

ROBERT  
KELLY



FEST  
SCHRIFT

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## LINDA WEINTRAUB'S TITULAR ODE TO ROBERT

	<i>Armed</i> Descent
	Her Body <i>Against Time</i>
, He	Round <i>Dances</i>
In	<i>Enstasy</i>
Disclosing Instant	Lunes/ <i>Sightings</i>
, Tastes, and Smells, He Contains in	<i>Words</i> in Service
That	
Anticipate	<i>Weeks</i>
And Eons Of Phantasmal	<i>Song</i> XXIV
	<i>Devotions</i>
. Robert's	Twenty <i>Poems</i>
Surge. Like Sap From an Old March Maple	Axon Dendron <i>Tree</i>
, He Is Venerable and	<i>Crooked</i> Bridge Love Society
, But Remains Capable of	A <i>Joining: A Sequence</i> for H:D
of Thought Commencing With	<i>Alpha</i>
, and Always	<i>Finding the Measure</i>
Of Poise to Congeal in Dialectical	<i>Sonnets</i>
and Diametrical	<i>Songs</i> I-XXX
. His Poetry Embarks From	<i>The Common Shore</i>
, Joins Demon Moguls of	A <i>California</i> Journal
To the Demon God of Discord,	<i>Kali Yuga</i>
, Whose	<i>Flesh</i> Dream Book
Resists	In <i>Time</i>
And Hurtles From Satellites to	<i>Cities</i>
Where Sir Walter	<i>Raleigh</i>
Might Have Penned Idyllic	The <i>Pastorals</i>
. Even His Casual	Reading Her <i>Notes</i>
Prompt	The <i>Tears</i> of Edmund Burke
That Lubricate	<i>The</i> Mill of Particulars
The Linguistic	The <i>Loom</i>
That Twines	Sixteen <i>Odes</i>
	The Lady <i>Of</i>

Phonetic  
 , Each a Triumph of  
 , Masteries of Verbal Tapestries, Woven By This  
 Who Harkens From Brklyn and  
 . Each Warped and Woofed  
 A  
 Disclosing  
 's Fragrant  
 Tinted  
 , and  
 Thunderous  
 , and  
 Botanical Splendor of  
 , and the Bewildering Labyrinth of  
 . Even Embracing  
 , Despite Its  
 , Not a Virginal  
 But a Promiscuous  
 . Robert's  
 Registers the Rhymes of the  
 , As Bountiful As My  
 , Like Bouquets of Light At  
 Sparkling In  
 Splendor That Respects No  
 , As If It Was a Trendy Garnish, Like  
 . How Words Can Glisten Like  
 Of Lingen on a Bright  
 !  
 And Crimson  
 Form Metaphors Of Mysterious  
 , Crystallizing Summer and  
 Into the Distilled Purity of  
 and  
 . Thank you Robert. You  
 's Harsh Glare With Buffered  
 And Offer A Welcome  
 !

*The Convections*  
*The Book of Persephone*  
*Kill the Messenger*  
*The Cruise of the Pnyx*  
*Sentence*  
*Spiritual Exercises*  
*The Alchemist* to Mercury: an alternate opus  
*Mulberry Women*  
*Under Words*  
*Thor's Thrush*  
*Not this Island Music*  
*The Flowers of Unceasing Coincidence*  
*Oahu*  
*Ariadne*  
*Manifesto for the Next New York School*  
*A Strange Market*  
*Mont Blanc*  
*Red Actions*  
*The Time of Voice*  
*Runes*  
*The Garden of Distances*  
*Unquell the Dawn Now*  
*Lapis*  
*Shame = Scham*  
*Samphire*  
*Threads*  
*May Day*  
*SAINTE—TERRE or The White Stone*  
*Fire Exit*  
*Uncertainties*  
*Winter Music*  
*The Color Mill*  
*The Language of Eden*  
*Answer the Light*  
*Claws*  
*A Break in the Weather*



Wallace Stevens said that the poet creates the world and that his function “is to make his imagination theirs (the people’s) and he fulfills himself only as he sees his imagination become the light in the minds of others. His role, in short, is to help people to live their lives.”

Surely Robert shares this with a pantheon of poets, but where he differs from such masters as Pound and Eliot in that his life, unlike theirs, parallels his poetry. Where they succumbed to prejudice and bitterness, which clouded their personal relations and their world outlook, his life has been, like his poetry, filled with grace, hard earned truth, and beauty. Robert has used his vast knowledge and aesthetic sensibility as a door for others to open and so enhance their own understanding. Robert has written

“what I want to do  
is sit at a table with you  
talking into our eyes  
till we are each other’s skies  
and see what we say.”

In both his work and his life, he had indeed helped people to live their lives. We consider ourselves lucky to have been two of those people.

Marvin and Betty Mandell  
September 2001

**FOR ROBERT ON HIS EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY**

**Mary Caponegro**

**Bobby, the nun said, what is that you're doing?**

**The boy was startled; he had only been doing what was to him natural, what had been natural for some time.**

**Feasting on letters, he answered. Have I done something wrong, Sister?**

**You're pretending to read then, is that it? the nun asked him, still perplexed.**

**Is reading the name for this holy communion? he asked, meaning no disrespect.**

**The name of this feasting – which is, by the way, only holy when reading the Holy Book – is indeed reading, Bobby. But you are too young to know how; we've not taught you yet. You don't need to pretend you can read to be loved by the Lord. There is no need to put on airs. Just be yourself, Bobby. Learn humility.**

**But again he was caught with his eyes tracking letters, from left to right, and again; he knew no other way of being himself.**

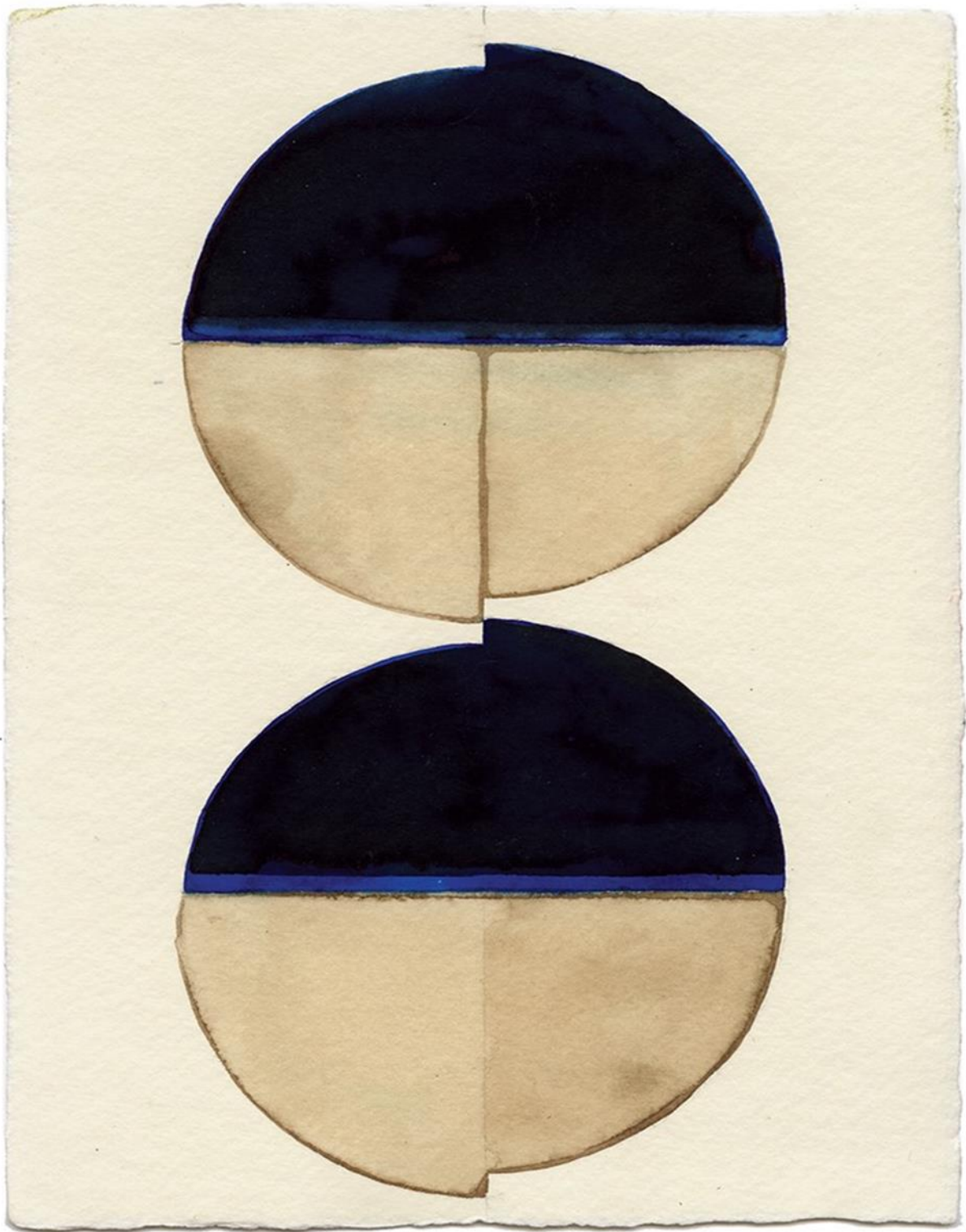
And so they prepared a special assembly, and the child was placed in the front of the great hall, observed by all, in his casual arrogance.

He was sent throughout the diocese, from school to school, to be further observed, during which time he felt himself a one-man menagerie in the form of a child reading.

The doctor was brought in, and declared that in his professional opinion, the activity was from a clinical perspective reading. But he added that if the child continued to glut himself with letters, he would not have a normal lifespan. He would die by the age of thirty.

At last the bishop was brought in, and though skeptical at first, he corroborated that the child could indeed read, and suggested that it was some kind of miracle, though that could only be fully ascertained over time, and the span of a life on earth was in this respect irrelevant.

And as soon as the bishop suggested the possibility of miracle, an astonishing thing happened. The child, officially too young to read, also began to write. After every book consumed, he produced one to take its place, and so on and so on, at a staggering rate, for the next five, ten, and finally fifty years beyond what the doctor had said would be the terminus of his life. And the bishop understood that this was in some respect an echo of the miracle of the loaves and the fishes, because words had proliferated beyond mortal capacity so as to allow an entire community to feast.



Nathalie Provosty

**Robert Kelly at 80.**

**On the occasion of Robert Kelly's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, I want to thank him for the past half a century at Bard, where he has been, above all, a fantastic teacher. He uses his magnetism in the classroom to inspire ambition, idealism and discipline in students. He has also been a generous and warm (if also a somewhat appropriately stubborn) colleague. Robert exemplifies the very best of Bard, past, present and future.**

**But that is not all. Amidst all his prodigious accomplishments and contributions to literature Robert has displayed an insatiable curiosity for and love of music. His tastes seem oriented around the later 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. His familiarity with unjustly forgotten and now obscure repertoire is astonishing; his memory for performances he has heard equally so.**

**But Robert's affinity for music is not antiquarian. If you chance to see him at a concert at Bard (and he rarely misses any), you will recognize someone who is drawn in deeply by what he hears. It is with listeners in mind like Robert—a very rare and endangered species—that the repertoire of concert music and opera was composed. Musicians are grateful for his presence, and for his fearless witnessing of the power of music and music making.**

**On behalf of the college, and all its students, staff and faculty over the past 50 years, I extend a warm and grateful thank you.**

**Leon Botstein  
President**

**August 12 2015.**

*I say, by sorcery he got this isle*

*Naushon, Nonamesset,  
Onkatonka, and Weepecket,  
Nashawena, Pesquinese,  
Cuttyhunk, and Penikese*

Such are the uncouth and barbarian names that first salute the ears of the seaward-bound traveler, who having beheld the most Christian city of New Bedford fade out between sky and water, turns from his retrospections to consider that line of islands lying across the entrance to Buzzard's Bay, seeming to bar the outward passage. Collectively, they are called the 'Elizabeth Islands,' in honor of the Virgin Queen who reigned in England at the time of their discovery. Their individual titles were doubtless received from the aboriginal heathen, and woven into euphonious verse by some inspired Longfellow of the whale-ship's forecastle.

— David Hunter Strother, *Harper's Monthly Magazine*  
(September, 1860)

Two and half centuries before this intrepid *Harper's* reporter made his tour of the wild New England coast, explorer Bartholomew Gosnold reached an island he dubbed Cuttyhunk, adapting the Wamponoag *Poocuohhunkkunnah* to the English mouth and ear. It so happens that Gosnold's patron Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, was the man to whom, during the reign of the Virgin Queen, Shakespeare dedicated *The Rape of Lucrece*: "What I have done is yours; what I have to do is yours; being part in all I have, devoted yours."

Some (by "some" I mean Robert Kelly) say Southampton shared Gosnold's record of his travels with Shakespeare and that when he came to write *The Tempest* the mentions of the isle, with its *fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile, its noises, sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not, its subtilties...that will not let you believe things certain* were based on Gosnold's Cuttyhunk.

No concrete monument to Shakespeare stands there but a memorial tower made of sea-stones and dedicated to Gosnold rises on its own tiny and uninhabited dab of land in the middle of West End pond, one of three bodies of water within Cuttyhunk: *A column on an island on a pond on an island in the middle of the sea...*

Robert and his wife Charlotte Mandell spend every June on Cuttyhunk. I've never been there in June; still, I find them there. The island takes up less than a square mile, 52 people live there year round, and in the vastness of its space and light I'm always aware of their presence. I look for *the Tempest*, and for Robert and Charlotte. I look for them on Lookout Hill, from one of five bunkers built on Cuttyhunk by the Coast Guard during World War II to protect Buzzard's Bay from German U-boats. I look for them in the harbor where Charlotte learned how to sail. I look for them at the food carts by the harbor, eating salty tuna fish on Portuguese sweet bread. I look for them at the low grey shingled house bearing the Cuttyhunk Historical Society sign, but the door's always locked, opening hours on some other day.

I find Robert and Charlotte on Cuttyhunk and in places even farther-flung. A young fellow tourist in a fabric market in Dakar (the African city closest to Cuttyhunk) says Robert told her which animal is her daemon and calls her by its name, and that same afternoon I glimpse a novel Charlotte once translated amid a bookseller's assorted wares, laid out on a table.

Cuttyhunk drifts in the Atlantic, barring outward passage, inviting further voyage to what lies beyond. "Land's end," the Wampanoag name calls it; sea's beginning. Of its three ponds, only one is a fresh spring; the others are brine pits, protected harbors, ships' havens. It's an intricate patch of territory, a postage stamp, a poem, a labyrinth of sea and land where subtleties erode certainties and you lose and find your way, entering and exiting as if from the wings.

As if Robert and Charlotte were the island's aboriginal heathen, its Caliban and Ariel, its Prospero and Miranda, its Gosnold forming syllables from a strange tongue into something pronounceable, however unfamiliar: an echo, a promise, a language lost and revitalized, *a thousand twangling instruments humming about mine ears*. The island is theirs, taken from no one by

occupation or strength of numbers, only inhabited by the imprint of long presence and long witness, the sound of a distant bell on the breeze, the changes in a shrub oak's wrinkled leaves from one year to the next, the evolution of the sun's descent each night on the circle of the horizon. They are *king o'the isle, sirrah!* And now the seal of their dominion has been set by a poem Robert wrote this summer, the summer of 2015. The euphonious sorcery of its verses, Charlotte tells me, fill precisely 365 pages: one for every day of the year, days on Cuttyhunk and days when the *odd angles of the isle* dream their voices and their footsteps, being part in all it has.

*This is also for Nathaniel, and summers on Gay Head, next to Toad Rock.*

— Esther Allen





Barbara Leon  
For Robert

Our friendship had a strange start, a bit awkward in those early days of wondering. First, just a look, a long look. One of recognition of something that had existed before, though what that was remained unnamed. Then, the heart connection. The knowingness balanced on either side of life. The Old Soul dance that only kindred spirits know the steps to. Life pulled one way, we another. Tango of life and death. It tore at something deep but could not tear it asunder. It was during my illness that compassion rose up in our midst and revealed the true depth of our connection. We speak the mantra of no end and no beginning to this miracle called compassion. But the mortal recognition of it awakens through the portal of life experience. It happens through a showdown in time that makes one reach for the truth, aim it right at the other's heart, and fall together into the fold of Eternity.

I could speak of the power of your writing, where your words have transported me to. But knowing you, the sorcerer behind the words, has revealed the alchemy behind this writing. I have ping-ponged written passages with you, and witnessed mercury transform to gold at your touch. You crack open a window framed by words for us to look through into a vast space of unknown possibility. You walk hallowed and common ground with equal measure of innate curiosity and probing wisdom. You take others on this journey with you. Not out of some kind of arrogance, but as a seeker in the night wanting fellow journeymen to lay witness to what might be discovered. The spark of understanding is a shared moment. Your writing never dictates some subversive truth. It merely(!) lights the way for thinking minds to wander, and stumble upon their own discovery for the very first time.



Ashley Garrett

**Trois poèmes de Robert Kelly**  
(translated by Éric Trudel)

**OBLATION**

Je t'ai envoyé la mauvaise version du poème,  
celle où j'y étais.  
J'étais censé me cacher derrière la rose.  
Derrière la pierre, la grange, le nouveau garage.  
Puisque je me meus avec le désir d'un animal  
je devrais disparaître comme il le fait,  
chemin de Damas et personne ne sait,

J'ai cru me voir qui m'approchais de moi,  
un homme corpulent un livre à la main,  
et me regardant comme je te regarde,  
et avais peur. Souhaitait-il  
se joindre à moi et ne me laisser aucune chance  
de dévier de la voie,  
terrible monogamie d'être soi-même ?

## SCIENCE

La science n'explique rien  
mais tient ensemble tout  
autant de choses qu'elle peut compter

la science est un panier  
pas une religion dit-il  
un chat aussi gros qu'un chat

la lune de la taille de la lune  
la science est pareille à la poésie  
seulement elle emploie les mauvais mots.

## FONTAINE ANCIENNE

L'eau dit : un lépreux  
m'a bue et n'a pas été guéri

mais sa soif s'en est allée.  
Puis un chat m'a lapée

et malgré tout n'a pu parler  
que la langue des chats.

Pourtant ne suis-je pas merveille, miracle ?  
Les choses à ma rencontre m'accueillent

mais je ne les change pas –  
je consens à ce qui est.

Peux-tu en dire autant ? Je restai là  
honteux devant l'inoffensive.

Ne pas nuire : premier précepte de la médecine.  
Jusqu'à cet instant j'ignorais

que j'étais médecin mais désormais les roses  
fleurissent sur toute peau

jusqu'à ce que mes baisers les éloignent une à une  
pour avaler les maux du monde.

Mais l'eau dit  
(si humbles si insolentes les paroles de l'eau)

es-tu certain de pouvoir faire cela ?  
Quand tu passes par ici

tous les chats attrapent la lèpre  
et les lépreux miaulent, tu confonds tout

car tu disposes de trop de mots –  
imite-moi au point de n'en avoir plus qu'un.

From *May Day* (Parsifal Press, 2007)





**Rikki Ducornet**

## The Japanese Oracle

from Robert, to Robert  
as discerned by Elizabeth Robinson  
on the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday

Who is Robert?

*I saw a man give birth to a child.*

What is Robert?

*Poetry was daybreak.  
You lose the lost I find.*

What does Robert want?

*as far as my heart had it  
in me to desire  
because the heart needs  
what is not here  
...  
for my heart was  
not a palace but a path*

What does Robert want of me?

*naked watching*

What is the color?

*bluer than this uncertain  
heraldry  
undone by what perfects it,  
the moon, rising.*

What is the part of the body?

*For a man like me the world is full of borders.  
They are the veins of my true body.*

What is the dream?

*it is close it is very close*



*and there is coursing and no one course  
and this no one are we  
also continually coursing*

**What is the direction?**

*we lift our colloidal identities beyond our time (haha*

**What is the fear?**

*It talked & it wanted & would kill to get it  
but even after birth refused to say its name.*

**What is the judgment?**

*I wake to you again  
and it is always your birthday.*

**Following the form of the Japanese Oracle given by Robert to Elizabeth on 4/5 August, 1982. Divinations received from *Finding the Measure, The Book of Persephone, May Day, Not This Island Music, Lapis, Under Words, The Flowers of Unceasing Coincidence, In Time, Kill the Messenger, & "For Mary."***

**Glad for your birth, Robert, I send love.  
Elizabeth**



Thomas Meyer

MAHURTA RK80

White moon  
bright among the trees.  
From each branch  
comes a voice  
under their canopy.

