Robert Kelly
Bard College

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

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/974

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.
In the silo  
what is stored?  

I want to write  
the answer  
all my life.  

Childhood equips you with inexhaustible mysteries, puzzles you spend your whole life solving. Everything you make or think or say tries, usually in vain, to disclose these central unknowns.  

Let everything be as easy as it is and we still need to wrestle with the dark.  

I mean the question remains always larger than the answer, than any possible answer.  

That is what keeps us going. A root dissatisfaction with partial answers, a root commitment to the time of the question,  

those questions, that sustain us. Whose sign we read in so many places, so many hours.  

We are built on the lines of bilateral symmetry, so every percept to needs its balance, its other. By itself a percept can’t be used. It must have its balance if we’re to use it, embody it. We have to create, at every moment, the balancing neural event. Otherwise the stimulus perception falls past us, incomprehended, unembraced. This balancing act (Ω) is art’s energy, art’s deed among us — how we can sustain the enquiry, which is at the same time (the other time, in illo tempore) the quest.
This is why I suppose the poet is right to take seriously this odd work on which poets are engaged, a work made up of nothing but writing words down to answer times and places and persons who do not appear to be asking. But who are nevertheless the flesh of the question. Everything that exists is of the question. They need our answers, unending, in detail. And we need theirs.

22 August 2002
Cool grey morning first in many days
glareless and serene. Just wanted to let you
know I noticed, am grateful, slept
late. Almost seven hours. Earthling again.
Marmoset sitting on my shoulder. Lies.

23 August 2002
MONTRIOND

I want to be you
your narrow bright eyes

I want to be your attitudes
your skin

I am the Antarctic
cycling towards my green season

it all comes true
time gives no choice

this is not the world
my world will come

because love is geology
the final knowledge of earth

and where it moves
everything moves with it

ponderous and slow
carrying us

with mountains
with lakes in them
green and cold
like one I know in France

like a secret shared.

23 August 2002
QUO USQUE

How long suppose myself to be the weather
when I’m just a clock?
                    Time bomb
disguised as a Valentine, a cardboard heart box,
when you open the box
suddenly it’s summer and
crows scream away crazy over the cornfield.

23 August 2002
In this country every hill
is a volcano, every rose
falls in the virgin’s lap

every cloud is a grammar lesson
the light prepares us
but for what?

I call it love
but you could name it just as well
the miracle of Friday

or a glass of water on the table
will evaporate completely
if you leave it alone

bare wood empty glass
the beauty lasts
it happens

by itself
and takes us with it
we move smiling in our sleep.

23 August 2002
AFTER THE WOODSTOCK READING

The fervent festivals
mostly old

where is the young
entablature

the tattooed graces
looking down from heaven
on all our swinking

we work so hard
at this intricate play

delicate and fierce
as paper dragon kites

dive at each other
over the hill by the river

just up from Broadway
foolishly so many

years ago why did we
ever consent to time?

23/24 August 2002
ODE TO SIN

Peccavi, and I have sinned.
The camels got there without me,
I detested your cigars, inefficiency
was my middle name, pronounced Jacques
when I crossed the Rhine, always
the wrong way, death cult,
heading west. Dwat they used to call it,
the thing that waits for you
(even for you) on the other side of the river,

any river. Bunches of names.
Let me carve in a limestone cliff face
all the names I sinned with,
calling them out as I did, outrage in the night,
arrows by day, the knowing
that walks around the dark.

My sin was calling. Sin was my calling.
My sin was your names.
I let the men do what their dull dreams
told them to do,
   working and money and building garages
and fussing with animals, je déteste ça.

Which side are you on? they’d ask me,
all I could do is smile and go on
licking a rock or writing words in sand
with my clean finger, hoping not to provoke them,
their tiresome anger, their weary commissars,
I have no side
to be on
I would explain
tuneful as I could,
I have no side and won’t ever be on,
I was born off and off I linger,
touching things and tasting things and telling
only as much as I think you can bear
of the terrible truth,

and when they left me
I was free, I arose, I cried out your names
fitting them together like the leaves I also
wove onto the neighbor’s trees
so they would look out and argue
is it morning or is it spring that’s come?

