decB2000

Robert Kelly

Bard College

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

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/1105
Not the Bach of it the sheer beginning
how could a Morgan of the first snow
simple over Annandale recover

instances such as these of the first light?
Tasmin Little playing the first sonata,
and why do they call her Le Fay and not La,

why is anything the strange way it is
when we first find it, always intact,
strange, but deeply reminding us of something

far away that we have always known?

8 December 2000
listen to them, they’re seagulls, at it
again, you’ve got to bring your ear right up against my lips
and then you can hear them, the gulls
inside me, they’re always screaming,
polite enough and beautiful and white
but still screaming, you have to press your face
against my face to hear them, listen to them,
the gulls who are never still, beautiful, never peaceful,
there must be a whole sky inside me that they fill.

8 December 2000
I bite my knuckle and taste my blood.
This little wound is a cosmology enough,

Look, I have a body, I have a hand,
I have skin and something can happen to me,

A wound proves I’m actually here,
Actually alone in a world full of solitudes,

A hermit in a forest of absolutes,
And the music, for Christ’s sake, the music

Comes from before I was born, the tender
Beauty that just seems to mean old, old, old

And then I get born and inherit my silence.
So the taste of blood in my mouth

Is the same as a word,
Language the first and last of all our wounds.

8 December 2000
the maze

come out of it
into a number

alone

the walls are hedges grown from yew
the statue in the middle is indecipherable
naked, old

we can do this
by counting

Go-ban or gammon

There is a ritual

essentially a robin
on the lawn
but it is winter, winter

then what do we do with our skin

we hide inside the number.

Between layers of leaves
layers of skin

Architect, unbutton your dark.
We need to penetrate,

Be penetrated.

It is an onion of a place, a flame
cool around a coming home

10 December 2000
a menu is

a menu is enough to rebel against
eat the ornamental fig tree in the window
fry the poinsettia
lie down and lick the vinyl seats on the banquette,

give all your money to the waitress,
the law is only a map of transgression,

eat the law. I open the door for your hand.

10 December 2000
if I were a color today I would be green
if I were a hand it would touch something,
    shrink back, and then touch again
if I were a bird this would be an opera
if this were water would you swim?
if this were the only chair in the room
    would you sit on it?
if this were today would you be tomorrow
how could I forget you when your skin is on my bones
how could I answer the phone when you are my voice
how could I open the door when you are the wall
don’t you think all questions are finally defilements?
PHARYNGEAL

Can I even wonder at it, the gulp
We hear when the Arab speaks
A word that seems to come from so
Close to the heart that we, insular
To the end thanks to our language,
Find a little bit too close for comfort

Embarrassed as we are by being.

11 December 2000
Le vent se lève, all the meanings change, a trumpet is shouting in the sky. When he walks out into the morning he will put his skin on inside out, this is the red walk, people come in and out of his house, they don’t come into him, where can he go to be entered. That is the wind’s work, a word he keeps hearing, mistral, hurts to hear, the wind’s knife is keener than music, hurts as much but doesn’t linger. Something else he wants to want him, a shadow that should linger, kneeling in prayer on the skin, a forest dismantling sunlight touch by touch.

12 December 2000
Become a laser.
What we adore
Compels us to form.

Then they fall
In love with us

And we have to leave,
Leaving is lyric.

Sometimes the memory
Of a person
Is the best part of her

And the wind rises
The wind shifts
And you remember the flat sand
That makes the sea itself seem built of hills

And there too the wind is coming fast
Into you and you were not alone.

12 December 2000
Come with me to the old
accomplished wheel
the one that breeds berries
in the polder where you claim to live

the first time you take leave of
earth’s the hardest
and then the landing to be beautiful

not berries cranberries
a different thing
how to land without breaking your back

frozen bogland and the cat ice
is never made for dancing, no skates
in this serenade, a red sun
chipping through the sea

what the skater told me
sitting quietly across the room
her legs crossed graceful as a ship in sail.

. . . 12 December 2000
Stood on the shore arms outreaching curved almost joining at the fingers but not, so seen between the sleek of arms the indecisively receding everpresence of the water as if she held a basin of the sea, an arc and shown citadel built only of waves, here in this bowl a building shimmers in the evening light and friends move in to stay the night, lodging snug in what they see.

12 December 2000
RAMADAN DISCLOSURES

Be empty
as the belly of the world

\textit{batn}

the bare truth
empty of particulars

why we fast.

Holy emptiness you
belong to everyone.

13 December 2000
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

Everybody answers
all at once,

I have been listening
since the beginning of time,

my time, my good hour.