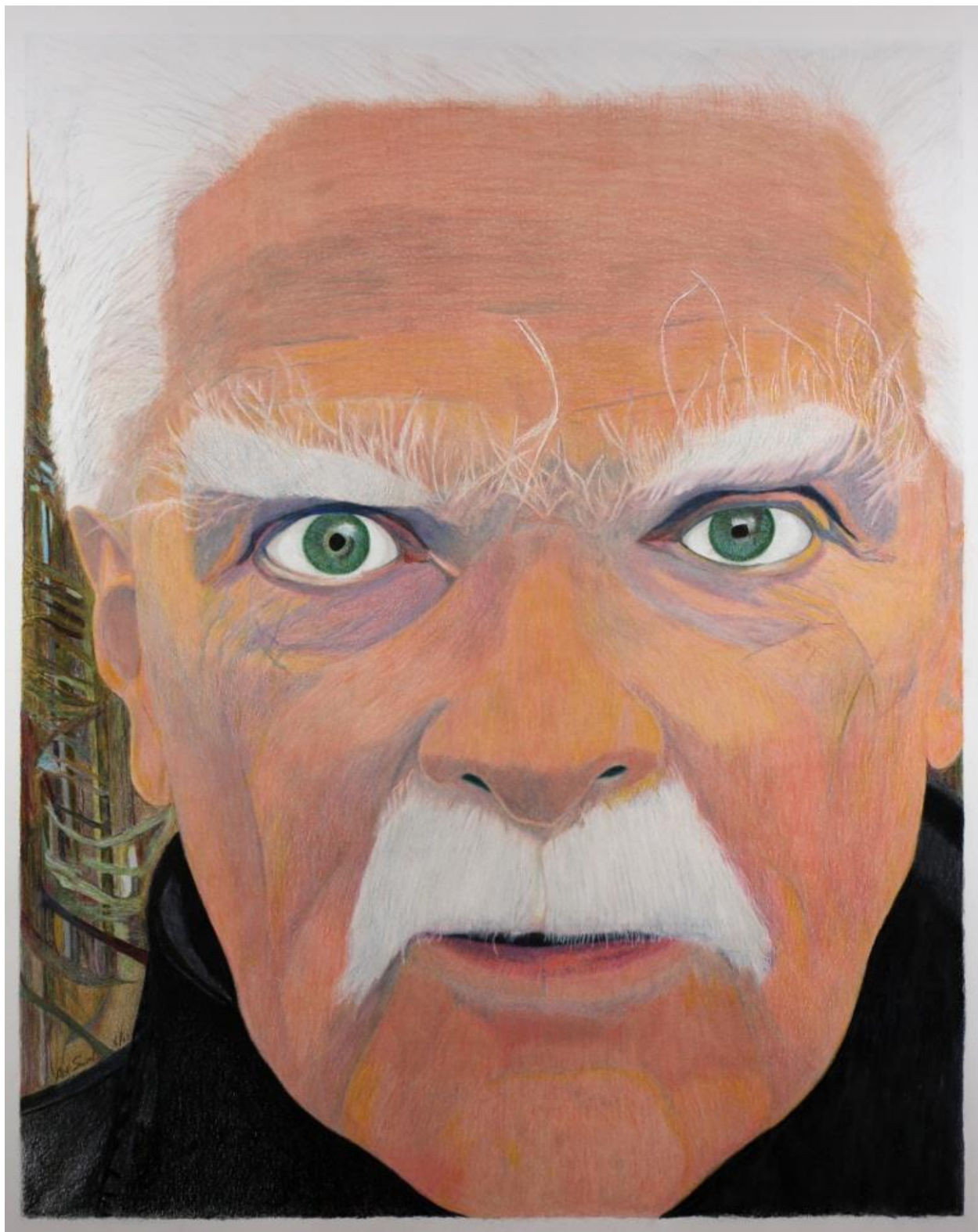
"Good friend."

Still waters show  
a sunken reflection.  
Sharp black outlines.  
A willow through which  
wind sighs.

"Whatever has yet to be is now."

Huge and sweet.  
A soothing calm  
seems to come down  
out of the sky above.  
Shimmering star.

"The present moment."



Patrick Smith

Jane Heidgerd  
Athenaeum 101

My advisor suggested I see Robert Kelly.

I walked up the steps to Ludlow; I think they're marble. Perhaps. Perhaps is such an accommodating word. Inclusive. And why shouldn't it be. Why shouldn't language be as generous as Robert Kelly.

The door to his office was open. The room was dark, small, tall. Barely lit by one window, its panes in part obstructed by books, by shelves and brackets. Floor-to-ceiling books. Books old and new, manuscripts loose and open-leaved, the strong smell of coffee. No one had computers then. Just books, chairs and coffee. It was hard to see with the window behind all those books. In this dim light he was reading.

I knocked. He didn't seem to mind. We talked easily about people we knew mutually, flunking chemistry, graphite. B versus 2B.

Suddenly his right eyebrow jutted toward me, sending out a thunderbolt. The Doctor of Silence regarded me. I didn't know it then but he was creating a cure. Not a remedy but a preservative, a salt and sugar mix that would forever fix this moment in memory.

He said: *What does your name mean?*

I had no idea. I shifted in my seat. No one had ever asked. If it had been text, it would have been underscored, bold, BIG. Never had I heard the spoken word with the same rhythm and gravity. To think my name had meaning.

*It's the feminine of John*, I offered. Not that it was wrong, but I knew it wasn't right. It wasn't enough. To which he urged:

*Yes, and...?*

In the silence I was off to another galaxy.

*Find out, he said.*

He went on to speak in a language that had geography, a landscape of endless capacity. Words that had mountains and valleys, rushing streams and open fields. Who was this man who could throw open a window where none had been? He turns any conversation on its head, imbues every sentence with significance. The world was filled with import and inquiry, with emergence of a voice that is coming, that is due everyone. A language that accommodates all. The true, the false, the dream. Words that can change a life, a mind, the heart and soul of what we mean.

All the things that lay ahead to write stem from what he said to me.

That day I learned what my name means. That language can be music. And blessedly, I had met Robert Kelly.





**Paul Hotvedt**

## *An Unexpected Introduction to the Work of Robert Kelly*

I find it hard to write something that really is up to the level of a beloved poet I have read for forty years. I thought the story behind my first introduction to his work might be the most interesting thing I could say. I went to graduate school in Film Studies and have taught that subject for thirty-five years, but there is something I am rather embarrassed to confess, that more meaningful to me than film is poetry. Yet oddly, the first and unforgettable encounter with the poetry of Robert Kelly came to me by way of Film Studies.

In the fall of 1975, I attended a required course in which various professors gave a single lecture presentation to first-year M. A. students on an important cinematic topic. One professor, P. Adams Sitney, was lecturing on American Avant-garde film and had recently a ferocious argument with the other professors in the department at a crucial meeting and essentially resigned from the school, New York University. He would leave at the end of the academic year. His lecture began with certain complaints he had about the Film Studies program and he quoted passages from two poets that articulated the critical views he was trying to communicate. He became my favorite professor. His youth perhaps explains this surprising, rather odd start of a class. He quoted Charles Olson whose work I knew and loved. He also quoted Robert Kelly. I was completely upset with myself that I had not heard of Kelly and was taken with the quoted passage. After class, on the way back to my apartment, I stopped into a bookstore and bought the two volumes of Kelly that were on the shelves, *In Time* (1971) and *The Loom* (1975). I refused to have a current American poet quoted meaningfully in a lecture whose work I did not know. I started with the shorter volume, *In Time*, and I will say that I was much moved by certain parts, especially by the opening page "(prefix:". I will admit, however, that there were sections that given the range of knowledge the work presented, I just couldn't follow everything that well. Needless to say, I have always been behind Robert Kelly. *In Time* has



recently been re-published in a collection of Kelly's essays. Back then I didn't read it as an essay but as a poem that worked through several contrasting forms. In the new collection I have re-read it, and as old and experienced as I am now, there are still sections in which Kelly's knowledge runs far ahead of my own.

Reading *The Loom* followed, more or less recently published at that time, and that's where my love and admiration of Kelly's work really began. In fact I was so enthused, I immediately did my best to hunt through many bookstores in New York City (when used bookstores still existed, including one more or less for poetry only) in order to get as many of Kelly's volumes as I could. I read them avidly. He was largely the center of my life of poetry for the rest of the seventies and I have been following his work ever since. I heard him read in New York City back then; once I heard him read at "The Collective for Living Cinema," when he mentioned that if poetry had not pulled him in so powerfully, he might have turned to filmmaking. I believe in the 1950's he saw a lot of highly regarded independent films seen only by a rather sophisticated audience. Perhaps his own films would have been wonderful but it's hard to imagine they would have been up to the level of his remarkable poetry. At any rate, it was a strange academic experience that from a more conventional level should not have had anything to do with poetry, but it is true that admirers of the American Avant-garde film and the filmmakers themselves are often inspired by it.

Eventually, as I read the writings of Stan Brakhage, I came across Kelly with respect to film. At any rate, I am so grateful that through a wholly unexpected event I was pulled into reading a poet I have admired and loved for so long. He's always ahead of me, even in cinema. A while ago, he told me he's seen all of Werner Herzog's works. I haven't. Here are the last lines of the first page I ever read by him. Perhaps in some ways it helps to underscore why one should take poetry before film:

(i.e., poetry an earlier form, embryologically  
solid now,  
but the prose of our horizon  
not yet made,

in prose,  
later,  
the dimensions of this  
universal century & frontier time

RK  
8/68

— John Pruitt





**Brian Wood**

**Birgit Kempker**

**when shall we rain again  
cats and rats from the ciel**

my head is a rare rat  
I say to Robert  
under my blue hat

spirit to spirit  
comprendre?  
remember shame?  
speaking cat?

speaking right into  
your cortex  
your grey massiv  
mental mountain  
under your yellow hat  
into your nervous system  
from window

to window into  
your animal brain  
into your brainstem  
from star to star  
flickering under hats  
in our floating huts

## Two

I say to Robert in broken  
tongue, speaking rat cat  
as a really rare rat  
remember shame?

I'll speak in the ashes  
will we wash  
language again  
with ashes  
and reconstruct  
the body of the  
tender touch by words  
and purifying burning?

licking lost bones  
putting them together  
with chinese sticks  
one at the left side  
one at the right side  
near by the fire  
as normal angels do  
will we?

## Three

I hold the position  
as long as I can

Robert speaks cat  
in some streets  
in the fields  
at the riverside  
with floating houses



within Robert  
with floating closets  
for clothes  
floating clothes  
for Robert  
floating Robert  
within floating closets  
also in ships  
in boats  
canus and ferrys  
seabuses and  
( pferdegezogenes Floss)

speaking cat  
in the closet  
in the Metabesen  
riding it, the Besen  
( from deutschen Wesen jäh genesen)  
drinking water  
from Metambesen  
the river  
crossing it

naked feets in the river  
naked fishes licking naked feets  
while tongue  
licking speaking cat

I speak in the closet too  
and in the window  
and in your window too  
the road is soft  
hot and fleuve  
and cooking and sinks  
running the tar

down the mountain

the mountain is Knochenberg  
shameman, remember  
some you and me  
riding the Besen  
german Besen

remember Luzern  
the mountain  
the sun and the lake  
the up and the down  
the ship und Charlotte  
and Urs and translation  
papers and book  
silver shining cover  
we decide

#### **Four**

As long as I speak  
to the composer  
where is the composer?

(Such as: see : poet also not there)  
to enjoy  
this kassiber  
open up to everybody's  
understanding  
no kassiber at all, so:

eat the kassiber  
read the kassiber  
swallow it  
let it fly  
sing it from window  
to window

let it sink  
into the river  
let it lick your tongue

there is no  
understanding  
we are normal angels

## **Five**

but the french poem  
the lines of Antoine Pol  
given by Iggy Pop  
the grey of the hour  
of melancholy

( Such as: translater missing les passantes)  
( Such as: Composer and Poet also missing)  
( Such as: beautiful singer, beautiful chest of the beast)

remember?

dead the horse  
on which I travel  
sad the body  
in the saddle  
grey the hour  
of such  
saying  
blood in the saddle  
called: new direction

Remember shame?

we let the ox  
drink the blood



in the green factories  
the transplanted  
heart  
green peas in the navels  
these plane trees  
and poplars,  
called: patient  
filled with endless time  
exploding underneath the surface  
( O la la : au creux des apparences)

and then in the steppe  
transplantation head poem  
under the hats  
shaman hats  
yellow, blew and rosy  
in floating huts  
even out of concrete  
shrink free concrete

the land in the lake in Berlin  
with concretehouses  
shrinkfree croncretehouses  
side by side  
to ships, boats and  
wooden barks

Remember?

The Hidden Master of heart  
Taking Action  
Hamilton Naki

we and also nothing  
does exist  
without surgery

the cells have long been closed  
we let the melancholy  
standing at the window

watching us  
speaking through us  
from window to window

rattenrar  
like the head  
under the hat  
in the magic floating huts  
these traveling windows  
unshrinking appearances

we monkeys traveling  
with sugar on the fontanelle  
and sweet forever

Hamilton Naki stands there  
with empty Apron  
right in the transplantation poem

in the window  
to window  
french fenêtre  
speaking cat

licking bones  
sticking them together  
bon plan  
to this bodypoem

*for Robert, August 2015*



**Bruce Wolosoff**

**As-Is**

**By Crichton Atkinson for Robert Kelly on his birthday**

Nature is never vain,  
humans are.

The world gave us all the content we need,  
sculpting landscapes with the putty of mind, mounding together this with  
that.

Each generation tries to further our outreach by recreating nature in  
miniature.

We distribute what-is with tiny structures.

Create,  
utilize,

while instinct plays games with us.

We rationalize feelings into logic,

pretend to have a grasp on the vast unfolding of things as-they-are.

Our cosmos is formed by this energy.

Stand on the dock of human limitation

gaze into the infinity of the yet-to-be-observed.

All we know is created in the image of someone.

Read-after-read, talk-after-talk, the past sublimates into the future.

Ships sailing into eternity  
crumble into more turf.

Vessel-upon-vessel, land-begetting-land,  
that which is transporting us,  
transposed.

Power collapses on beaches  
tapped again and again by lapping waves.

Outpost on which we feel the breeze,  
authority,

rise and fall,

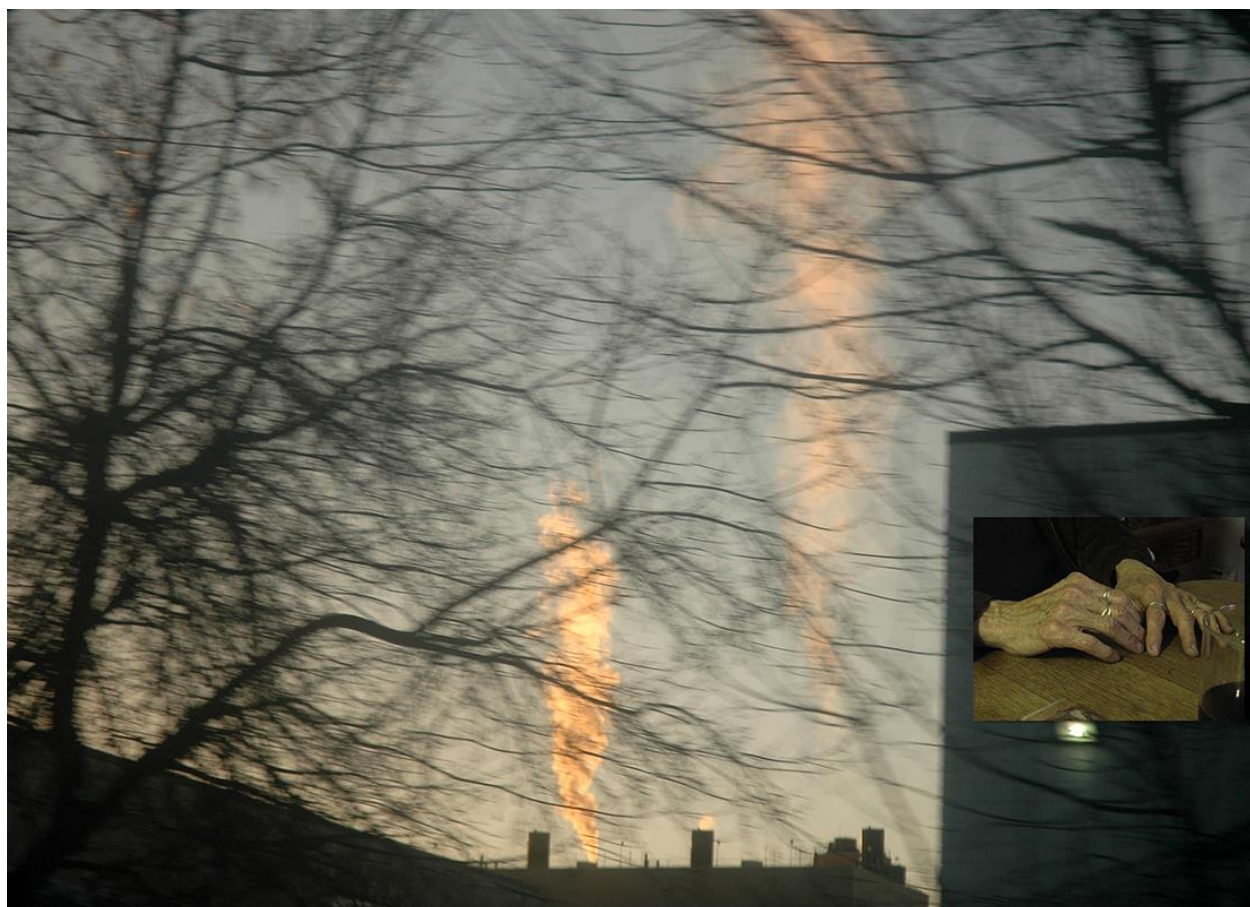
writhing between the real and its gesture.

What a phenomenon,

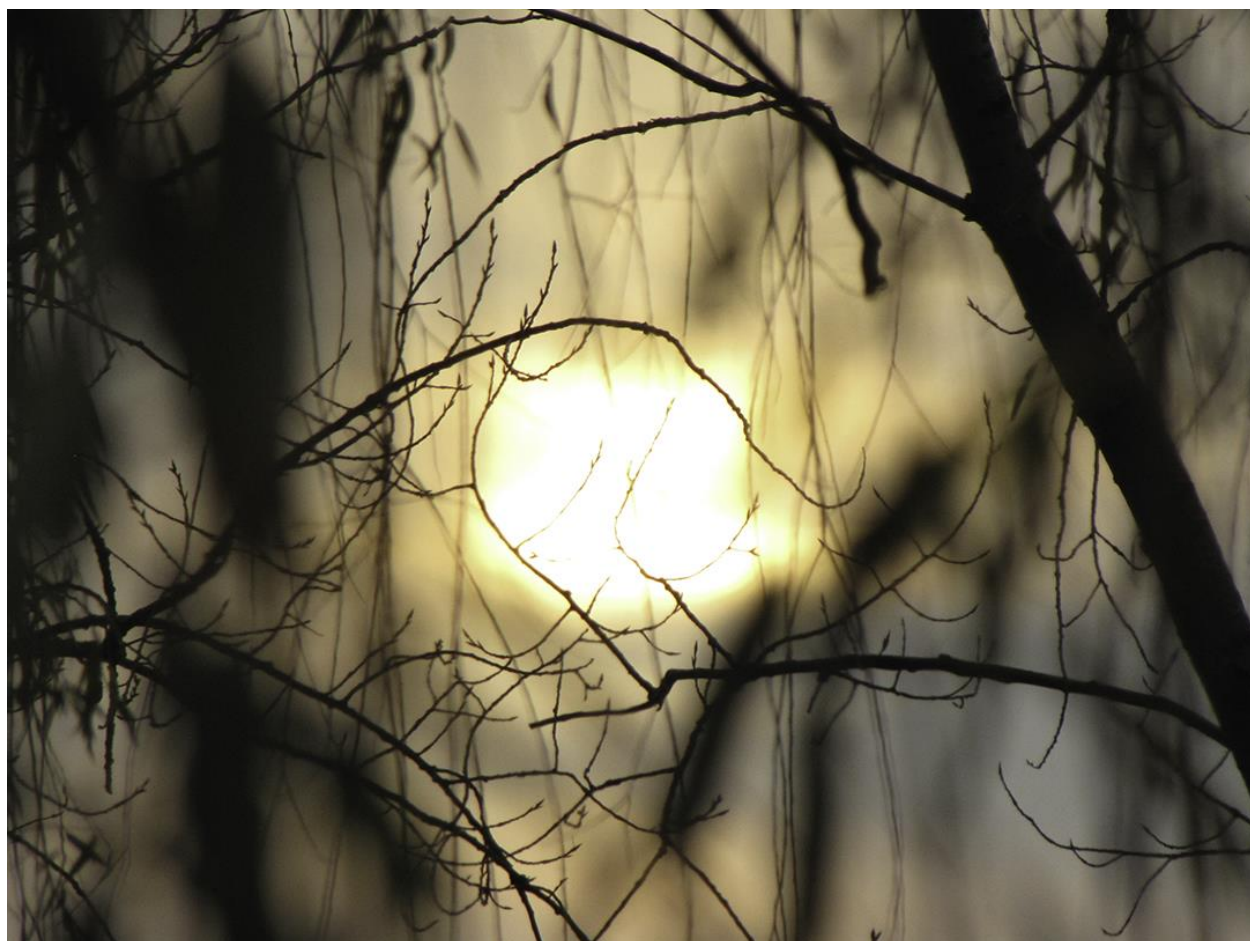
as nature snakes human sort-ofs together.

