sepA1995

Robert Kelly
Bard College

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

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/1188

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.
MEASURES

A life is only to give.
Thinking is clearly something else.
A thought is tantamount.
To leaving.

0.
What could they be
that are so delicate,
pleasures? Measures.

1.
A swan’s head lifted from the turmoil of riding
waves, the secret paddling
by which they move. They thrive.

Asleep in a canoe,
artificer! Have I found you again
by the railroad trestle

over the doomed lagoon
water caltrops muskrat lodge
the skeet shooters of October with live targets.

And the woman asleep in the canoe turns,
rolls over on her right side. The canoe
sloshes a little in the shallows but is dry inside.

Although the breeze is cool
it seems to be coming straight out of the sun.
We live by horizons.

2.
Are you sleeping when I need you?
On her right side she dreams of new weather:
a snow squall out of the sun that engulfs her
she wakes in warm golden flakes
that mass around her, bell song in the air,
she sneezes with pleasure.

A green wind
suddenly drives out the snow
that drifts soft sifting from her face like cornmeal,

with fine cornmeal in her sleep she writes
words on the proud embankments of famous rivers,
foreign rivers. The canoe beneath her heaves

guilty, lifted by dwindling ripples
of a boat’s wake, a boat from now
that’s already far, its engine

out of earshot. An earshot is precisely eight
thousand times the distance from the knob of her elbow
to the tip of her middle finger.

3.
Her middle finger, coated with cornmeal,
she lifts to her lips and licks, almost waking.
The taste for danger.

The danger moments in a creature’s life
are those when things make their passage through
the barrier of self or skin.

Eating, drinking, excreting,
belching, sneezing, breaking wind, being plumbed
by love’s searching chreodes, even breathing

if you don’t breathe right.
She breathes gently on the floor of the canoe,
her breath blows away the dream weather,
a boat passes, she tosses
over onto her left side
not even pausing to lie flat on her back

so the hidden daytime stars can see her.
On her left side she lies, her closed eyes
stare into a library somewhere,

the shelves are always receding,
she is reading a book in their shadows,
she is wondering about a word.

4.
Is torpedo from the same root as torpor,
named for a fish that makes flesh numb?
A cruel bomb beneath calm water moving.

Is war a kind of angry torpor?
She is in the boat and she is frightened.
Not far from her a swan alone is passing

though usually you see them two by two.

1 September 1995
[revised 9 II 96]
What had been me, if it had gone forward into the vacancy would have found a fortress lit entirely by blue light. Skaters silently zipped around it on acres of ice. It would have heard only its own, circulation of the periphery, a cool responsibility. It would have called itself Nature and everything else The Human. That’s how the words always sounded if there was air. Language happens only to air. Inside the castle defenders were busy in the archives trying to build a functional calendar. Peaches and cream. Titian’s self-portrait held in Apollo’s—maybe a little repentant? rueful? Hands. I keep thinking of the same things, that’s what makes it me, this sequence of images reminded—vaguely, tenderly, uneasily—of each other, out loud, very, and to you, calling like a big peacock in a small enclosure I heard years ago in a small town park in winter.

If it had kept going
it would have encountered
a chiasmus in the path
(left, right, past, future)
and probably would have
camped there for the night
in its huge silken tent
translucent in so many colors
that when the Coleman lamps
lit up inside, the pavilion
looks like a bead of Venice glass
half-buried in night loam.
It would have been pleased
to look that way
but it was sleeping.

There was not enough air
to speak or feel, plenty to breathe
though. Even a kind of wind
that alarmed the smaller branches
of the evergreens — you name them —
while hardly moving the trunks.
Still, there were voices aplenty
in the woods, where sailors
from the Dido were searching
by torchlight for one big pine
to lop for their new mainmast—
the old one shivered after
that storm it never even knew it had.
If you look long enough at anything
you see your own face looking back at you.

2 September 1995
[revised 9 II 96]
When fruit is given who is giving?
The ambiguity of the passive

(or reflexive — Saint-Saens, did we overlap on this planetary cycle?)

confuses just our reflexive us.
Just us. The pear tree

knows what to do
if you call it doing.

And it doesn’t,
it just does.

3 September 1995
Crows investigate the huge basilica of thinking. They are not distinguishable from everything else except by name. They keep crying out their name.

3 September 1995
Transported, how the capacity inheres in the instrument.

Pens write me. Touches you with a remarkable fluent skin, the language goes so far. Language is skin. There is a dark republic it covers but it does not say.

4 September 1995
Caught in the map
the traveler
sullenly understands.

His feet
are nowhere.

