortest walk you ever took.

12 October 2006

= = = = =

Bow'd over sky one
arrowed the earth –

(w)Idea, something seen.

For once we could see the thinking –
a word, is it the opposite of an idea?

Stagger night
streak morning
as simple as ερχομαι,

to move this way or that, *bestir oneself*
in movement, middle voice, action with respect to the actor,
is that the idea?

Come, go.

Gently: I would not call that an idea.

Not even in Libra, bright morning
after the year's first frost.

To act on the self. To make oneself move.
To be three:

the bow, the arrow, the archer.

The idea.

13 October 2006

= = = = =

How can I catch up with what I mean?
Tell a story. Lie to me, baby,
then I'll know what's really going on.

Not the talking cure. The telling cure.
Therapy. Tell at least what kind of animal
you have seen. Or have been. Today.

Then the tawny maple leaves can fall
and we can spy the branches of who you are.

This house is on fire, he said,
gesturing towards the empty meadow, morning, cool.

13 October 2006

= = = = =

Is something coming?
Is it a cheekbone
catching sun in shadow?

What shapes us
lasts longer than what it shapes—

from the bones of the Ancestors
men got the notion of god, or gods,
probably one first, then many,

that were to the world as bones are to my mother's face,
a predisposition,

a quiet energy of form,

a long forgetting.

13 October 2006

= = = = =

Thinking can close the ears.
Or open same.
A wolf is howling.
Lowly, near my heart.

But the middle of my hand is silent.
As a word, silent as a word.
I talk in my sleep the music confesses.
I am "Mozart on the road to Prague,"

I must reread myself again.
Mörike's midnight
holds my other hand,
sweetness, goodnight—

you if only you can hear me.
The sound you heard outside
in the grapevine arbor,
call it a bassoon but I know better.

13 October 2006
(at the Fisher Center, hearing Leon
conduct the 'Prague' Symphony.)

THE SECOND PART OF THE SECOND PART

The knowledge of God with respect to Himself.

To speak of knowledge is like Mozart being quick.
Theology arises only in absence

specifically in the spaces – not necessarily explicit,
or scored as rests – of music as it is performed.

What you don't hear all around what you do is God.

13 October 2006

A CONCERT

Attending a concert is to suffer synesthesia.
You don't hear what you do see.

The eye is busy coupling and decoding.
Even as the eyes turn this way and that
trying to connect the mellow cry of the bassoon
with the shiny forehead that looms
above the music stand – all you ever get to see

of the bassoonist. And while he plays,
the trombonist clears his valves, the timpanist
screws and unscrews his mysterious membranes.
Might just as well close your eyes and watch the colors.

13 October 2006