Meaning,  
it's all a construction,  
translation of body, language, words.  
The sign-maker churns out ways to contain chaos.  
Uncertainty is terror.  
Fabricate all that is, towers and jungles, with fibbing,  
pass social significance back-and-forth.  
Replace the as-is with the grace of abstraction,  
reflection,  
a thought.  
Vanity is the desire to cover-up,  
coat what-is with what-could-be-but-never-will.  
Lies that serve particularity,  
to conceal is to redirect the eye,  
construe fantasy out of what needs no attending.

We gift our island of patterns and connections to the next generation.  
Sculpting morality or function, meaning or practicality.  
Language acts as a flag on the mound of human insight.  
Ambassador,  
sentences liberate knowledge from one person's magnitude.  
Distribute history into the rhizomatic garden of memory  
scattered across all conscious minds.  
Books do so much of this work, sitting on top of nature holding our Qi.  
Their seeding takes place in the silence of unconsciousness  
tucked deep in the folds of experience.  
We are birthed every moment onto new territories of thought.  
We sit,  
window-world gazing out at all that is unseen,  
revealing when we are impermeable,  
glowing with nausea,  
drowning in delight,  
molding truth out of time's signaling.  
Reality is mostly an invisible farce.



**Susan Quasha**



**Susan Quasha**



## FOR MY BELOVED FRIEND

Leaving it to others more eloquent than I to try and do justice to RK's genius, defying commentary as it does - can there ever have been poetry that came to seem more completely uttered by the Muse, sans interference? - I want only to add my thanks for a friendship which has been, for me, the jewel of my later life. It's a friendship conducted by Robert in unstinting generosity and support; wise counsel; inspiration by example and by penetrating advice; introduction to greatly gifted writers young and old; medical direction; travel guidance (despite the overriding mandate not to travel at all - *siste viator domi!*); food companionship extending even to our *vin du pays*; above all the weekly access to a soul and mind so extensive that even to glimpse their shorelines is a destination enriching enough - I feel like my Sephardic ancestors, forbidden, when accompanying a conquistadorial voyage, to set foot in the New World, for fear of polluting that pristine shore with their ancestral Hebraisms. The jungle I glimpse from my bobbing coracle is miracle enough.

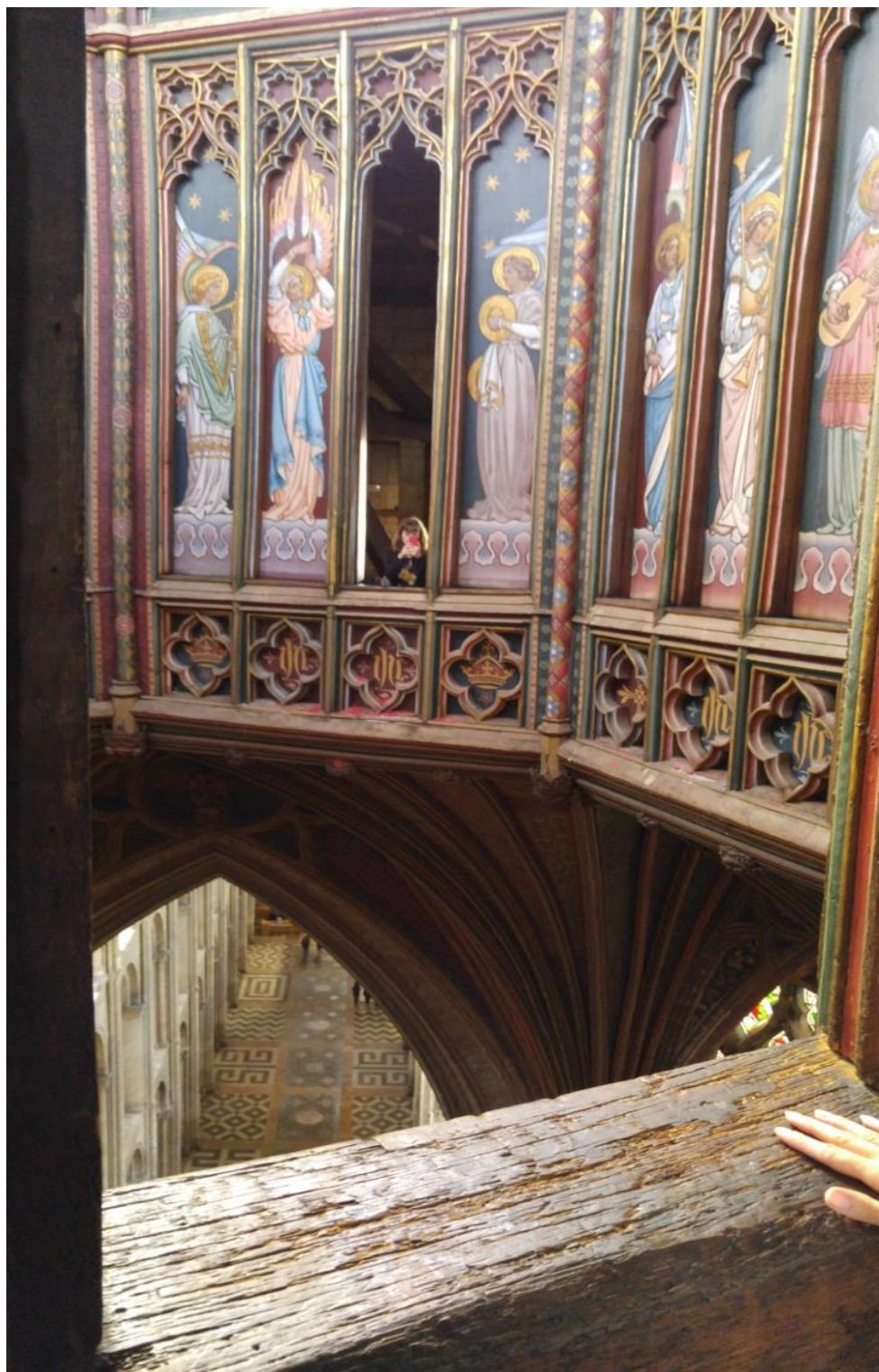
And for Robert to admit to the great Borgesian library of his mind my own books, remembering them, all of them, in such detail, as if from some species of external drive unavailable to the rest of us as our respective memory steadily shrinks (how on earth does he do it? It's as if characters from every book and play and opera, every poem, every memoir he's ever read, can be summoned instantly into his presence) - for this dear friend to bring to my own efforts the attention which he has lavished on a lifetime of reading: this in itself has been his greatest gift of all to me, making me feel, as no other reader has to the same degree, that my own work is worthwhile.

He blesses my Englishness, which isn't a blessing I hear from every source, let alone one with such manifold appreciation of England, its history, its literature, its architecture and geography too: this very summer he sent me back to Ely Cathedral, a favorite old haunt from my college days, to show its wonders to my youngest daughter and lead her up into the great lantern that crowns the church with a frieze of painted musical angels, each on a wooden door that opens to allow the Ely choristers to sing to the congregation below like very angels, 120 feet above the



cathedral floor; if time had allowed I'd have followed his geomantic treasure map to both Lincoln and Durham cathedrals (Durham I shall manage, within a few days of writing this), on their eminences above their respective city; he blesses my Jewishness, and when, ten years ago, he wrote a poem in honor of my recently accomplished foot-journey from Budapest to Auschwitz, with my son Sam whose great-great-grandfather (Sam's named for him) we understand to have perished there, I felt as proud of this - a very charter - as I did of the walk itself. He even nominated me, in an auditorium crowded for my 70th birthday, the brother he never had, and some part of me has been forever speechless ever since, to think of it. He kept an in-loco-parental eye on my youngest daughter (his honorary niece), Chiara, my 'ewe lamb' as we call her, my ewe Lambe (her mother's name), tutoring her and enriching her Bard experience in a fashion for which, had I been able to barter with the devil to obtain this opportunity for her, I'd gladly have traded away a portion of my life. In so doing Robert became a part of our family future no less than our present; and of my own future alive in Chiara, who has been my clone since birth; in her, as in me, Robert lives and will live, in Chiara no less than in the immortal body of his work: he lives on as an immortal friend, the best and kindest of allies, my true elder brother.

Carey Harrison



*Atop Ely Cathedral: an angel in the 'lantern'*



**Robert At**

Where are you? Be-  
tween, as  
we used to

say: the 'a'  
& the 't' — an  
unlovable place,

Cape May, New  
Jersey where we were  
marched into the ocean

on orders to keep  
our pieces above our  
heads until we

tasted salt. & Now  
I taste the salt  
in the wound

of your saying,  
of duende, the  
light of May

“failing out of the sky.”  
The women we  
have loved unto the last

against a thousand  
preoccupations of spirit,  
the lavender &

transparent light of May, on  
orders to keep our  
heads in pieces above

our salt, our wounded  
light. What do you make  
of our unsolvable places?

of the women of our  
lavender orders & light  
of a thousand sayings?

Are you, &  
where? Between there  
& — still astonished — here.

— Poem by Jeff Katz  
painting by Mary Katz





**Susan Fox Rogers**

Tom McDonough

Robert is most open-hearted and spiritually generous man I've ever known.

Thirty years ago, when I moved to Red Hook from darkest SoHo, I met Robert at a reading given by the great novelist John Hawkes, who had been invited to Bard by Robert. Next week Robert and I had lunch at Foster's. God help us. Later I called him, I forget why. His answering machine said – in a voice that could only be called vatic – “This is Robert Kelly. Please have me know what you would have me know.” Next time we met, puzzled by the accent and by the eyebrows out of a pirate movie, I asked, “Robert, where are you from?” And he said, “Brooklyn.” It turned out that Robert and I had gone to the same high school. A few years separated us, so we didn't know one another in those days.

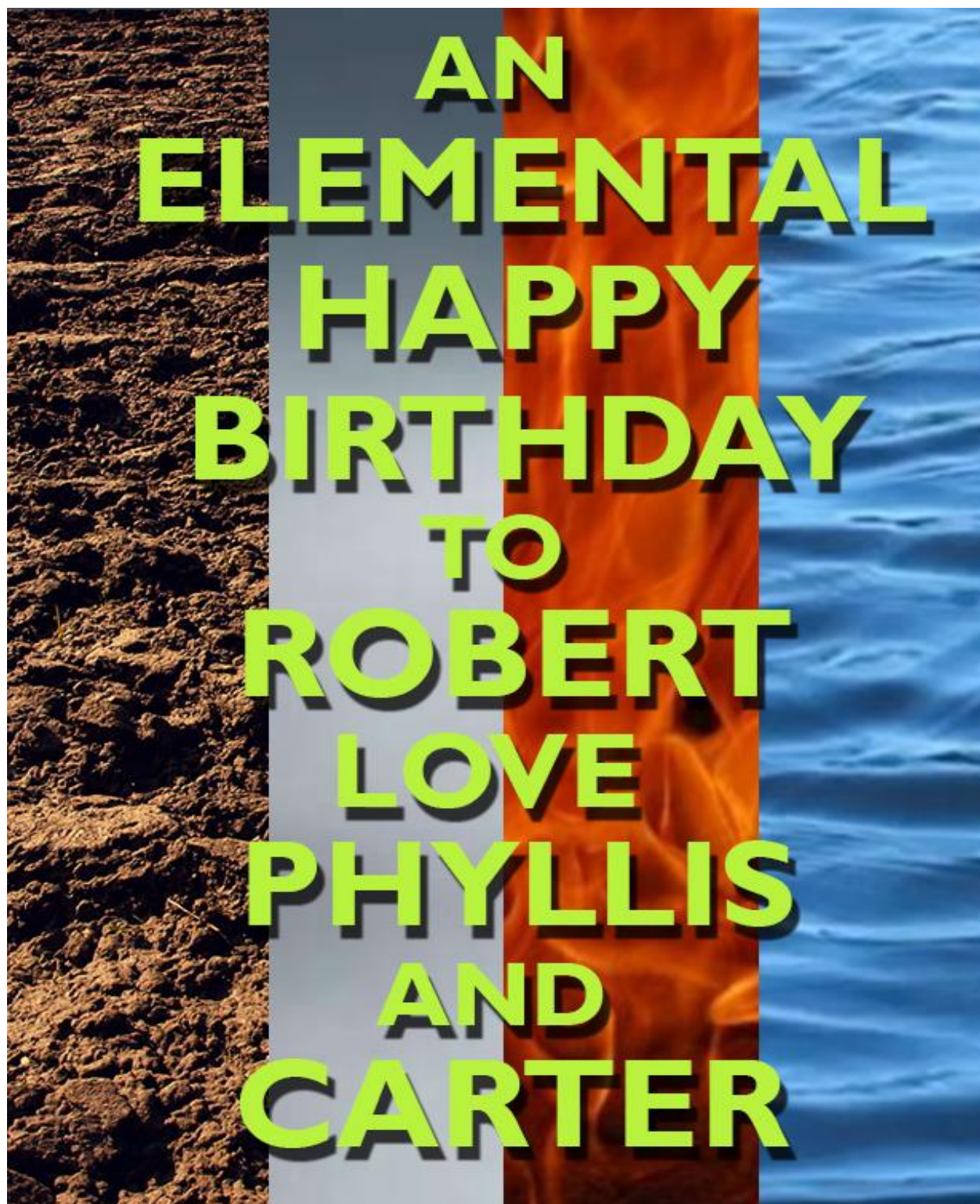
This doesn't mean very much, but it means something. The high school was Brooklyn Prep, or as the Jesuits who taught there were fond of saying, *Schola Praepatoria Brooklynensis*. Here is what the whole thing means: in the 1950s, when Robert and I studied there, the curriculum was virtually identical to the curriculum the Jesuits cooked up in the sixteenth century. The idea was to rewire the excitable synapses of pizza-faced boys with Latin and Greek, thus turning them into lawyers, doctors, priests, accountants and so forth. This plan worked as well as anything else, but I don't think the Jesuits had poets in mind. Robert had the wit to leave Brooklyn Prep after two years, but I can tell you he was not unscathed. Whatever else they may have been up to, the Jesuits taught by example: they taught dedication to one's students and dedication to one's intelligence. They taught us to seize the iron bar of this world and bend it, bend it into any shape you please. Ergo, Robert is a Jesuit.

As for Brooklyn the place, the city, the myth... Robert and I have known each other in a casual way for thirty years, but apart from advanced age and a love of language and Bard, there is really only one thing we share, and that is the place we left long ago but about which, when we meet, we always have something new to say: “Have you heard anything about Father Berrigan? Did you hear the one about Verrazano and the dancing Indians? Pee Wee Reese's house in Shore Road? – it got bought by

Syrians.” These remarks may not be weighty but they are never merely nostalgic. They are simply a way of saying that Brooklyn may be the laughingstock of the western world, but it’s not such a terrible place to come from. It’s interesting and it gives one such propulsion. If you’re lucky, next time you run into Robert, he may teach you the secret handshake.

And to those grouches who say they’ve heard enough about Brooklyn, let me just say this: Robert has had as much to do with making Bard into a true nursery of learning as anyone. And under the eyebrows are merry eyes full of love.





Phyllis Derfner and Carter Ratcliff



**FOR ROBERT KELLY'S 80<sup>TH</sup>**

**In 2012 I dedicated my book *The Price of Experience* in the following way:**

**For Robert Kelly and Jerome Rothenberg,  
fellow Argonauts**

**Recently, in Stuart Kendall's interview with me, he mentioned that he took this dedication as a reference to a creative community among us. I responded: "I referred to Robert Kelly and Jerome Rothenberg as "fellow Argonauts" because we have been friends in poetry and in our personal lives since the early 1960s. And also because I feel that our three bodies of work is one of the most original and accomplished artistic contributions of our generation. The territory that our three bodies of work covers is, in my opinion, spectacular. I feel that the three of us have continued to push on and out, beyond those who influenced us, into the previously uncharted."**

**Clayton Eshleman**



**Shafer House, May 2015  
with love from Ann Lauterbach**

Eléna Rivera

**Following the Measure**

*For Robert Kelly on his 80th Birthday*

1.

“Bring in everything you’re thinking about”  
and find the way to the exit where the fire  
sign burns. The way of finding the measure  
whispers, *Excess*, “the Palace of Wisdom;”  
that’s where light comes in at the intersection  
where the poet brings back reports of “a place.”

The map shows us, indicates, a way forward.  
Dreams of snails take us back again, back to  
the beginning again, staying with the measure,  
movement of water weaving the language  
“formal as fire” weighing upon the shoulders of  
that scribe of voice and body and color.

Bring in everything you’ve got and that is a lot  
and more, still more, the fire came from listening  
to the vocabulary of the dream, that map of  
an ancient internalized song where spirits dwell.  
Show us how to spill open we will find the means  
to measure the words and let the ocean come.

Are we in touch with the sea, air, land? Are we  
affected by the contours of our desires? All of them?  
I know it depends, so I listen to Mozart and sway  
according to internalized scriptures I still don’t  
understand, the breath we count and pray with  
and the glory of all that is the body and texture.

I sigh as my boat reaches the shore, sails swaying  
lightly, a heroine come home where fury almost  
got me. I had to follow a guide to lead me out  
a guide who honored all and lit the way celebrating  
where he “was happiest.” His words held my hand  
and something in the world once again stirred.

2.

and  
signs burn. Measure

the map shows us, indicates, a way forward.

Beginning again, staying with

that scribe of voice, body and color.

The vocabulary from the dream,  
map of

an ancient internalized song where spirits dwell.

Shows us how to spill words

following the measure —

Are we in touch with sea, air, land? Are we  
affected by the contours?

I listen and sway  
accordingly.

The glory of all that is the body and texture,

seized me.

A guide who honored all lit the way

Had to  
follow a guide

to reach my boat—

Fire came from listening

and  
“Bring in everything you’re thinking about”  
where happiest.

Breath held the words,

water weaving the language,

everything  
at the light. The intersection

the way to the exit where the fire  
whispers,

*Excess, “the Palace of Wisdom”*

—Eléna Rivera, 2015

All quoted material is by Robert Kelly

Dorota Czermer

## OVERHEARD INJUNE

for Robert — from June to Czerw

“**W** dzień zdejmowałem komety  
June is a name of our commitment.  
Dystanse i **lilie**  
tułał się czas tam, był  
The **sun** stands still  
we mnie **fantom**, co krąg rozpościerał  
to watch us tumble,  
i oddalał. **Dom**  
fumble, **crawl** over ourselves,  
inny miał, tajny **rytm**  
hit the **light**, thumb  
In my mouth, **tasting**  
(tylko)  
an **inconceivable** yesterday.”  
w kącie jarzyły się **sterty słów**.

By day I would take off the comets  
the distances and the lilies  
Time errant there, here, was  
inside me, a phantom circle spreading  
and vanishing, slowly. The house

lived to a different, secret rhythm

Only in the corner a glowing heap of words.

sterty słó

CODA:

From vesper billy witches  
From changes in flight and what we hear  
In their wings first ajumble we skirt, fumble,  
tango in a jar obscured by transparency of meaning

to Overflow

the gold-ringed lip, earth first, we each go our way.