Crows are lecturing
in empty meadows.

Here we are again, he
isn’t even thirsty.

5 September 1995
Murano

Hurrying there from a scripture of the ‘Leaf’ class into the glass workshop of the Armenian immigrants where light is taught to make a tinkling noise. But in the back room, surrounded by tea cups and flies, the blind patriarch measures the whole weight of light.

5 September 1995
FRAGRANCES OF WHEAT

The heat of yesterday still ringing in my ears
I found myself worrying about the cactuses,
pelargoniums, aloes, where
will I put them inside
to be safe from winter? And the broad
uplift of the clivia, that viscountess
among amaryllises? Suddenly I know
it’s cool. At my feet
a furry-bear caterpillar
prophesies early winter.
Soon winter, long winter is what I hear—
and then I realize that my body has been listening.

6 September 1995
Counterpoise — the star
balanced on the morning

brings you greeting
from the ones

who were before.
And they were ones,

only ones and never more
and soon forever,

never two or more
however many

ones of
them there are,

were, sing. All
sound is song.

6 September 1995
KTC
Getting organized is part of it but which part? The alligator in the subway, the bizarre remembrances of passion that suddenly like sodium vapor lamps on Eighth Avenue light up in memory, the limbs of all their bodies, endless waits impaneled by anxiety, eternal cafes, breathless rivers. I see her walking in a city air not forgotten but all my need forgotten, beyond connection, echo of a snapshot of a wish I saw one day in sunlight, Sunday, ever after. And now no one knows who any body is.

6 September 1995
Caught up with the sky 
a blessed haze

to dim the clamor of the day
so hard the light has been

Ask a woman about a diamond
a priest about a shadow
everything answers

“relief
is in the air”
though summer still besets us, you can feel
every pronoun in the world
softly changing in the night

I wake up you
you wake up everyone

and who are they?
They are changed now into prowless boats
adrift on a kind dark sea.
Almost midnight and
I must have had something to say,

it was a day,
I walked around

like trying to find an uncrowded bank in Thonon
on market day

the lake stretching, gleaming dark as asphalt,
far into the Swiss sunlight over there,

nothing difficult, nothing international, nothing
with coffee and biscuits and hawthorn

just with my life I mean my wife up there
among the cool alleys of spicebush and maybe
some deer browsing not far from the river

but not very near it either.

8 September 1995
Caught by augury
mere augury — a squirrel
drees its astrology,
little nut in little paws

feverishly seeking
on our lawn, meek
feed-me of lower earth,
meek anxious grey I-love-you,

we are abandoned to our needs.
Soon an iridescent grackle
nabs some duck food,
the things we have to swallow

to be beautiful! Church
steeple at Combray,
one more sign in one more sky.
If we are feeding, let it be everyone.
If we are waiting, let it be for light.
If we are sleeping, let all pain sleep with us.
If we wake, let everyone be up before us.
THE INTERDICTION

Her eyes so black he remembered them blue —
and so we give color to the opaque identities
who center around us all day long

silent as dreams, and all we understand
— if that — is their names. And their names
— as every child learns at last with such grief —
have nothing to tell us.

9 September 1995
What is waiting
to tell.
A color
in a bird’s wing

you said said
your name?
The skin
is in love

and with everyone,
by such strange
signs as touch
it would be known—

say nothing
and feel everything,
that is everybody
else’s name, not yours.

You are the one
who has to tell,
a strange bird,
a peaceful wing.

9 September 1995
OISEAUX

for Colette

As if they were also waiting.
Stand after repose.
They make us so happy
to look at them,
birds. Waiting
in the sky for a tree,
in a tree for seed, on earth
for heaven. The neat
array of feathers, the sudden huggeness of white wings open. The flurry of them suddenly calm.

9 September 1995
Heart-shaped leaves on the ground
pale but not yellow,
do linden do
that fading or that color,

the pinwheel rattles in the west wind,
blue autumn towards us
leaning, a sky
scarred, perfected

after all we have seen through.

10 September 1995
THE IMAGE

It all might be waiting,  
or salt tear slipped between  
impastoed lashes

one waits
agreeably
for one’s fate

pinned
to the circumstance
the velvet cords

analyze consent.  
In the darkened room
no one is coming.
EXORDIUMS TO EXAGGERATE

just to get through
the door. I am so big
the air touches me
on every pore, so small
I can walk sideways
through the light
and you will not see me,

now, even now,
if you look up.

11 September 1995
Is it thinking?
Or am I raining?

12 September 1995