9:30 Eastern 8:30 Central
said Alan Gilbert

and the spongy light was all about us,

waiting for a new catastrophe
here among the civil particulars of supper

the spongy light
blurs all the edges

we sink
into radiance

dreamers. Dreamer,
how dare you touch me,

your soft cheek
trying to own me
out of the drunken archive
where our images tumble

in vomit and patchouli
spilled stars riot

and then he says, and I love this,

“just be grateful the falcon has been fed”
for things rise up from us
and soar
above the common hungers

and best for us indeed
when they do their hunting and their feeding
in what passes for our dreams

and we wake
to find the bird is sated and wise

the way you wake
to find yourself embedded
in the night you left

— the thing I miss most about alcohol
is the morning after
I haven’t been hungover
in forty years

and still the lovely sand-eyed bleary dawnlight
remembers itself in me

and the sun rises
like a thousand
bleeding harps

Kristin Prevallet says we can hear

But now sober
I have to stagger
to the writing desk
out of some renaissance comedy

to scribble my message to the galaxy

but “Gonzalez drank all my ink
thinking it was medicine”

the monk in Herzog says.
Nothing to write with 
but other people’s words

and that is the delicate 
dishonesty 
that makes us true,

the sensual honesty 
of “our hybridity”

(Kristin Prevallet)

we live in their language 
the way mitochondria 
live in us.

How old were you when you were born?

13 December 2000
But I wonder what I was thinking of, I wonder
about the snowplow and the tree
all the American tragedies under the bird feeder
the oil truck bringing half a month of heat

and where was there room for me in all that
wrapped like one of Breughel’s drunken peasants
in bright rags, a little tuckered out from
scarping and lifting the animal of snow

serpent-sleepy sluggish heavy making one
surface with the ground, I lifted and never
felt more out of touch with language and with things
than at this moment, stupid with remembering.

Forget it like an old car. Forget it like a name.

14 December 2000
CONTRA SAUSSURE

A dog day a dolor
of ice a bark
silenced the way
the moon was
muffled in cloud
there is a color
in the world
same as cold hands

I’ve been shoveling the hard-crusted snow
until the fingers understood

this is the letter someone sends me
I bend and hoist it to read
such literature

then come inside
to find

a message left in the machine
silence and a gentle disconnection
I knew was you

So I called you back and listened
to your phone ring and ring

letting our silences discourse
a satisfaction
to know at last

words need no languages to speak.

14 December 2000
Let there be a house.

There is a tree
certainly a tree
I can’t see through
into a window where someone is sleeping.

someone not sleeping
looks out the window sometimes
sideways so as to see past the tree
into huge grasslands stretching towards distant woods

We live on a map
doesn’t see me, the tree that keeps me from seeing keeps from seeing me.

Things are like that

Latin Impersonal Verbs
licit, it is permitted, oportet, it behooves, libet, it gives pleasure

gives pleasure thinking of a window
sees the huge prairie full of autumn mist

libet, it gives pleasure

the only thing vague in all this is me
me looking and seeing and not seeing and not being seen

just the sea of mist pouring over the prairie

not Wisconsin not Minnesota no place I have seen
and not the mist playing around the huge plane trees of the Vaucluse

and not the sea mist where I was born
another house, another house

*libet*, it gives pleasure
to be far, to be there

safe from all the cancelled distances of love

2.

*unclean with fear*

— Franz Kamin, “The Pervasive Cretin”

it’s looking at so many things
let look at so many things

a woman with her back to looking
kneels up on a chair

gives herself to being seen

whether to let them see or not, see them or not letting

selves look at
so many things

that is the problem.

Looking makes the soul afraid,
seeing brings it comfort,

is that what it means?

sometimes to be *unclean with* looking.
Unifying the Essence

That it would in one large sense master me
Glidingly, as weather does, the principle
Unfocussed from the sky and left to fall
Until it finds its limit in me. In us,
Actually, he said, this conversation
Mostly about the canapés we eat,
The wine they give us, the furniture in the room.
As if we bring nothing with us. Just the mean
Little eyes we notice with, he said, we stand
For nothing in particular, we stand around instead.
Is that an epigram, I said, he said an epigram
Is a kind of instant boredom, something
Offensively the case, I lost you, I said, and he
Helping himself to more baked brie observed
That girl against the curtains looks like my third wife.
Fine boned women are ambitious, I remembered,
Ain’t that just the truth he said and slipped away.

15 December 2000
Red Hook
As if I didn’t have enough to worry about
now I have to write poems in German
since the bridges stand cold
over the swan-squandering rivers
Spree Landwehrkanal the Havel

a city with bridges, more of them than Venice,
with skies more than Montana

somebody has to explain these things
since the German poets are too busy
changing their genders and fiddling
Mallarméan mummeries

why does it always have to be me to do it
what do I know about this place

Just the trolley going up and up Warsaw Street
and the railroad yards stretching out to the west
like characters in some Cold War opera

Weil die Bruecken stehen kalt
Ueber die schwannenentraeumte fluesse
Spree Landwehrkanal und Havel
Eine Stadt mit Bruecken mehr als Venedig
Mit Himmel mehr als Montana

Jemand muss diese Sachen erklaeren
Denn die deutsche Dichter spielen
Mallarméenmunterni

Warum muss ich alles unternehmen alles tun alles schreiben