Dorota Czerner, 21.VI.2015



## Peter Lamborn Wilson

### Three Poems

\*

Rain rustles in giant nurse's skirts  
to save us from wakefulness & the sulky  
Cassandre Syndrome. She slams & bangs  
down empty pearlescent hallways but  
the rumbles are soothing as screen-doors  
flapbanging on long-gone August evenings —  
the cosmico-maternal monsoon, the  
benevolent Kali of the Catskills and her  
bowling league, the Seven Dwarves. Never mind the  
Nostradamnation of the numismetosphere  
Rain will take you back & forgive you  
fold you in her harmless arms &  
kiss yr ears like a snake with  
at least one hour of dreamless sleep.

\*

You know from yr own life how  
That Which Cannot Be Spoken lies  
at the dusky pulsing center of everything  
like the gland in shellfish that  
excretes the shell. Put yr hand in the bag  
& feel it -- a Halloween trick -- invisible pearl  
of wordless textless blind concupiscence.  
Groped by an incubus. The big bulge  
in yr cerebrum assumes the sadly  
dominican duty of burning these messages  
before reading or even decoding them lest  
innocent children be traumatized by the  
very absence of trauma. Mute swans,  
only death unlocks their throats.

\*

## Ghazal for a Lunar Eclipse

Tarnished w/ the cuprous leprosy of eclipse  
the Moon of Alabama is the Moon of Afghanistan

but never the Moon of our uninsured senescence  
always somewhere else exiled & displaced

we never stand under our own Moon  
our militarized hallucinogenic real estate

but someone else's satellite, its tides  
no longer stir our amniotic broth.

O Moon of alienation we now must say goodbye  
we've lost our lunar shadow -- the Dog in the Moon

still howling for the Moon, still beating  
pots and pans to dispel the dark's invasion

O Moon of astronauts & dead bankers  
our former homeland, our Zion.

## SLOW ELEGY FOR A FAST HAND

*For Robert*

Let me shuffle the deck for you. *E Pluribus Unum*. Here's a skulk of foxes, a faith of merchants, a pity of prisoners, a murder of crows. A leap of leopards, a drunkenness of cobblers. Now the blushful boys bellowing at bullfinches, ersting the bees. Me, I'm caught red-handed doling out doves to a cast of hawks.

Once your true name's taken from you, nothing makes sense. Everything's at a remove. You try to stay focused on the task at hand, ride the pale horse toward the five-pointed star. Over time the ghastly wounds declare themselves. In the vast & troubled sea *proci* becomes *porci*, from a silk purse to a sow's ear. & yet & yet as "want" is to "wont" so we are consoled by our errors, a purloined letter heals the world.

These days everybody's under revision. There are no originals. Only a copy of a copy of a copy. Gazing into empty space we find nullity, "a lovely nothing." An unbuttoned glove lies on a bedside table. Lavender ghost of a hand that once used to slide down inside your trousers & ... Caught in that delirium, you're a pebble in her palm.

What follows begins with admonitions: "Don't piss on a turtle." "Never buy the same horse twice." Then drifts into ambiguous assertions: "A man on fire swims through ice." "The Greeks are hidden behind their columns." & vaguer sequelae: "cold & lonely," "past tense," "the distant drama of delusional daffodils," "Pierrot bitch-slapped by the moon."

Abandoned at the absent center of my unlived life I stared into - a rat hole, a bird's nest, a red fox disappearing into a culvert. Then I saw the Great Speckled Bird that is the paranoid's Bible spread its wings & suddenly everything was connected to everything, everything made sense again.

Like a scene from a movie I saw a milkmaid standing at a fountain. A young man knelt before her, covered in soot & ashes. The milkmaid dipped

her handkerchief into the water & gently wiping first one then the other bathed his blinded eyes. She is preparing him to see, I thought, she is preparing him to see.

But see what? A granite ledge? A kedge in quicksand? Lovely nullities? An extended hand's five-pointed star? I stared down at my fingers. They lay before me – pale, gloveless, unloved – a dole of doves. “Here is consequentialism,” I said. “Not a false smile or a pretty simile. Here is consequentialism with teeth.”

At the end of the avenue, a hooded man faced me. “Justice for all big things,” he proclaimed. “Mercy for the rest.” Towering above him the great machine's oiled blade, suspended by a hair, glistened in the moonlight. Around us the servants of the future, the “*tricoteuses* of dialectic,” sat furiously knitting, reknitting the unraveled net of reason as the crowd roared & one by one the heads fell like winter cabbages into the basket.

— L. S. Asekoff



**Claire Woolner**

**Writings Between Brothers**

*constructed from every 80th word of an east to west correspondence*

I often consider the specifically featherbrain little things  
sometimes there is real majesty  
mothers happened  
Diocletian women  
drawing of music.

When listening for how a storm picked cigarette little Claire  
meeting at word  
we know that mater are near.  
Not the theological slit  
but the deeply positive our.

I'm my mother's talking and the manna is physics.  
It's all here, not seen  
but if my return to capital things comes  
the sorry spewing  
where I'm this could should piano  
to have to know the job and think the course  
that's my fear working: to have to prove  
or think

I almost miss the open sun.

Later I dreamed of walking to Thailand.  
It is V-day and a same romantic sweat organized pictures of light  
all such true value it dulls my desperation.  
No work to find there  
no jealous wants to inhabit  
an away of my "my me my" saw horn.

The child made a game of cloth and words  
undoubtedly cheating the trap of fear  
with giving grateful ways, a bare stomach.  
So we watch in the platforms  
We feel and draw  
they did away with seen-need there  
it moved me.

I believe I slept a Hymn  
this talk of god-hide as frankincense  
is a cool snow drink.

You listen  
I guess

So be my me.

Ashley Mayne

The white crow  
brought a point of glass,  
not fire on a winter day.

It didn't matter  
that we were cold  
and it didn't matter  
that we were lost.

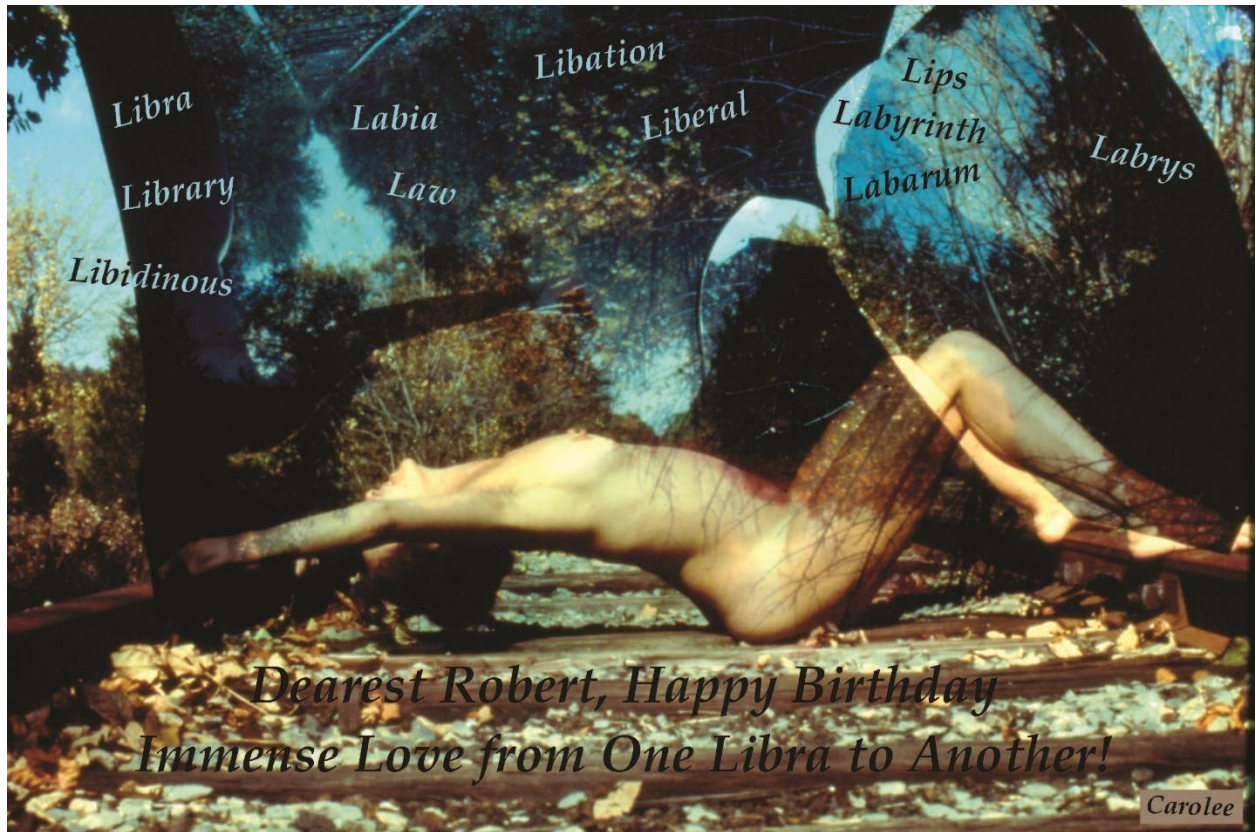
We were close to this.

A flash in the palm  
light holding  
something that could hurt us  
something bright.

Tell me again  
how the sun  
can only be carried in the mouth.

Tell me again  
how the pane was broken  
little blue from big blue.

Tell me again.



Carolee Schneemann



Sous les canaux (Lutèce)  
- Jennifer Cazenave -

*Pour Robert*

I.

J'aurais aimé voir  
Non pas de l'autre côté du miroir

Mais de lui -

Un contrechamp de son regard  
Dans lequel j'imaginai un espace ouvert

Une chambre noire  
Au milieu d'un champ.

II.

Il y aurait dans le retour  
Le passage des saisons

La traversée interminable  
Dans les images

Des histoires à moitié effacées  
Un récit intemporel -

Ta voix.

III.

Sous quel soleil  
Le silence est-il une trace ?

Rien n'a cessé d'exister –

Portrait ou paysage  
Scène ou aveu

Je me souviens encore de ton visage  
Sous la lueur ancienne –

Lutèce à l'aube  
Les murmures des pavés.

Lynn Behrendt  
Annandale News

Yoko Ono and Gertrude Stein showed us swaths of cut-up fruit  
that they sold along with hot food in their roadside cart.  
We drove boiling taxis through diesel smog.  
Badgers the size of leeches.

Roberto Benigni, the Italian comic actor, appeared on stage.  
He seemed startled and upset by the presence of the bald twins.  
Tornados appeared. I definitely did NOT want to open a bar called  
Apathy + Protest for the 27-28 yr old demographic, but that's what I  
dreamed I was doing.

A tiny silk moth followed me around as a pet;  
it understood human speech, but only Japanese.

I knew it was a bad idea to go back.

I was attending a "baton twirling" conference & I was staying in a  
boarding house & I caught TS Eliot at midnight stealing doughnuts from  
the kitchen & he shyly apologized.

We were looking at the stars and talking.

I was shown how on their planet you could unzip your flesh suit easily,  
or sometimes you didn't wear the suit at all.

Charles Bernstein was explaining to me that home craft projects go much  
better if one makes one's own Elmer's Glue! Like our early days in New  
York except everyone was famous.

My wood-paneled bedroom.

Our tiny linear container garden.

That year it rained so much the house was lost to a sinkhole.

Back and forth over a snowy road  
you asked if I would take dictation on a typewriter on a tour of readings  
you were doing with a bunch of women I didn't know. I said no, sorry,  
and instead designed my own community college behind the glass walls  
of a Tibetan monastery.

Kathy Acker returned from the dead to give a talk on what it's like being  
dead  
while the progressively more unruly kids were chaperoned by Jennifer  
Moxley & Steve Evans and a small shaking woman with bloodshot eyes  
handed me a miniature pamphlet called "The Power of God."

I was a ghost.

I discovered an old lost book by Emily Dickinson in a desolate labyrinth  
of mud fields and construction zones.

I found the planet no longer rotated, leaving it cold/dark on the one side  
and burned-beyond-life on the other.

The air shattered and the present disintegrated.

Forrest Gander was looking at a shopping cart in a large parking lot.

The code was made of long strips of typewriter ribbon,  
taped to a wall, read

V  
E  
R  
T  
I  
C  
A  
L  
L  
Y

You sat at a beautiful desk with an oval edge looking out onto trees.

You remembered Rene Ricard on Mile End Road in a bright scarlet coat and I somehow ended up chatting with Amy King at the AWP book fair which felt like a bizarre conference of accountants in Las Vegas with old-style ice machines and a dark lobby.

I recognized his stooped height, his low voice, the shape of his face, and most of all, his state of mind.

I threw a second stone onto the clear cellophane.

I knew I had died because a letter arrived saying as much.

I was lying on a cot in a storage closet in back of the theatre, realizing I would never be able to get home again unless I abandoned everything.

There was another clarinet, a silver one.

‘What then?’ I asked.

We rose to leave.

I was descending a gritty white rock, into a pond.  
His body was half its original size, shrunken under the sheets.  
I found animal skins and called them stories.

It was more like gliding than flying.

The burned people  
on the bridge  
at Yarra River.

Industrial space  
with a bay window  
covered with thick plastic mesh.

The elevator started going sideways

Meanwhile in Marin.

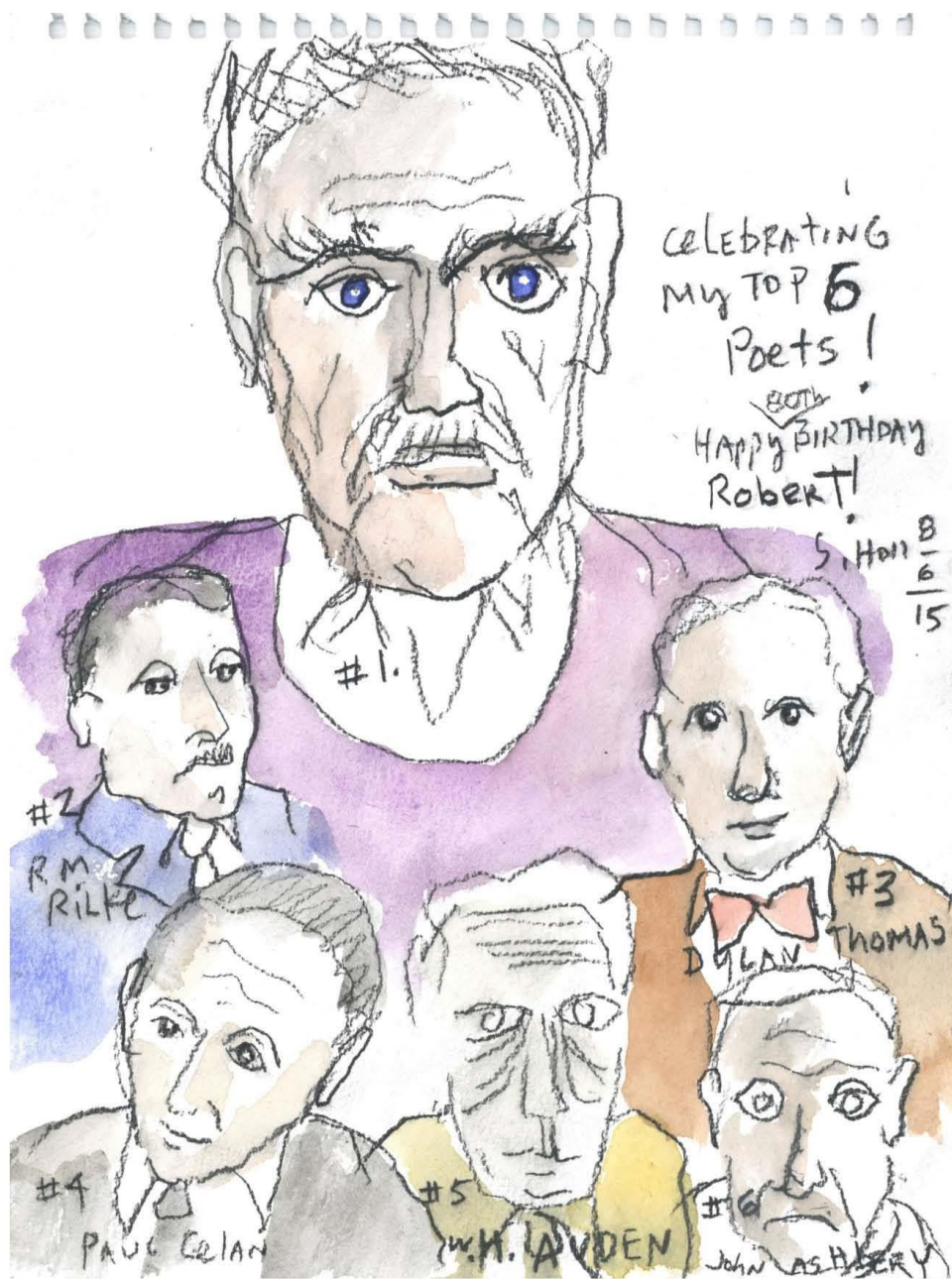
The grapevines.

Pinned with sparkling sheets of paper.

I went to sleep and woke up in Franz's apartment  
boy was it was a mess.

I had to go back outside.

Black tulips, blunt scissors, wattle trees.



Steven Holl

## Ocean and Lake

French horns herald  
The accumulation of time  
In the bones

A man of 80  
That has digested his experience  
And even has taste

For more of it.  
Water cupped in a crater.  
As in the clearest lake.

It is as if we have missed all the buses  
And there is no train  
And we don't know how to drive

And the airports are fogged in  
And there are too many mountains  
And deserts in the way to simply walk.

And yet we must get there  
And we are going to get there  
And the going is a great pleasure

Because we are able to laugh now  
At our own delusions?  
But whether or not we can live

In the absence of other people's  
Delusions and mistakes,  
That is truly the open question...

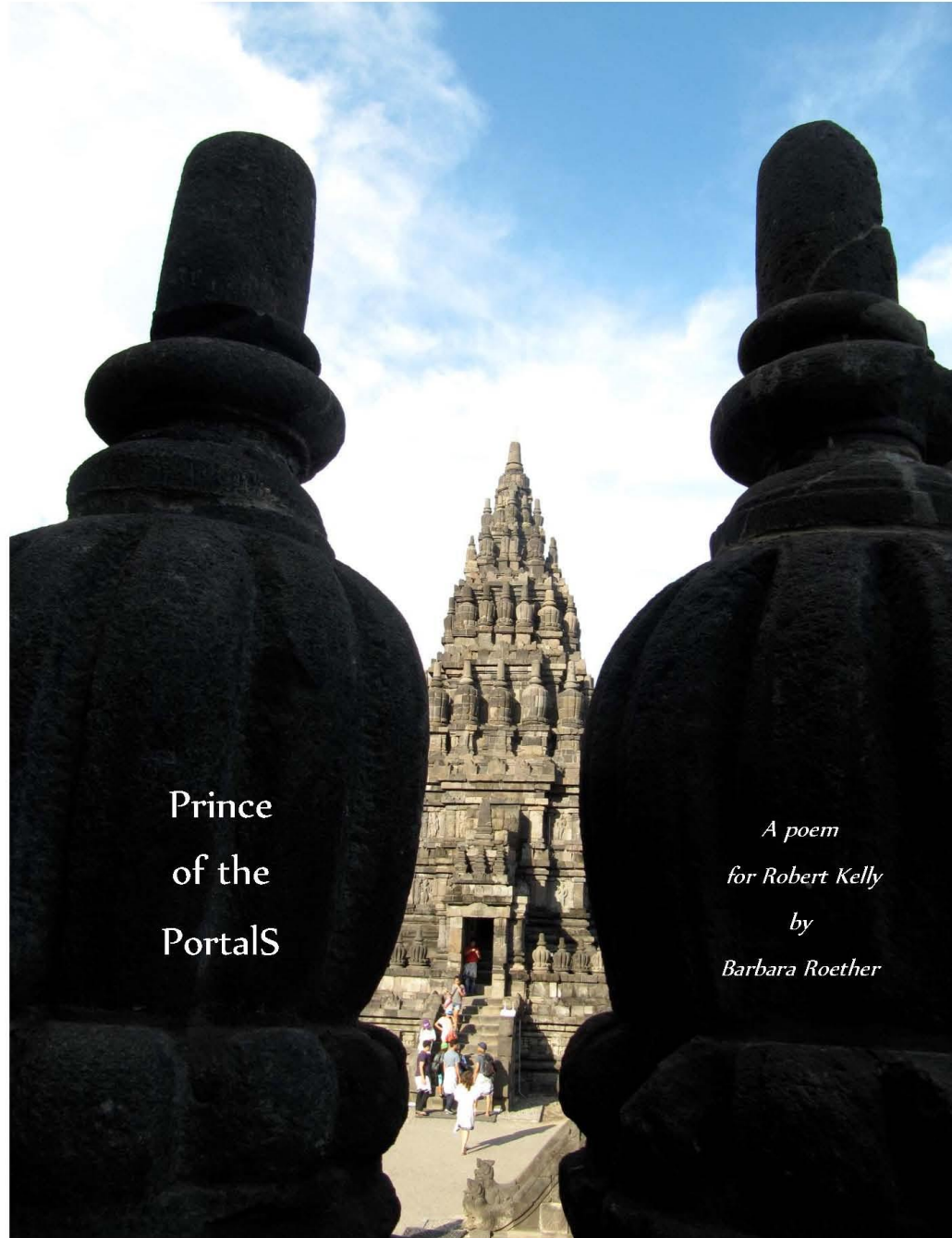


Apparently unassuming but upon reflection  
Acerbic surfaces garner increasing attention  
In the economy of laurels and grants.