But at night I was my own.
When the moon was listening
even though she’s always distracted
by the shapes of her gleam-work
she sees returning
from this sparkling earth
still new as on the first day,
it is only night still of the first day,
I would sing a different tune,
one she taught me,
and tell the truth
and the truth is just another kind of sin.

24 August 2002
The stone comes and talks to me.
“You have paid too little
attention to me.” In this country
even the stones reproach me.

Why is that, I ask? “Because
I am here, and so many
just like me are here, gorgeous
in our differences, and you

look only at one or two things,
mostly the ones who walk around,
and only a few of them, even,
the ones you wanted from the beginning.”

25 August 2002
The Program

There was a similarity
in the dark
and it found us,
an ace in the deck
that fell out and left
all the other aces to rule
the meaningless consequence
of chance. This one
on the other hand
was the true ruler
of all our matters
that is the Essence
of another suit, a pip
we had never seen before,
not red not black
but a quivering sort of blue
the way the sky goes peach
at evening but still
is the color of itself
and the shape kept changing
from bell to beast
to something like a wave
lifting something like a man
and dropping him on shore
where he trudged up
towards us and then
was a bell again, a barn
on fire, a deer wounded
but stumbling bravely
into the snowy birches.
I slipped this card
in your hip pocket
and it runs you still.
compelling me in turn
to follow you forever
wherever the card
tells you to go.
And you listen.
We have always listened.
The one instruction
runs us both
smoothly, even pleasingly,
we are happy to travel
deeper and deeper
into the machinery we are.

25 August 2002
FAVELA

There is time for this
then that. Hovels
on the hill. Habit
of being happy.

In my next
movie I show a woman
sleeping by a window
and what the moon does.

To us all.

Hours
come easy with us,
minutes are hard.
The conscious sweet
attention, dear.
And then we.

26 August 2002
STRIDENT PARTICULARS

Inside the alcohol molecule
people keep singing there too
smile of a stranger

    curve
of learning then the slope of dark.

Once I thought the gate
led from my house

    out into the street
of the others, brothers
and that sort of thing.

    But it swings
open inward,

    the usual
oubliette beneath the carpet
and I fall.

    By morning
even the features of her face
had gone

    abstract, she was lost
in resemblances, I knew
sort of what she looked like
sort of how it felt
when we were talking.

    But I have felt
all that before.

    Only my fingertips
a little bit remembered how she
actually felt.

26 August 2002
THE SYSTEM

But it’s an old system
like a dead rose
in columns of letters
bent before the end

the paper or the screen
goes brown, the words
are the kind that fire
leaves, ash alphabets,

they vanish from you
as you read them
and leave you only
with what you call memory

the thing you always
think you have but memory
is a fire of its own
or silver ink

tarnishes, leaches
into the sea, that uneasy
everything called mind.
The unruly one
the out all night
roisterer that smells
of air and very late
the quiet smile

of what’s been forgotten.
Even this information
disappears so fast
nobody can read it right.

26 August 2002
I WOULDN’T TALK THIS WAY IF I DIDN’T LOVE YOU

Don’t listen till you’re ready to hear.
Otherwise the little animals that run your brain
will wear themselves out with playing
hide and seek or Johnny on the pony
deep in your miserable woods.
I pity you because you are so me.

27 August 2002
LOVE

So many hours and years
getting ready for the simplest touch

a mouse knows how to do it
with a mouse and we

exalted angelographers
wish and hope and dare and touch and die.

27 August 2002
LOVE SONG

I want to know you better than anybody
but to whom am I speaking?
Imagine now the telephone
lights up a different room
where all the voices sound the same.

Are you still you? Are you
the one I want to know so well,
are you even someone I can name at all?
You are lost in what I say to you,
lost in the design.

Diamond
in gravel. A word too loud to understand.

27 August 2002
THE WORK OF THE MIRROR

So many workers at the crucible
each bringing ore. And you,
cor meum, what have you brought
except yourself, impostor metal?

But at least you burn it all up,
no one know what good it does
but you do it, no one knows
more than you do about getting rid
of what you carry, simple
words for complicated feelings,
let it go, a kiss to represent
the Newest Testament.

Embody.
The work embodies. The work
tells those who have a body:
be in your body, be free
in what you know or think you do.
But what do you know
gives you the right to tell them so?
And have you ever smiled
back over your shoulder and told me?

28 August 2002