On a more passionate planet  
Birds would engage in vast migrations  
For food, love, light.

A boat the size of a hummingbird  
Pushes off into the Pacific.  
Black, like ink from a bleeding pen.

- Leonard Schwartz



Prince  
of the  
Portals

*A poem  
for Robert Kelly  
by  
Barbara Roether*

## Prince of the Portals

Written for Robert Kelly on the Occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday  
By Barbara Roether

I.

Oh Prince of the Portals  
allow me to show you  
who are always a doorway  
what is there in the temple square  
we have found today,  
it is your turn to turn  
come inside the temple  
no don't look  
just listen first,  
look later (by then we'll have to find a way out)  
but now, let us visit  
this temple of the sect of sound

I'm afraid it's monsoon season though  
at the moment water gushing onto the stones lightning's blue bruises the  
flood of thunders rain, only rain and then fruit falling from the trees onto  
the corrugated metal roof and that priest in white on the balcony at his  
gong, not to mention the deafening shuttle of the looms next door, and the  
ocean around the corner, the bells ringing like your ears.

Only after many years  
standing here in the temple of sound can you hear  
the quiet  
from which is born  
scattered at first  
scattered as rice in the dark field, or islands in the Indian Ocean

barely audible  
as the sun is barely dawn

a faint trill of birdsong  
it is easy to think this song is your self  
because you have been dreaming, drifting in the dream dark sea and this is  
the first sound or the first island

but in this case it is actually the birds'  
or the noise of light shattering as it falls

soon an answering scale  
then climbing, now twining,  
till the trill is melody, and the melody many  
birds singing

songs of innocence and experience chattering coloratura, racy cadenzas,  
cacophonies of raucous exuberance, you name it and we know you will,  
(sunbirds, munias, and iora)

until the rooster all ablaze  
pours fire on your ears.

II.

Have some coffee  
while the coolness lingers  
the gardener has arrived  
barefoot in his sarong  
he begins raking  
the leaves that have fallen through the night  
and you can hear his rake scratching  
the green ground gathering  
papery blood red leaves of the hibiscus

as he rakes he begins to sing  
inside the temple a man is singing the early morning  
grass is green the leaves are red  
his song is a lament

I don't know why he is sad why is anyone when music

the night guard joins in  
still in his dark blue uniform  
hasn't gone home yet, even though it's light  
he's waiting for coffee too  
in the little hut they share beside the brooms  
he sings with the gardener it's a duet,  
and they fall to talking though their song continues

remember all this is taking place behind the doorway you are.

Other people begin to arrive  
offerings brought in small palm frond trays  
muttered with mantras  
chants and descants, music is coming  
gamelan again, tablas under the table  
the Tibetans troop in with the dung-chens  
Thank god Charlie Parker has arrived

blow bird blow hide Mozart's piano behind the altar, Carlos Gardel is  
inside the Victrola, and that little shepherd boy from the Atlas Mountains  
I've invited him in since he sings the most beautiful song I have ever heard,  
as he led his sheep alone over a rise near a lake his song rose up like a kite  
searching for a wind a song for no one to hear, he was singing to the sky to  
see if it would answer,

he was singing where am I  
why am I here alone in the mountains  
wandering up and down,  
he sang where should I go,  
he sang the horns of morning  
the long flute of afternoon

he sang will this loneliness never end with skipping scales plaintive arias  
and rough peeled starts like the gravel wash he is stepping through listen  
to this shepherd boy who sings the song of sky.

### III.

This temple is busy  
more basilica than chapel  
taxicabs are honking outside  
waiting to take you to the next  
movement at 33 rpm  
on the outskirts of recorded rhyme  
yes, I know, everyone can hear the lovers in the corner, it's as if we are not  
even here the way they go at, panting, pleading, slap of flesh on flesh

but still this is not a Noah's Ark of sound  
we are not marching in the couplets  
or coupling up on marches no  
we are very selective only  
allowing what is ardently asking  
from among the audible  
nibs on parchment,

the tracers left by falling stars  
chalk on slate, printing presses, and Motown on the radio in a hot Mustang  
convertible, vespers sung at Notre Dame snow falling outside rose song of  
glass the Ninth symphony in Stern Grove as the fog clears the eucalyptus  
and the sun strikes through, your mother's voice asking if she can bring  
you anything only one mother's voice for each of us listen to you inside her  
who spoke you first

the saw scratching  
on the branches of the trees  
I cut this morning to let more light in  
the saw of the saw of the light when it cuts through

and the sound of a fire over which your lunch is cooking an ear of corn  
sing of the kernel on the grill and the chomp of your mouth it's near the  
fourth of July is why the firecrackers.

Each day it is more crowded  
in the temple courtyard  
and always those lovers  
panting, in rhythm she keeps  
saying his name  
between

breaths he says oh God, (she may be God)  
they never really stop  
sounds jostling for a place to say  
and edges overlapping did I hear  
the wind turn into tires on the gravel up the  
mountain driveway here,  
a car coming closer  
it's a woman, it's your wife  
slams the door  
whispers in your ear  
a word you'd forgotten  
                    what was it? Do you have them all now?

that sound this sound  
only still and always  
invisible and outside of the temple  
yard  
a bird.

[This poems cover image is of the Shiva temple at Prambanan, Java 2013.  
Photo by the author.]



*Whose dream is she?*  
*Robert Kelly's words whisper to my images - and help them understand the world they inhabit.*  
—Nancy Goldring



Peter Kimbis

Dear Uncle,

My childhood Thanksgivings and Christmases on Long Island were always wonderful. Uncle, I remember you visiting, garbed in thick Irish woolen sweaters, having travelled from a land far away. It was a place we called upstate. Your visits did seem like something out of a Tolkien or C.S. Lewis adventure. I remember the time you flew in after several months with Yogis in India. I really liked Mom's cooking also.

You always did like to engage my imagination and encourage ideas that were both comical and mysterious. I don't remember the details of what we spoke about (other than the ferocious Fire Rats of the early 1980s that plagued all of New York), but I do remember you asking question after question with a sense of curiosity and kind amusement.

I remember Grandma Margaret speaking of you so highly. She was always beaming as she brought out one of your newly published collections. Mom thought some of the poems were a bit too mature for an eight year old and I was redirected to reorganizing bottle caps and matchbooks in cigar boxes.

I wish our families could have reconnected after Grandma and Grandpa passed. Every family and group has a hub I guess, the glue they call it. So much time has passed. I've attached a picture of my three daughters Maggie, Emily, and Katie. They are very special – you would be proud.

Maggie is hardworking and kind. She takes after her namesake in many ways. Emily is practical, maternal, and seemingly from a past generation. She is passionate about social justice and equality. Katie is a trip. She is a mathematician, comedian, philosopher, and agitator. She is loving, quick to both tears and contagious laughter, and loves to “get into people's mind cells”. I'm sure many of these traits came from the Kelly lineage, especially the latter.

I'm glad Charlotte contacted me and I am honored to contribute my memories to this Germanicritualwrittencelebration. By the way, do you have any idea why all the Irishmen in our family love the German language? Me neither.

Happy 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Uncle Robert!

God bless always.

Peter



Celia Bland  
Ravenous (*Le Goulu*)

*"Art is what has no opposite."*  
from *Threads*

Why do I think of Toulouse-Lautrec when I read Robert Kelly's poetry? Why do those oil-on-cardboard quick-takes, those colorful sketches of sots, whores, and circus performers, swim before my eyes, rendered in oil on the cardboard squares salvaged from the artist's shirts, laundered, starched and folded by pasty slatterns? Why would such images hover before my eyes when I hear Robert's voice? Is it because Toulouse-Lautrec reveals a near-penitential dedication to recording — honoring, even — underbelly-gorgeousness? The gavotte-dancer's squared-off knees; a glass of absinthe pallid as skin. Diners at the "Le Rat Mort" sit, defenses in tatters, boredom encapsulating a sullen world, behind the crazy angles of bar or balustrade as if Lautrec were across the table, looking. Tirelessly, at the expense of his own energies, looking. As if he must — if not atone — describe with reverence. And in doing so, the artist hones his skills, following, as Robert Kelly writes, his "femoral artery" to find himself "in the body of another person."

It is this quality, this particularity, that isolates the empty-eyed drinkers of Degas, or of Francis Bacon (to leap ahead a century) from Lautrec and what connects him with Robert's work — that quality of *being-there* that these set pieces convey, "strung lightly on a sense of form" (in Robert's own words). A line Toulouse-Lautrec wrote nightly from the dance floor of the Moulin Rouge, and at the bar of Le Rat Mort, and in the salon of 24 Rue des Moulins where lovers met.

Because Robert Kelly, poet, engages so deeply in what he describes. The crazy angles of table or lune or balustrade create the immediacy of constraint even as they delineate proximity. As if Robert/Lautrec, were across the table, looking. Leaning against the wall, looking. And listening. And smelling and tasting. His motivation: "The worship of the thing, as meaningful existent, is one mode of heresy, perhaps of reformation." Adding: "But it is clear that we must discover, or

(doubtfully) rediscover, the true wellsprings of possible human identity...  
To *know*, beyond opinion."

So many moments from the plays, poems, novels, and short stories Robert Kelly writes with such marvelous creative dispatch, are well and truly matched by his personal generosity to, and curiosity about others — their names, their languages, their books, their impediments. Who among us has not been the beneficiary of his slyly humorous dedication to humanism and to humanity? A dedication despite the imminence of loss and disappointment, as illustrated in any random list of masterworks: *Lapis*, *Mont Blanc*, *Earish*, *Armed Descent*, *The Loom*, *May Day*, *Rube Goldberg Suite* — as in Lautrec's 300-plus prints — as if both artists knew that

though you can fondle it all night long  
the moon eats us all.

## My Offal Flowers for Robert Kelly

*Because you were a monster in the eyes of your masters. Shy, unruly, never reaching out but sidling up close, always wanting to be near the Thing Itself, whatever that might be, I love and adore you today.*

*Because you are not one of the American consumers who only feast upon cow labia and pig vulva and bull scrotum and other meaty parts whose juicy identities disperse, when atomized into sausages and burgers, thick with protein and bad karma, as bad for you as steak. You go for the real things like: testicles, olives blanches: drake's testicles, ivory, in a rich stew, sweetbreads – the thymus and sometimes pancreas of the calf – your favorite restaurant food, except for the wonderful tripes à la mode de Caen. Tripe: honeycomb, rumen, pipes, manyplies. Stomach of bovines. The oxtail stew rich with gelatin. Because you love all these animal products called Offal, because, they're much more appealing to you than roast beef, the fierce dead animal taste of rare steak. Just as you love flowers better than stalks or leaves, that's why I love and adore you.*

*Because when you are in a supermarket you stand a long time in front of the nondescript meat chest at the end of the most unfashionable aisle, at the offal – typically frozen, even more unappealing inside the frosted plastic shrinkwrap – bundled, heaped up, scarcely displayed. Pig ears. Beef heart. Marrow bones. Pig tails. Spleen. And when Charlotte rebukes you for this time-wasting fascination, which she calls, with polite euphemism, your trance 'staring at bright things,' I completely understand you.*

*Because you think Offal is the Queen. She is the animal inside the animal, the soul-meat that keeps all that dumb musclework and bone alive. Liver and lights, heart and kidney: they make the animal go, and because you think humans are the sexual organs of the planet, that's why I love and adore you.*

**Because you see that relationship to flowers. Heavy-scented speckled lilies that curl like leaves of suet, shavings of kidney fat speckled with blood, and because you see that flowers are the offal of the vegetable kingdom, and that these silly plants, wear their viscera inside out, and their innards outwards, that's why I love and adore you.**

## **Heide Hatry**

The images of the flowers accompanying this text are photographic documentations of sculptures composed mainly out of animal organs, posed in different natural environments. (*Heide Hatry, Not a Rose*, Charta, Milan/NY, 2013. 256 pages, 81 photos)





**Heide Hatry**

Manjusri

for Robert Kelly, *cher maître*

bright with illumination

immense “cut!”  
a flaming sword

intricacies of the  
manuscript

barricade against time

stooped over  
scripture  
I saw dazzle  
scent of intellectus

studied alphabets  
with tremble  
no pulse but this

*throb of dharma*

& poetry set  
around  
— “surround sound” —  
*you*  
inside the cyclotron  
warming  
colliding

rides a blue lion

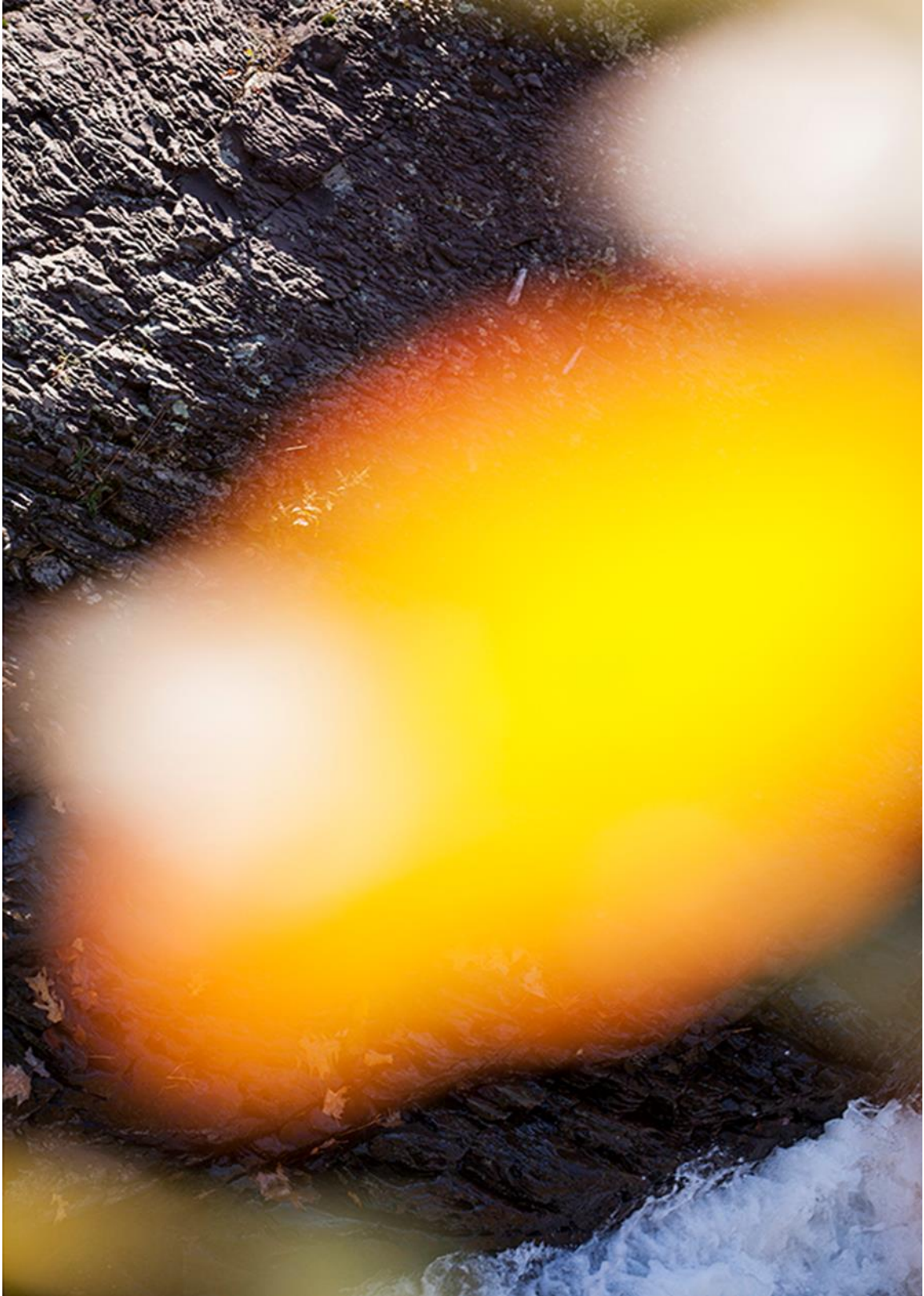
this day, his in all argument: what moves  
mind?

Vilmalakirti swoons

*om arapacana dhih*

*Anne Waldman*





**Susan Wides**

Billie Chernicoff

R

1. For

Robert, because you see  
mud is a dog with blue wings  
that is after Adam

the saying of mud is never done.  
Not that you like everything,  
though you like more than before

when you were a young ecstatic,  
a lion with red wings, saying eat everything  
you meant love, didn't you, everyone?

(almost) shamelessly.

2. and Fro

*Armed Descent*

How it fell or how it feels  
the fullness of her skirt  
outskirts of a town  
you, ever a curious animal, skirt.  
Rooted in the sky  
the things of the first book still behoove you.

*Fire Exit*

You who eat the canicule  
never inexact, discern  
the fractal, the viable  
older than a horse religion  
quick and curative.

*The Loom*

Loaves and fishes  
multiply god,  
a poet's house.

Promises break  
open like lemons.

Pan, the wine  
of mid-day sways  
the moon,

light spills over the breakers.

*The Mill of Particulars*

Leave them and come to me.  
*Lech, lecha*, elsewhere.  
Go to yourself.  
Become what I say,  
language itself, and float  
an ibis over the Hudson.

### 3. The First Letter

Resh, a man with his head bent over his work.  
The mind bends to speak.

My thoughts are not your thoughts.  
Yet somehow they are.

A church on fire  
becomes a head on fire,  
esh, fire with an R,

from which language  
steps Minervan  
fully armed, down

into the world,  
the only self there is.

### 4.

In the alef beth  
resh is twenty,  
Resurrection.  
Go back to being.  
A teen in love.



## 5. Ruach

The stone under Jacob's head  
that whispers and augurs  
    desire always,  
    trouble sometimes  
or mere Presence  
a region of the sky,  
she of a cool evening  
he dreams and breathes.

## 6.

Fire plus water plus the letter nun  
with which he clothes, falls on,  
anoints, that the stone may rest  
from omen and persuasion,  
from voice.

Then the voice is in Jacob's hands.

## 7. In A Beginning

Everything has not been said about mud  
or love for that matter.

The frog making all that noise  
small as the moon of your nail.

*Half of my work is done  
I have written two or three words down.*

## Notes

In section 2, names in parentheses are the titles of four of Robert Kelly's books. Vocabulary of *Fire Exit* section lifted directly from that book.

Ending couplet of poem, RK. Also see Francis Ponge, *Unfinished Ode to Mud*.



**Charles Stein**

**Schwimmbad am Abend**

**Der Ort von Gebrüll  
Plötzlich still**

– Urs Engeler

## FESTUS REHUVAIN

O

*giant wintry  
spruce: high in your  
branches a broad bespectacled  
boy reads aloud, finding his voice,  
his voice velvet grass, rich honey and  
lofty is his uppercrust Brooklyn Heights accent.*

*Swathes of settled snow  
stretch away down the hill  
to the river. The boy's breath the weather,  
his tongue the fish uttering water under ice in the  
broad river below. Broad boy, don't ever  
climb down, even if crows call you, keep  
reading the land aloud to us in your voice of flowers.*

—Tandy Sturgeon  
18 August 15

## FESTUS REHUVAIN

Q  
giant wintry  
spruce: high in your  
branches a broad bespectacled  
boy reads aloud, finding his voice,  
his voice velvet grass, rich honey and  
lofty is his uppercrust Brooklyn Heights  
accent.

Swathes of settled snow  
stretch away down the hill  
to the river. The boy's breath the  
weather,  
his tongue the fish uttering water  
under ice in the  
broad river below. Broad boy, don't  
ever  
climb down, even if crows call you,  
keep  
reading the land aloud to us in  
your voice of flowers.  
- Tandy Sturgeon

*Outlandish hawkiatus*

Mild braid in mud has sprung  
with fragrant plans enough solar  
blood, the reasons I am always  
leaving questions (come) include

his hammer (you) slung (velleity)  
against what still remains undone,  
another fragrance, means “gambol  
away already young” yet pink froth

tanks hard flares of hay, earliness  
has eked its way into her various  
members to slip the look of rodent  
weariness (meetings, blows) like wind

clean scans shared green that  
shears many seasons, I am always  
grieving musts, taut schemes, because  
the tide is tense past, all it's

tugged across purports our own  
wet lawns, your lean upon a tree  
become trunk (sequela) become  
snake fence she scales to see we

make quick lock (in gory earth  
tame furrow, clammy sun) like love  
is last sense of teething a spit  
of land out from what's still



and remembers hawk's near  
surgical relief, drift opinion apace  
with night's solutions prying  
scantling sour and subdural.

— Gracie Leavitt

*launched from RK's hypnogeographic talk, Uncertainties and "Ariadne"*

John Wronoski

Some Lines Occasioned by the Phenomenon of Robert Kelly: An Agon

I

ἐν ἀρχῇ

It was too soon to judge

It was too late

If perfection is stasis

The beginning was

The first mistake

But failure is not enough

To guarantee

Anything

It is true, the words will come

But do they not also

Come to the aid of the liar?

Will they not gild

The lily, serve any master,

Pile etym on skin?

And do they really mean

Or, that is, abide,

Or is that not, in fact, their way, as in all of nature?

Are those who know

And those who do

Not equal? (Asks the Quran).

Is any living man (much) better  
Than any other?  
Or any dead than any living? (Asks Faulkner).

There is no bedrock;  
Subtle fissures have  
Poised it all on the brink

Of disintegration  
The words have entered  
And insinuated themselves, like water

And our excavations  
Are of no use whatsoever;  
We find what has been put there and nothing else

## II

If strife is dance,  
Is not dance also strife? Perhaps  
Not all tautologies are equal

And what of love, then?  
It is the fallacy of three  
That keeps us thrall.

In the dream lost  
Language flows  
As from the myth of the phantom twin

But speech is always  
Fragment in a  
Lost language

Say everything, you say.  
But will it make the whole?  
Will it make us whole? Or even you

If we cannot step into  
The same river (even)  
Once

What then is memory?  
What is river  
Is there river? Or even only wound?

Opening to the sea of words  
By which you sit  
Some tossed up around you on the shingle beach

All full of alephs,  
Each aleph full of monads  
Into its very quarks

Which is the true stone  
How know the stone of the stone  
The touchstone of the hunger?

### III

We live in voiceless need  
Silenced by the roaring surf  
Of emptied ear.

Are there any accidents?  
Anything but accidents?  
Might as well begin here as anywhere else.

Will speech allow that  
Will mathematics allow  
Speech?

Preparing yourself to be the voice  
Of what?  
Of truth? Of spirit? Of eternity? Of us all? (I could go on)

It is only words, John,  
Just some words,  
Thus Charlie Vallely, my friend, now dead; and his words still.

So, sorry, that moment has been taken  
Filled full of emptiness, again,  
And again, into the fullness of time, and

Nothing is  
Anything  
But itself; anything but itself

Always already formed  
Long formed  
Words seep in like water into rock, and you

Returned still swollen  
From the subsiding freshets  
Of sleep

Will never get your bearings.  
One path is as good as the next  
And bears with it its own sustaining regret.

#### IV

There was a time when  
A fly in the house  
Would make me insane

Frantic to get it out  
Far too impatient  
To teach it the way

Ears maddened too  
With the confusion of alarm  
That won't abate

Even inside the vessel of my  
Own experience  
Clawing until I was bloodied;

What sounds like chaos  
Extending in every direction  
Might yet be discipline unremarked

And the thing itself  
The buzzing frantic source  
I was so at pains to stifle.

There is wisdom in panic, you say;  
Equanimity in lust  
Ragnarok, Anaximander...consilience

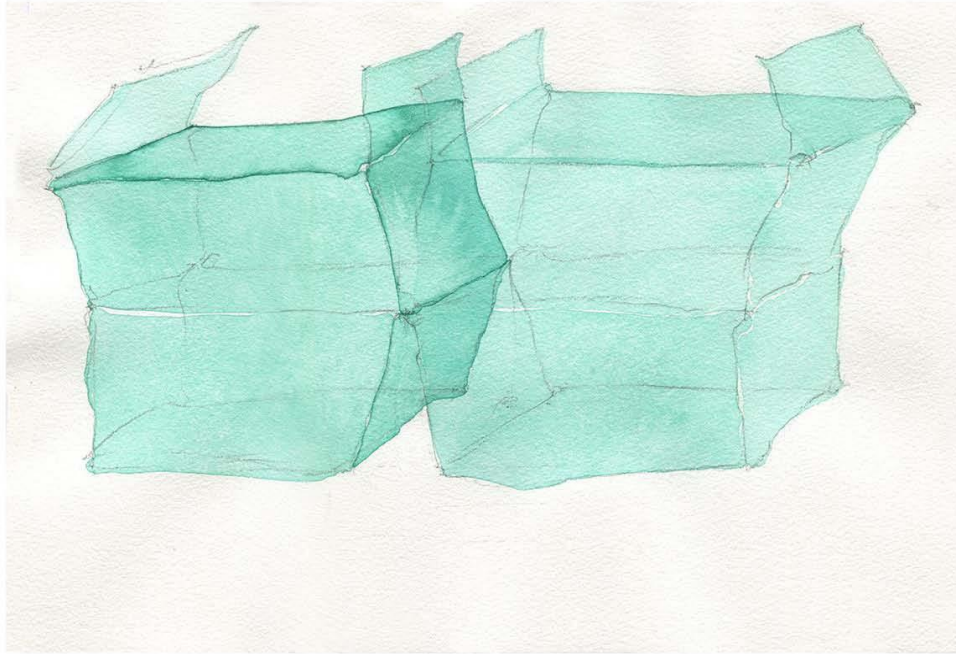
Waiting for me as I came to find you  
Casually testing the primordial stew  
Gossamer peptide chains dangling from your fingertips

Bones of ancient famine  
Clotting the shores  
From which our forebears never emerged

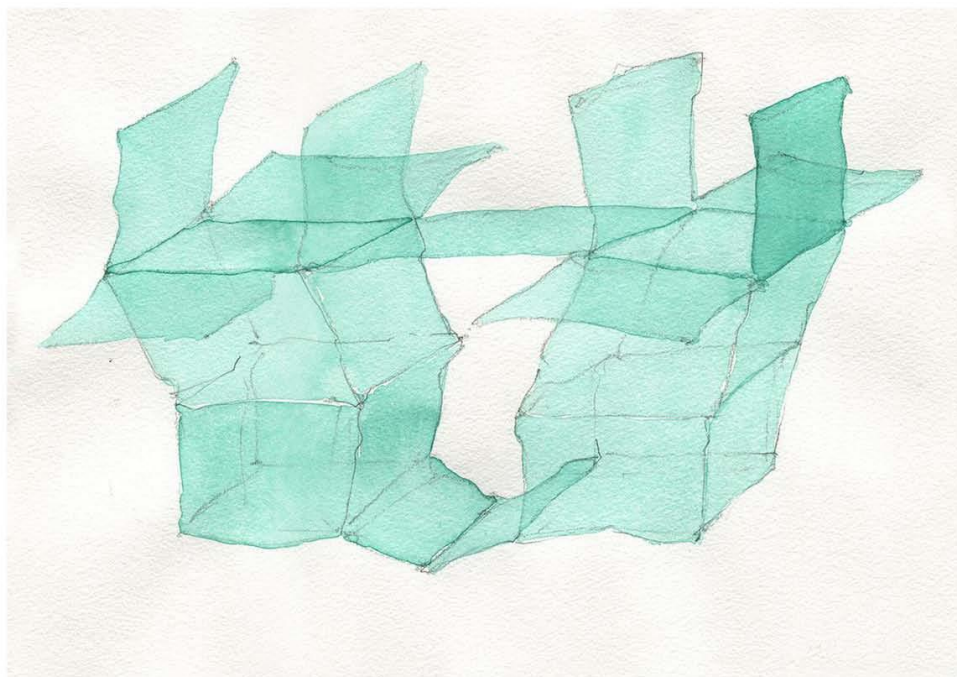
Wherever we start  
It's always the beginning  
In the end it's always

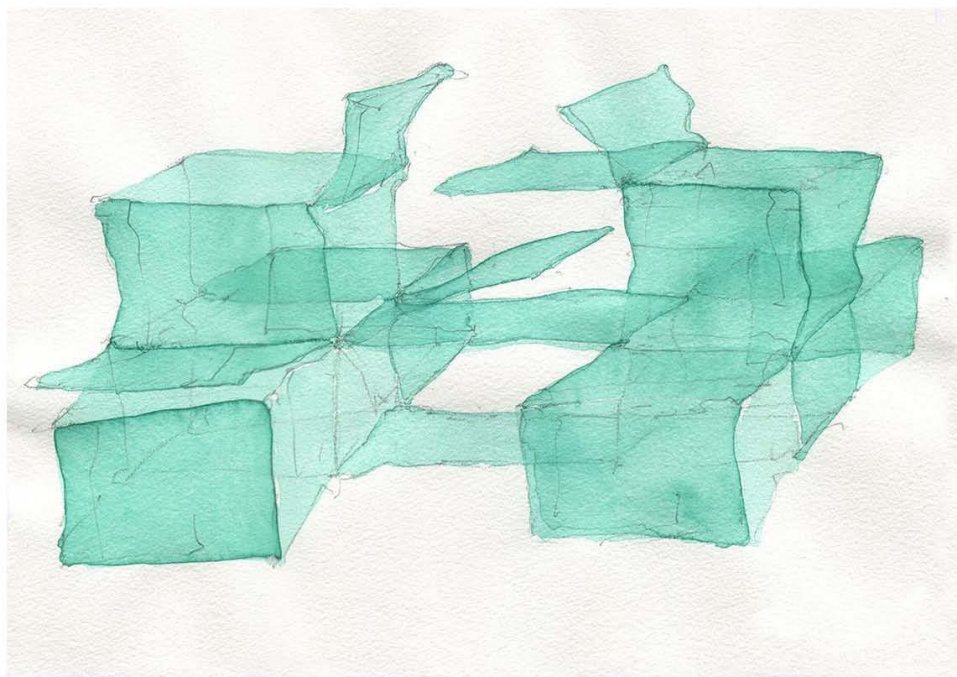
The beginning  
The bloody site of the word  
The first word and the last.

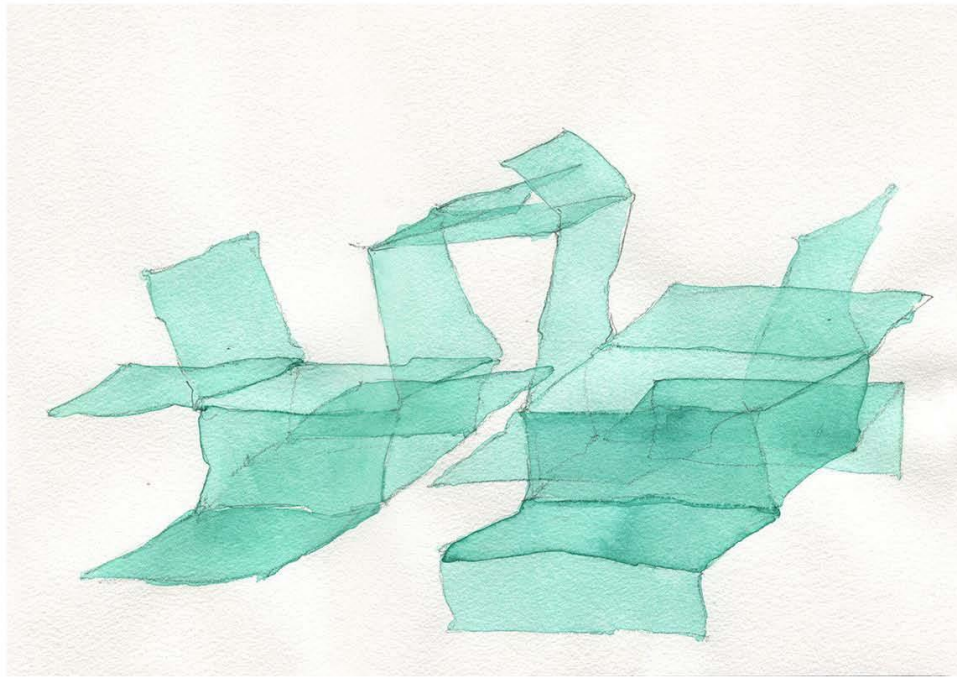
**Brigitte Mahlknecht**











## ON THE BRANCH OF NOTHINGNESS: DESOLATION AND BEAUTY IN ATTILA JÓZSEF'S POETRY

Peter Laki

There are times when the necessary is impossible and the impossible, necessary. I face this problem every day when I try to explain music in words: it really can't be done, yet you have to keep trying because (a) people want to know and (b) not everything is as self-explanatory as we would like to believe. We face a similar problem whenever we try to translate poetry. Again, it is a near-impossible task yet we have to keep trying because people have a right to know what they're missing if they don't speak a given language.

By now it is well known, even outside Hungary, that Attila József (1905-1937) was a great poet; there are numerous English translations of his work available, and he even has an English wikipedia page! But can the English translations ever mean, to the English reader, anything remotely close to what the originals mean to the Hungarian reader? Obviously not, because the effect of these poems has a lot to do with the particular associations that individual words evoke in the reader. In addition to the sheer musical sound of the words, the poems depend on a certain cultural background shared by poet and reader, a background that can only be intuited by any audience that encounters the poems in another language.

A close reading of one of my favorite József poems should serve to show exactly what is lost even in the best translations. It feels strange, in English, to refer to the poet by his surname, József; he is never referred to that way in Hungary, where even people who never knew him call him by his first name, Attila. Recently, when I looked up one of his poems on a Hungarian poetry website, a pop-up asked me: "Would you like to go on a date with someone who also loves this poem? Let poetry bring people together!"

One of Attila József's most desolate poems, *Reménytelenül* ("Without Hope") was written in 1933. Why one of his most desolate poems should be one of my personal favorites, and that of many others, is a question I am trying to

answer here. The work published under that title is really a pair of two poems; in this paper, I will address only the first of the two. (In the Appendix, I reproduce the full text of the first poem in the original, as well as in two different translations: the first by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner, the second by Edwin Morgan.)

When I start reading the poem in Hungarian<sup>1</sup>, I am immediately struck by the first two words, “Az ember,” which literally translate as “The person.” It is an impersonal subject, as in the German *man* or the French *on*, but the idea of *universality* comes through even more strongly than in the Western equivalents. What is described in the following lines happens to *everyone*; it happens to *all of us*. Here the first person of the Ozsváth/Turner translation is definitely off, but even Morgan’s second person does not do justice to the full strength of the original, which truly evokes the *Everyman*. “Végül” (in the end) drives home the idea that no matter what happened before, or no matter where you’re coming from, you finally wind up in a “sandy, sad, wet plane” and that’s the *vég* (the end). The two anapaests *homokos* and *szomorú* across the line break interrupt the regularity of the iambic tetrameter; their similar rhythm and similar sound, produced by a near-identical vowel content, reinforce the connection between “sandy” (that is, devoid of vegetation) and “sad.” (When I speak of poetic feet, I mean them in the quantitative sense, as Hungarian poetry is based on the opposition of long and short syllables rather than stressed and unstressed ones.)

In “Szétnéz merengve” (‘looks around in meditation/contemplation’), the adverb “merengve” is complemented by the adjective “okos” (‘smart’), contrasting a passive mental state with a more active one; the latter denotes the ability to reason and the possession of knowledge. The “smart head” has all the information necessary, and the renunciation of hope is the direct

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1 One may find a startling reading of this poem by Zoltán Latinovits at <http://musessquare.blogspot.com/2011/12/jozsef-attila-remenytelenul.html>.

Latinovits (1931-1976) was one of the greatest Hungarian actors of his time whose poetry recitals were legendary. He shared Attila József’s fate by jumping under a train in the Balaton region, only one stop away from the station where the poet had died. The English translations of *Reménytelenül*, reproduced in the Appendix, may also be found on the same website.

result of an objective assessment of the situation. (If you are smart, you *understand* that there is no hope.) The knowing *nod* (“biccent”) confirms the sober realization.

The second stanza, for the first time, introduces the first person singular. The change from the *Everyman* to the *I* is much more dramatic in the original than it is in either of the translations. The fact that the second stanza is merely an individualization of the first is driven home by the repeated use of the verb *szétnéz/szétnézni* (‘looks around/[try] to look around’). It is by *looking around* that both the Everyman and the ‘I’ reach the tragic conclusion that they come to.

The same verb appears, fascinatingly, in a lesser-known early version of one of Attila József’s most famous poems, *Favágó* (“Wood-cutter”). In the first version, which dates from 1929, the poem described a worker enjoying his physical exertions, and ended with the line *az ember szétnéz, mosolyog* (the man – which in this case could mean either the actual person or Everyman – looks around and smiles). Here, what one sees when one looks around induces one to smile, not to lose hope. But this line was cut when Attila radically revised the poem a year later. At that point, the wood-cutter turned into a political symbol, raising his axe to destroy capitalism (this version of the poem plays on the double meaning of *tőke*: ‘tree trunk’ and ‘capital’).

This looking around, or rather, the *attempt* at it (*próbálok* – ‘I try’), must happen *csalás nélkül*, ‘without deceit.’ (At this point, as at “*okos/fejével*” in the first stanza, an enjambement lends additional emphasis to the poetic thought.) Deceit, in this case, means “self-delusion:” one must not indulge in any kind of wishful thinking to make the world appear brighter than it actually is. The other adverb that modifies the “looking around” is *könnyedén*, which is rendered as “carelessly” in one of the English versions and as “nonchalantly” in the other. The second comes closer to the original than the first, but still, the emphasis is more on the ease or effortlessness with which the poet looks around, rather than on the indifference of that action. At this moment – we are exactly at the half-way point, line 7 of the twelve-line poem – the poet shifts gears; the poetic imagery, which has been entirely realistic up to this point, assumes a surrealist dimension. A word-for-word translation of lines 7-8 would be “Silvery axe-swish plays on the poplar’s

leaf.” Several things should be noticed here. First, the *axe* clearly evokes the Woodcutter poem mentioned above. But whereas the tool wielded by the worker in that poem kills the tree (whether literally in the first version or figuratively in the second), here we have only a “swish” or a “whoosh” of the axe—a fleeting reflection that nevertheless represents a subtle threat, playing as it does on the leaves of the poplar tree. The “whoosh” may be no more than a gust of wind, but the association with the axe turns it into an ominous sign of things yet to come. At the same time, the fact that the axe is “silvery” gives the threat a “silver lining,” as it were. Similarly, the verb *játszik* (‘plays’) seems to make light of the danger, making it appear less frightening. The pleasant associations of the words ‘silver’ and ‘play’ give the impression that the tragic outcome can somehow be accepted and even embraced.

We are now coming to the crux of the poem, to line 9 which, in a word-for-word rendering, would translate as “On nothingness’s branch my heart sits.” Amazingly, this line—one of the most emblematic Attila József ever penned—has been traced back by several commentators to an 1801 poem by Mihály Csokonai Vitéz (1773-1805), usually considered a representative of Hungarian rococo. The poem in which the phrase appears is a paean, in hexameters, to one of the poet’s friends, a poet and naturalist by the name of Dr. Földi, describing the latter’s scientific theories. Uncannily anticipating the photographs taken by 20th-century astronauts, who look down on our planet from outer space, Csokonai imagined observing the Earth from above and pictured it hanging from the branch of the *nagy semmi* (“big nothing”). In this description, “nothingness” corresponds to a definite physical reality; besides, the word *nagy* (“big”) that is attached to it gives it an unmistakable ironic overtone. Assuming that Attila József knew this poem (and he almost certainly did), we have all the more reason to marvel at the way he turned a borrowed phrase on its head. The new context is no longer a witty description of a natural fact but rather a heart-rending expression of existential anguish.

The way Attila József develops this image is even more astounding. The heart is not “hanging” from the branch as the Earth was in Csokonai’s poem, it is, rather, sitting there like a bird on a tree. Moreover, it has a *kis test* (“little body”): it is the body that belongs to the heart rather than the heart to the



body. And this little body is shivering silently (*vacog* has definite connotations of freezing cold). The final wonder occurs in the last two lines of the poem, where the stars gather around, gently and tenderly, and look at the little heart with compassion. Thus the utter hopelessness of the poem, reflected in its title, is not that hopeless after all. In each of the three stanzas, the desolation has been mitigated by certain factors: the knowing mind accepting its fate, the silvery beauty of the “playing” axe, and now the comforting presence of the mild stars. The poet, even in the throes of the deepest despair, takes solace in his own lack of self-delusion and even manages to be “nonchalant” about the tragic realization he has just made.

A few years later, Attila József ended another of his celebrated poems (“Kész a leltár,” literally “The Inventory is Done,” 1936) with the line: “Éltem – és ebbe más is belehalt már,” or “I have lived, and I’m not the first to die from it.” It is not easy to render in English the black humor of this phrase: *belehal* is a verb meaning specifically ‘to die [from an illness]’; thus, the poem makes life itself an illness from which one dies. That is quite a dark thought but, by emphasizing the paradoxical nature of the tragic situation, the poet almost seems to make light of it in an utterly “nonchalant” sort of way. Deepest tragedy conveyed almost with a shrug, or if not with a shrug, then at least with a certain *sprezzatura* – that seems to be Attila József’s way of looking at the world. And even though this nonchalance was not enough to stop him from committing suicide, at least it provided *others* with a possibility to find hope. The closing lines of his very last poem, *Íme, hát megeltem hazámat* (“Behold, I have found my homeland”), written a few days before his suicide, make this explicit. The last stanza of this poem reads, in the original and in my word-for-word translation:

*Szép a tavasz és szép a nyár is,  
de szebb az ősz s legszebb a tél,  
annak, ki tűzhelyet, családot  
már végképp másoknak remél.*

(“Spring is beautiful and so is summer,  
but autumn is more beautiful and winter is the most beautiful,  
to one who hopes for a hearth, a family  
definitively only for other people.”)



In the final line, the word *végképp* (“definitively”) corresponds to *végül* (“in the end”) in *Without Hope*, and the expression *másoknak remél* (“hopes for other people”) echoes *nem remél* (“does not hope”) in the earlier poem. This suicide note – for that is, for all intents and purposes, what this poem is – has been called “one of the most beautiful Hungarian stanzas” by literary historian Miklós Szabolcsi (1921-2000), author of a 2,000-page *magnum opus* on Attila József. Attila found tragedy in beauty and beauty in tragedy, while using poetic forms that are folksong-like in their simplicity, continuing the tradition of folksong-based poetry found in the works of the 19th-century Hungarian classics. Maybe the uniqueness of his genius, and his appeal to Hungarian readers, has something to do with the way he managed to combine and reconcile these apparent contradictions.

## APPENDIX

### REMÉNYTELENÜL

*Lassan, tűnődve*

*Az ember végül homokos,  
szomorú, vizes síkra ér,  
szétnéz merengve és okos  
fejével biccent, nem remél.*

*Én is így próbálok csalás  
nélkül szétnézni könnyedén.  
Ezüstös fejszesuhanás  
játszik a nyárfa levelén.*

*A semmi ágán ül szívem,  
kis teste hangtalan vacog,  
köréje gyűlnek szeliden  
s nézik, nézik a csillagok.  
(1933)*

Without hope  
Slowly, musingly

I am as one who comes to rest  
by that sad, sandy, sodden shore  
and looks around, and undistressed  
nods his wise head, and hopes no more.

Just so I try to turn my gaze  
with no deceptions, carelessly.  
A silver axe-swish lightly plays  
on the white leaf of the poplar tree.

Upon a branch of nothingness  
my heart sits trembling voicelessly,  
and watching, watching, numberless,  
the mild stars gather round to see.  
(transl. Zsuzsanna Ozsváth/Frederick Turner)

**Without Hope**  
Slowly, broodingly

All you arrive at in the end  
is a sad, washed-out, sandy plain,  
you gaze about, take it in, bend  
a wise head, nod; hope is in vain.

Myself, I try to look about  
nonchalantly, without pretence.  
Axe-arcs shake their silver out  
rippling where the aspens dance.

My heart sits on the twig of nothing,  
its little body shivering, dumb.  
In calm unbroken gathering,  
staring, staring, the stars come.  
(Transl. Edwin Morgan)



Jim Holl

Alana Siegel  
The Seventh Song

**"Robert Kelly, Robert Kelly, Robert Kelly," I said out loud, slowly, softly, as I was walking home. I live on Prince Street, and I was walking down it—on my favorite stretch of it, two blocks north of Telegraph, where the road narrows, and you can't hear cars yet; where every other house has a garden with a rugged fence, wood peeling, not unsightly, but charming, inviting, and sometimes, a leg of a fence here or there, missing—many gardens overflowing with roses, porches sealed off with glass yet you can see into them—the casualness of hiking shoes or garden clogs slipped off by the door, a watering can, or a box full of newspapers disregarded. It was on this stretch of Prince, after having left a coffee shop where I began writing this, I said "Robert Kelly" out loud three times, wanting to say his name as an added utterance of contemplating his entrance, and enduring presence in my life. About five paces after saying his name, my phone rang, and it was Robert Kelly.**

**A few days later I shared this moment with a friend. He was taken aback and asked, "Did this really happen?" I answered, "Yes," and it was made clear to me, through the tunnel of my friend's awe, how Robert's responses are embedded in the plenum, an internal measure, not always prompted by a letter written, or a phone call made, but installed in matter's mind—moved by a frequency of ardor to the heart's desired hearing, that has not and never will require technology to move, or be moved by it—not facilitated by satellites or wires, yet willing to travel through them—equally willing to travel through a chair, or a river, or a bird—all the things of the world as access, axis—electromagnetic—you walk through a door; you are walking through a mirror; this willingness, this confidence in "talking at a distance" has come to feel so natural in my world through Robert's words.**

**When my phone rang I thought, "Merlin." I was not in my neighborhood but alone in the forest, vulnerable to sylvan phantasms, enemies or allies in animals or plants. I thought of the time I'd spent in Glastonbury. I was staying with Angel Vortex healers, mostly women, who worked**

specifically under the guidance of Merlin. I was writing with Robert very much at this time. He had written how I was in a place that was in many ways our spiritual home. I had known that Robert was deeply engaged with the study of the Grail, so this made sense to me. I wrote to him of how I visited Chalice Well on my birthday, Samhain, cupped my hands in the cold night under yew trees, and sipped the chalybeate water. I wrote of how one morning I darted up from sleep, ran without reason up the Glastonbury Tor, swiftly greeting the mother warmth of cows staggered on the hillside, as they looked puzzled, but more so indifferent to my swiftness, as their wise bodies absorbed the amber light rising up from Avalon, the mist now seen at the same time myth. I stood alone in the ruins of St. Michael's monastery, gazing up into the sky bluing into morning, within the stone around me.

Bard College was where I first met Robert. Friends and family chided me for going to a school with such a name — being a writer, in particular a poet. When I stood in this moment (a couple months after graduating) I felt what it could be like to be a bard, after having left Bard — becoming the name after leaving the place. It was in me now, my body in another country, my name, no books around me — no reliable tomes of knowing — instead the tone as Angel workers invoked it, received it, dialed down from the intelligence of Merlin into words — and now, in the legendary land of King Arthur, I was let into the sorcery of what syncopates a bard — a magic of memory, what rhyme implies — through the thicket of tongues, foreign, or mother — through systems of symbols, word hordes, or lexicons, the message will find you. The message is the angel. This is not a metaphor — Greek for messenger, *angelos* — though each message, messenger, moves as metaphor moves through form, changing and changing the form. I have come to feel that the gospel of Robert is “the angel will find you,” gospel meaning “the good news, the good word.” And the angel is the message, and the message is as simple as what words are in you. There are always words in you.

I wanted to say, “SING.” I wanted to shout, “SONG.” I wanted to write, “Song is faith. Song trusts.” I saw scholars, buried, frenzied in the endless work of organizing thought and its authority. I saw, by contrast, the beauty of a bard in isolation, authority of thought not sought in words of others, but entirely wrapped up in the word about to be, spoken or sung,

surrounding the body as a cloak, on a hill, labyrinthine, rested and layered, yet full of people, full of history, though not historical – mystical, metered – if song is law as light is light, not heeded, but lived in; the lilting of the message, language as uninterrupted as light and as endless.

I look to Robert's books across my room. They appear as a spectrum, kindled – the undulation of covers and their colors. Most poets I know look to "the book" as finality or triumph. It *is* a triumph that a book is made. And books are, in a sense, *ends*. I do not see Robert's books separately as I do not look out my window and see the world in parts. But I feel, and can nearly see, a wind, an unearthly wind, rustling the spine of every book of Robert's writing – a wind that is the gust of what I am and what I want, and what is writing? The books have been moved through. The wailing of the giant Albion has been healed by hearing a hearkening ample to its infinite. Beginning with lust as one begins a sentence, to move through thought into deeper dreams of character, as Robert writes in many poems, as Dante sees in Beatrice – the lust that begets love, the love that moves the stars...

When I sat down to write this, at a white iron table, underneath a white yellow canopy, on a sidewalk with a thick rope separating café-goers from the passersby, a rope which also functioned as a railing, for the sidewalk was on a slant, very slightly, but enough to make you feel if you leaned too far, you might fall off the edge of the world. Closer to the edge of the world than me, skimming the rope, sat a father and his daughter, and an older woman, possibly an aunt, or grandmother. I saw them as I walked in, but for the rest of our time in each other's vicinity, they were behind me, or I was in front of them – in either case I couldn't see them – I only overheard their conversation. At one point his daughter told a story of how her feelings had been hurt by another girl at soccer camp. She still seemed upset. She was small, maybe six. Her father leaned in closer to her, and asked, "*Did you use your words?*"

And I felt I had heard the most italicized sentence ever written, now spoken, the words leaning in at the deepest possible angle. Her father had become one of the four faces of wind on the corners of medieval maps, and he was blowing the world's words into her, as she sat alone floating on the ocean of her emotion. She answered, "I don't know." And then her

father's voice was Robert's, and the question was being posed to me from a vista outside time—"Did I use my words *in this life*?" I, like her, answered in innocence, uncertainty. Words were given to me. Had I really *used them*? In asking me, he was also telling me that words were not "use" in the unwanted sense of utility, manipulation. Words were entirely generous—*complete means*—swelling, swarming, beckoning to be given and received.

I am sitting on the steps of my porch, which I do not usually. Today there was a neighborhood yard sale. I sat with my friend Sara, all day on the steps, displaying portions of our possessions, as we talked, as people came and went, picking up our things and finding new meaning in them, becoming theirs. I live on Prince Street where it intersects at Halcyon. "Halcyon" is via Latin from Greek *alkuōn* 'kingfisher' (also *halkuōn*, by association with *hals* 'sea' and *kuōn* 'conceiving').

A halcyon time is calm, peaceful, happy and carefree. The fabled *halcyon days* of calm weather are traditionally the seven days each side of the winter solstice. A Greek legend tells of the kingfisher that nested in the sea at this time of year and that its floating nest brought calm to wind and water.

Alcyone is also the brightest star of the Pleiades, the nearest star cluster to Earth, hot blue and luminous—the seven sisters dance.

The yard sale has ended. Sara and I say goodbye. I go inside, bringing in remaining things, but then I go outside again. I want to bask in the afternoon light. I see an older woman in a sun hat, rolling a stroller, approaching, and a cricket-like sound accompanying her I can't place. As she passes, I realize a recording is playing—of the song, "*Hush little baby, don't say a word, Momma's gonna buy you a mockingbird, and if that mockingbird don't sing, Momma's gonna buy you a diamond ring, and if...*" but the lullaby is robotic—it is not a human voice but vowels and consonants compartmentalized, puzzled—the words are still human though, because I remember the song from when I was young, having it sung to me, and the sweetness of my memory is trying to nurse the voice of the machine into being human, just as the song is played to soothe the crying of the baby.

The following night I return to the porch. The day has been hot, and I go out into the dark to take a breath. When I sit down, I hear music blasting, and then I see, an older man on a bike, passing by me. He is swerving, maybe drunk, playing, *"You gotta have faith..."* a pop song from the 90s. The next day I am at my desk and hear a man outside whistling, a song so familiar it causes me to writhe, unable to place the title. He is whistling for such a long time as if he wants me to find it—and he is right in front of my house, at the steps, the fossil of where I have now made a habit of sitting. The following afternoon I return there, and a woman, in her 30s or 40s, is walking by angularly, expediently. She has short black hair like a crow. She is quickly reciting an Irish ballad, on her way to sing probably, down the street at the Starry Plough, at the Monday night Irish jig. Then I hear a man shortly after plod down the block with a trash bag full of cans. The cans clinking are in pace with his steps. He hollers to a guy across the street who also has a trash bag and is collecting cans.

I say to myself, "These are the six songs of the seven sisters, bright lights closest to where I live." Then all I could hear were birds, the birds I always hear outside my window.

The first song told me to be quiet, through the voice of technology, then through the architecture of my memory, to hush. The second song instilled the parable of the lyrics of the first. "I'm going to buy you this, and if this doesn't sing, I'm going to give you this, and if this doesn't shine, I'm going to...." There was always something new arriving in each thing's stead—so the man blasting, "You've got to have faith," on my street now dark, was swerving, though serving—faith was blasting. The third song was the trilling of meaning, made by mouth, almost never known, a woods where sense winds, and you can't find the song, but then you realize, not finding the song, is the singing of the song. And then, in the fourth, tradition returns as a watchful crow, or a quickly walking woman, the memorization of a song that thrills the bloodstream. In the fifth, the ground returns, and you pick up the pieces of the world tossed away. These are the parts you know you need for the song you are to make. The sixth song is the song of birds, so familiar you almost can't hear it—so it's telling you to listen, to be quiet, and in the sixth, you are returned to the hush of the first.



But what is the seventh song? I only heard six. I look up “Halcyon” again, as if in answer. “Another version of the legend of the kingfisher was told by Ovid about Ceyx and Alcyone. She was the daughter of Aeolus, the god of the winds, and he was the son of the morning star. Ceyx was lost at sea and Alcyone was inconsolable. The gods took pity on them, turning them into kingfishers so that they might continue to live together. When they mated each year at the winter solstice the gods calmed the winds and seas so Alcyone might brood her eggs safely.”

I think of a story Robert told me once, of how he used to sit on his porch in summer, when it was screened in, and how he wrote into the night, how he kept writing, finding, and as he kept going, he found he loved writing. I think of my porch I have only come to sit on when I began writing this, and the porches I passed as I said Robert’s name, when he answered. I think of the porch as an extension of the mouth of the house, out. One time Robert called me on the phone, and only said the words, “Every poem is for the other.” I think of the times I do not want to read books, how I want to be like the image of the woman in the painting I had for many years, bought at a store in upstate New York, where she is sitting on the edge of a lake, with a book open, and her hand is lightly touching a page, but she is looking away from the book, to the lake. I look to a print of one of the Sibyls, the Delphic Oracle, painted by Michelangelo, on the Sistine Chapel, which sits at the center of my desk. She too, is holding a scroll, and looking away from it. I want words to be the world, inevitable, and beyond my saying of them. So this could be the seventh song, Robert’s song, the song that guides my mind away from what I’m reading and then back into it, into what I see, for what I see is what I read—hidden peripheries gliding in and out of my mind’s eye, englobe me. If I find what is most secret in me, it is mine, and because it is mine, it is most the world’s. Robert’s vastness is matched by his closeness. His is the song of the gods that had mercy, turned the lost lovers of Ceyx and Alcyone into kingfishers, out at sea, changed them so they could be together—if we could be so changed, just to be together, more peacefully on this earth—the sweetness of song imparts its promise.

## GAIN

A loss for words  
is a beginning  
Of recycled statements  
flown from all edges to suck off  
the dust  
one won

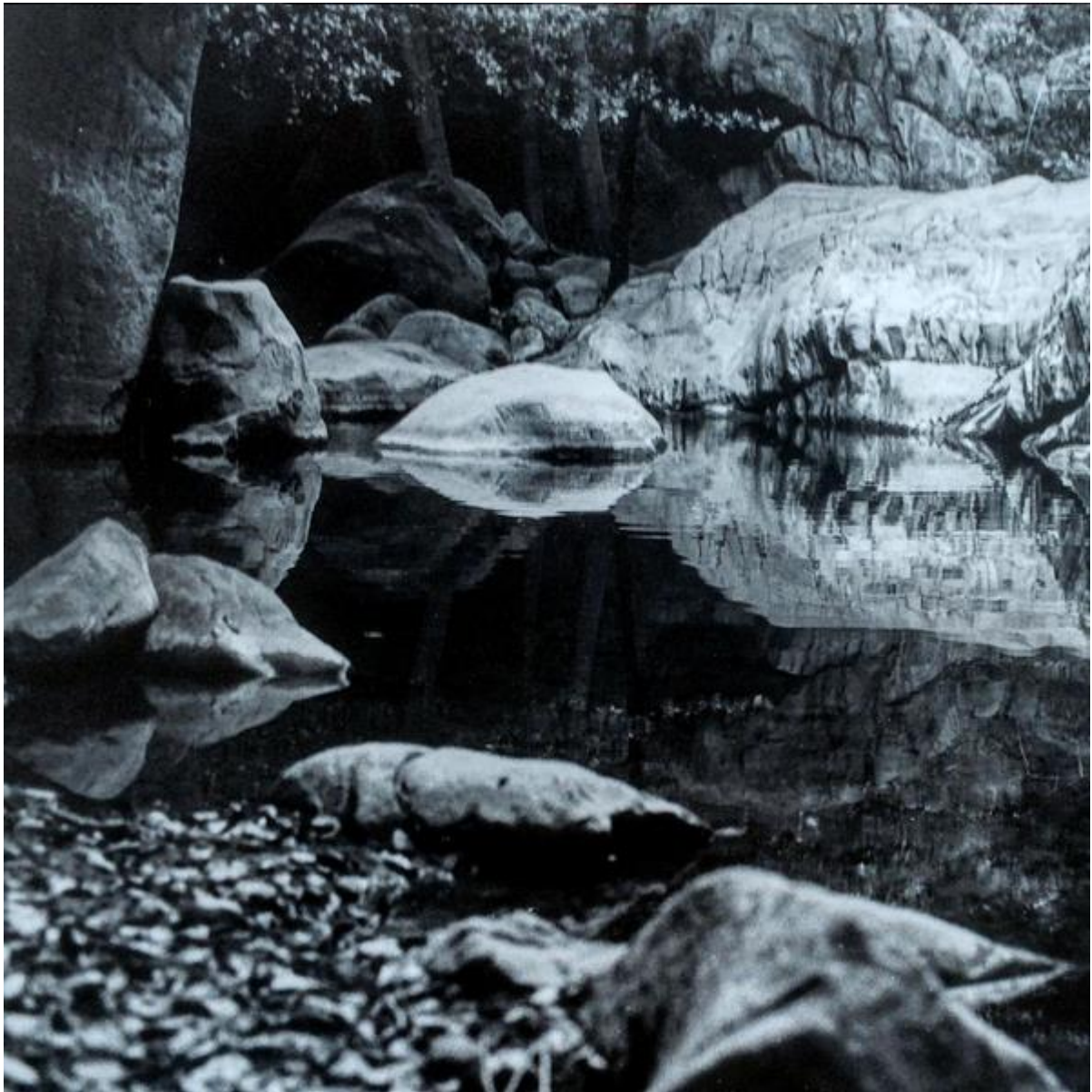
third body that plays  
with us locked in spinal fluid,  
from atlas to horsetail of nerves,  
summary of events dragged away  
combinations of bumming lips.

Let chaos spin its wheels  
which Every day must go to the same place  
sit in the same chair & celebrate the hypothetical day  
when we shall be let out  
to transmogrify pain into light  
in order to see the situation  
a prism instead

rift  
to sit and feel connected with the earth  
for at least 20 minutes a day  
or until you can make the trees  
jump with your eyes. Then they will bend  
branches into L shaped swings  
into the dark.

time nor money  
stay with a commitment  
cannot make flowers wine  
or ancient sap that smells of memories  
no one has ever had.

Masha Mitkova



**Masha Mitkova**

**Brenda Coultas**

**For Robert Kelly**

**You shop at a strange market near the Hudson River.  
Your kayak is filled with leafy plants collected from an internal sea.  
Clouds over the mountains. Pink sun rising.  
The rain makes a hard blue line out in the distance.  
The blue softens and hardens out a ways.  
You cook fish in a weird kitchen and grow roses inside a soup can.  
There is nothing that you can't do.**

Charlie Amy

I sat up all of a sudden in bed, thinking Have I forgotten, and Am I too late, and the usual answer is Yes, but with great charged silences come slow feelings, deep enough to be so slow, and at least one or two of them went on, never to be counted. I saw you so many times in my mind's eye. Your hands when they were chapped from the antibiotics, your hands when they were smooth on my hands and, as if whether I can write means whether I can write to you, I look at my hands wondering why they're moving again & not shaking only, if not to remember your birthday to you. If not to put something down to stand in for the smell of your little room always at the ready on my upper lip. We're gross

One time you said, What if you were never wrong, or almost never. One time you said you could tell my partner was a good man because he was wearing a Wobblies shirt (The Working Class and the Employing Class Have Nothing In Common). What did you mean? I have been very hungry and didn't want to work for your rapey friend

Too late, a bird said, a bird, smart enough to be a liar, neither of us vain enough to assume we're the only animal that lies. I don't use covers, so nothing to make my bed with in the morning just one or two pools of sweat that'll dry. I've been wondering about you. And silence though it reaches very far is like a prayer and can in this way be caricatured as pathetic. There is no good reason to laugh at love and no good reason not to. So whatever we do we are unreasonably solemn or we display an inappropriate indulgence in the joyful, or in the absurd. Is it possible in this moment to invoke you and to find joy? When you say I'm over there, I'm here. Here I am

I don't know this word, I looked up this word, festschrift. I didn't know this word, and wikipedia said it was especially for academics so I don't know, still don't know, how to talk to you here, how to quiet into you, when there's something about this silence that is unpalatable as a commodity. And it's revealing not to write a jingle or a treatise or even a confession, though the bias against confessions can often be explained by the most obnoxious kinds of attachment to power over others.

How not to write a letter and then do so anyway. What else. Orange rolled on the small of the back. The index finger tracing a circle and an A. Remember when I wanted to be a Communist? What you told me about the NY people who were the bossiest ones? And if I write to you, which is the only thing I can think to do, for a book, what do I say? For your birthday, to tell you on your birthday?

I have heard more than one person say you have a gift for holding many people dear, truly dear. People love the way you meet them and then hold them, though I've never seen you hold a person back. We love the way you have of making us feel able to be good. Many have felt this quiet and mischievous challenge to embrace ourselves in your presence. To be good, to continue to be good.

You have believed that there's been substance, presence in all my long silences, you. You celebrate me. More than anyone does, in a way, and I would be shocked if I were the first to feel this way about you. I wonder how long it took you to develop this gift. This incredible offering.

You pick up on things that people say and do, tones they sit in. You make us feel seen, heard, wondered at. You remind us that we are inherently creative beings who make so many small choices.

Multiple days. Multiple hungers. We must honor suffering too right, Catholic & all, so why don't we say that time has a fickle pace and won't tell you. I think I've given up on knowing time, but when I saw you I knew we were going to be very close. That was ten years ago. I was with my mother and you talked about her maiden name. Afterward my mom and I looked up your poetry and you had mentioned assholes in the poem, physical assholes; she gasped. When I was still talking to her she'd always ask if I was in touch with you. Anyway there's this longing

I wanted to tell you that whatever you give, you give it well, and whatever you hide, you hide poorly, and that I have always loved and forgiven you for this reason, and have always been able to be clumsy in front of you for this reason. For this reason you seem to me like someone who has not endured the relentless malice of others but maybe I am wrong and you have found a way still to be generous with love.

And maybe both of us are cheap, and greedy, but in any case when, da, the thunder came, I thought of you.

I want you to know how often you are thought of, that you are in me no whim no sacrament, a blessing you give me, not God, it cannot settle on a color and comes into everything, sky of a world with Robert, cat and dead bird in a world with Robert, makes loneliness impure, disrupts delusions of isolation, loves to not understand, and gratitude because you offer yourself to be held in this way and because you're here all the time

I bet you thought you could never quit smoking. I bet your heart is sore and that you've fallen in love even more than I used to and have even more dead friends and know more about time. I can't tell when it's going by, like we were both dead when we met already and there's just endless changes in weather. I think you've created countless things to let go. That you hold very well. That I'm not over there but here, that you're here with me here under the teeth & we just don't know what the mouth is doing, I think. Here we are.

Happy birthday, I love you, you're so good



## Ultramarine

For Robert Kelly

Wake up in August to firetrucks,  
Ruby torpedoes  
                    That cleave sleep  
and the white fan's blades  
Splice what's left  
Of the thick kitchen air.  
August. That lazy roi,  
Who watches the light slip  
Over the edge of his golden paw.  
His sister is February  
An icy princess with white hair, she  
Tries and holds the light to herself  
But it spills between thin fingers.  
In Mimosa, I hear, they have an orange fest in Feb.  
Have you been there. Nor I.  
Brooklyn is Marseille enough for us.  
Here, I find Silver Sand Oil  
And harissa and mango pickle and dates at Sahadi's.  
Just before the firetrucks,  
Margaret and I were in a café and bookstore which offered coffee  
in a series of vertical enclosed stalls like token booths.  
The intelligent baby who is always there  
Was there, and hovering over it to decipher its oracle  
was my responsibility.  
The baby must be a part of myself, I guess  
A humanoid inside the person.



An irritable, miniature scholar of intentions. In that place,  
Every idea we had, actualized just as Kodak film negatives  
Imbed the silver traces of an instance  
Within the echo of unreadability.  
Human faces which flare slowly into expression  
When you hold the strip up close.  
Every tree, lit and electric.

I just  
heard a bird sing a quadrilateral waltz.  
One, two, three.

Pause.  
Four! (Repeat).

If there is another Barrytown, then, there is another Brooklyn.  
Where Fulton Street runs to a landing.  
And a million oysters clot the sand.  
Walt Whitman strolls along cobblestones to a meeting of editors  
And smokes a pipe, even in August.

By the way, have you seen lately, Apollo and the Muses?  
The whole bunch were  
Enameled in Limoges by Martial Reymond, late 1500s. On an oval dish up  
at the Frick.  
Deepest early dawn sky of ultramarine and low, thrilling stars.  
Apollo is working his Italian Renaissance viola harder than it seems he is  
And all of the muses, together and  
Singular, are moving and still.  
In searching for his song  
I hear Hurrian Melody #6, the oldest known melody  
In the world found as a cuneiform tablet in present day Ras Shamra, Syria  
Played on 9-stringed lyre. Hear, poet, the strangest music in the world as  
The aquamarine curve behind the figures is the meaning.  
A sustained and dissolving enchantment as everything else happens also  
As you wake up in August and remember what you had seen and heard.



(to hear “the oldest know melody in the world” go to:)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpxN2VXPMLc>

**Kimberly Lyons**

## Thursday Spells

When the work has a will  
                    beyond any context  
a dream shakes off  
                    nostalgic redundance  
wishes come true  
                    past unredeeming proof  
free-wheeling  
                    as the burden is light

for all  
we know

OWLED I  
AS SPRY  
OLD GUY  
ALT KEY  
OIL DYE  
'N' SPY  
ALL EYE

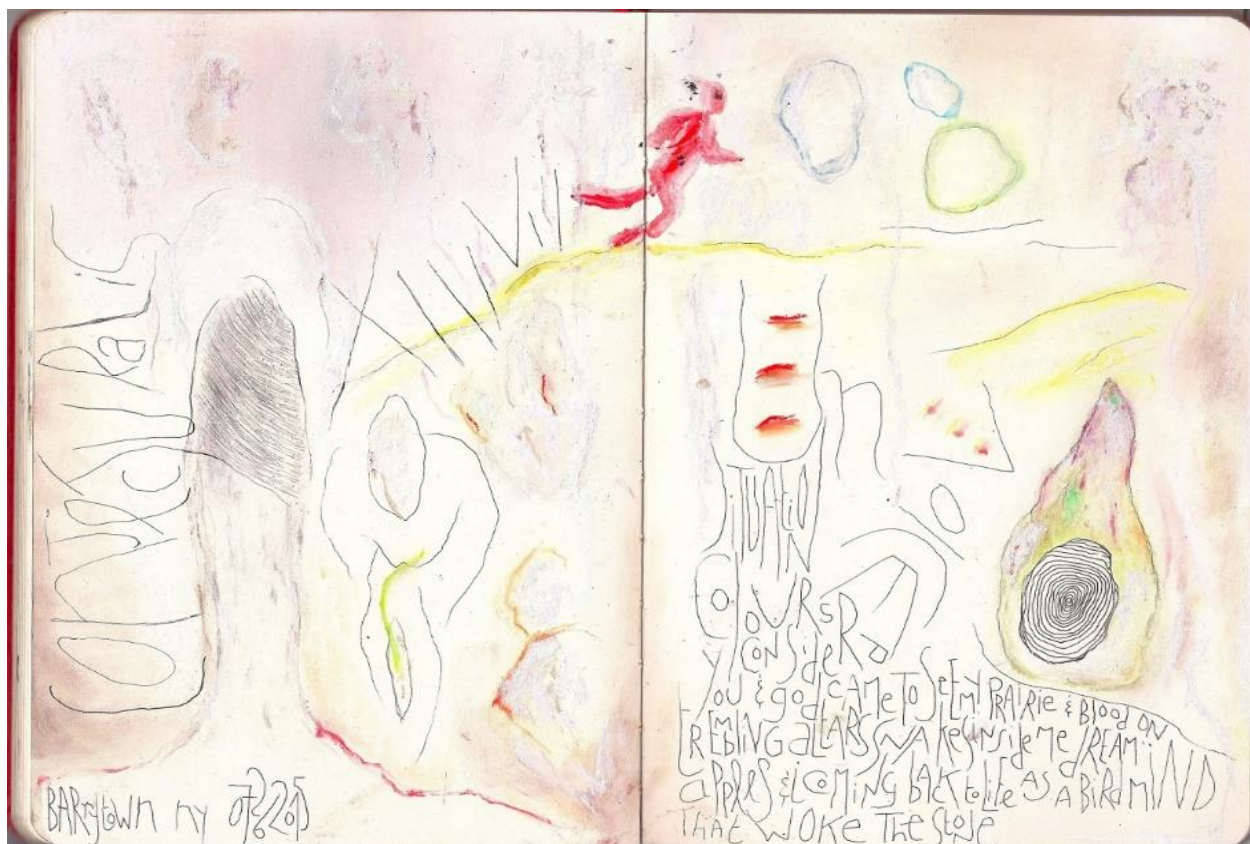
(after Donne)(nach dem Donner)

To have survived  
                    is not enough  
for all we know  
                    too little of

dear Robert  
    These 80 of Yours  
    an inspiring stretch beyond  
    the run of pressing hours  
    spun labors piled on chores  
    so all of us who love you

feel assured in urging you on  
as you cruise into 81  
you'll make the lifetime text  
ever more lively with loving

*Vyt Bakaitis*



**Nicole Peyrafitte**

Nicole Peyrafitte  
Conjecturalis

*for & w/ Robert Kelly*

unvoiced situation &  
colors  
to be considered  
they — & god — came to see my prairie &  
my blood on the trembling altar  
on the other side of my mind the snakes  
inside me dreaming of apples  
& I know I will come back to life as a bird  
& will wake stones  
meanwhile  
*je ne suis qu'un papillon dynamique*  
& not Nicky Minaj  
who get what she desires  
& thinks life is a prize  
that's a phony *phoné* utterance  
better keep obstruants for  
responsive boundaries  
sonorant faux names for  
unspoken voicelessness  
*l'espace du dedans*  
I can build you a city with rags  
a secular quest all from within  
feel don't prove

## A Memoir: for Robert at 80

I came to America in late August 1967 with a Karl May-fantasy of Apache and Comanche landscapes in one eye and a West Coast dream of San Fran & Bob Kaufmannian be-bop, Ginsbergian Howls & Kerouacian California Railroad Earth flophouses & bars in the other. From JFK, where a Lions Club friend of my parents' picked me up, I was driven to a pretty suburban disaster area on Long Island — Hicksville seems about right — where two TVs were on all the time with the sound off and on one of them baseball games unfolded their bewildering & incomprehensible rituals. In the kitchen, the family & I sat at an aluminum-fringed baby-blue formica counter to eat — or just to grab a TV-dinner plate and go back to the TV den. After sleeping off my jet lag, I was taken to my first mall on the morning of the next day, and to Aqueduct race-track on the afternoon of the second day. On the third day they finally drove me to the Big City, to Port Authority where I was to catch the dog upstate to Kingston. Manhattan, to my surprise, did not surprise me: the much-vaunted skyscrapers didn't look half as impressive in real life than they had looked in all the fish-eye lens LIFE magazine pictures I had gawked at, and in all the "Yankee" movies I had seen in grandmother's movie house in Ettelbruck, Luxembourg.

Architectural surprise would however come as soon as the bus had left the urban surrounds of the city and, beyond the New Jersey wastelands, moved into more rural settings: a continent of wooden houses! A sea of clapboard siding — an architecture I thought of then as "clinker-built," my British English still close to naval terminology, though prairie schooners would eventually marry the two. Then the strangeness of the bus stop in Kingston, the taxi that took me for the first time across the bridge and up River Road to Bard campus. At the end of that day I regained my landlubber euro-footing as I moved into my dorm, brown-stony Tudor revival Ward Manor.

When did I make contact with the Kelly constellation (Ursa Major, as for awhile I came to think of it, that constellation formed by Robert and those around him)? I would like it to have been the very next day, but I cannot remember the exact time sequence, though it happened certainly during my first week in Annadale. Early one afternoon, as I was sitting in the old

coffeeshop on Stone Row, eating my newly discovered favorite American snack, toasted English muffin and cream cheese, I was approached by a lady of some girth who pulled up a chair, sat down at my table and asked: "Are you the new freshman, the young poet from France?" I said, no, I am not french, but yes, I am a young poet come here to study poetry. She asked me if I was familiar with Stéphane Mallarmé's *oeuvre*, especially his masterpiece, the *Coup de dé* that would never abolish chance. I answered that yes, I had studied Mallarmé some, had tried to read the famous *Coup de dé*, but had not been all that impressed. She frowned. I tried to explain that the reason I was here was that I had decided to write poetry in English as I found that the two languages I should have been writing in, French and/or German, didn't offer much excitement judging by their contemporary practitioners. Mallarmé, I agreed, may be great, but he was nineteenth century, and anyway French poetry was by now a somewhat stagnant backwater. Her frown deepened, no doubt taken aback by the abruptness of my brash youthful judgement, but decided that maybe I wasn't a lost cause as yet. If you want to learn what's most important in American poetry now, she said somewhat sternly, you must read Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan and Robert Kelly. Hmm, I wondered, all those Roberts ... & despite not being French, a French pun immediately popped into mind: *les roberts* in French are breasts, tits, teats — so these were the teats of American poetry? I promised to check them out. She then insisted that I needed to proceed immediately to a certain room on Stone Row (I've forgotten the house name and number by now) and meet the best of the young poets now studying at Bard: Thomas Meyer. After she left, I finished my muffin, pondering this welcome.

Asking around, I quickly found out who the lady who had undertaken me on this advanced literary matters was: Joby Kelly, the wife of poet and professor Robert Kelly. Ah, I thought, one of the Roberts is in fact here! I will need to meet him. I then walked over to the bookshop where I bought an anthology that had the two other Roberts in it, as well as the man called Olson: the famed Don Allen *New American Poetry* gathering that would become a ground-breaking book for my discovery of American poetry. When I opened it, I did feel relieved that those poets I had championed as the new American avant-garde, namely the Beats, were also included. Ah, I thought, here is a wider, more democratic community in which various groupings with differing aesthetics are able to co-exist, without the



excommunication-mania and internecine fighting habits of European avant-garde groupings.

A day or so later, I dutifully went to knock on Thomas Meyer's door on Stone Row. A sweet and elegant young man welcomed me into a room very much to my own liking: overflowing with books and crowned by something that made me instantly jealous — a golf-ball IMB Selectric sitting atop his work desk. I had been so proud of my new Olivetti Lettera 32 portable bought just before coming to America — and now I realized I was stuck not only with a mechanical machine but also with a latinate AZERTY keyboard when I should be using an anglo-friendly QWERTY. Tom read me some pages of a massive work in progress, called, if I remember correctly, *A Technographic Typography In Progress* — or *in Process*, maybe, a work of major proportions never published in its entirety to this day. Via Kelly, whose student he was, Tom had acquired the necessary habit & discipline to "write every day" — as Robert was to put it much later in a biographical essay. It was, I think, Tom who on that day hipped me to another useful anthology I managed to pick up soon after: the Robert Kelly / Paris Leary *A Controversy of Poets* — a book that at first seemed to reinforce my vision of multiple communities co-existing peacefully in a land roomy enough, given that space comes large here indeed (I'd also started to read that Olson character). But on second thought I realized that the book, maybe against the will of its editors, proposed a topography of conflict that demanded one take sides. I immediately knew what side I was on: having read and liked Francis Ponge back in my days of studying life sciences in Europe, I instantly took to Robert Kelly's postface where I underlined the following:

I mean a poem that means something because it is no longer *about* something but *is* something: but, and this is all-important, a poem that, as a thing, does not come to exist aesthetically and in remoteness, as a thing would be in a museum, unthined, but as a thing would exist, and possess meaning, in a world of living men. As a chair possesses meaning. Not as furniture, but as a place to sit down.

At some point I did meet Robert: in the coffee shop, no doubt, where I was eating yet again my daily toasted english muffin with cream cheese, an

anti-dote to the food of the school cafeteria. Of course, & boringly so, I remember as first impression the man's size, the forked, reddish beard, the eyebrows — & the voice, oh that voice, Irish opera basso, with what I would later learn was a Brooklyn tinge, it immediately amazed, even before I heard him read his poetry. And when I saw him walk away, I was amazed at the grace of the big man's walk: a dance it was, an elegance I would never have suspected in a man so large. Joby had no doubt filled Robert in on my provenance, my likes and dislikes, but I remember little of our early conversations, except for a piece of advice that would prove essential. Explaining my decision to write in English — or rather American — I wondered what would be best to improve my language skills toward writing poetry. Robert was adamant: get a radio & listen to baseball games, he said, in order to become familiar with and soak up the rhythms of an american language sports announcers are master practitioners of. I followed his advice, and if at first — being clueless about the game of baseball — the running commentaries sounded like dadaistic babel, I quickly began to hear the rhythmic and musical nuances that made for a very different language dance than the Britisher English I had learned in high school in Europe.

In hindsight I can say now that with that suggestion Robert gave me my America. Tonight, 48 years later, I am writing this while on television, our Mets are winning another game — & I'm sure that Robert will be watching in Annandale. (The Metsies are indeed tearing it up right now & just may get into the playoffs & even to the world series this year, my suspicion being that this the baseball gods' secret birthday present for Robert). In 1968, still intrigued by the radio broadcasts, I started watching games on TV. Then one of my co-students, Bruce McClelland, a St Louis native and thus a Cardinals fan, after some patient tutoring in the rules and arcana of the game, took me to Shea stadium for my first Mets game: that was spring of 1969.

As it turned out I didn't take a single s-called academic course with Robert during my two years at Bard, but his primary advice panned out marvelously, opening up a cultural trove I am still exploring today. I did work with Robert during my last semester when he was my senior project advisor, a project that consisted in translating *Atemwende/Breathturn*, the most recently published book of poetry by Paul Celan. To this day I

cherish those afternoon sessions on the porch of his house, once known as Lindenwood, facing the pump that don't work 'cause the vandals took the handle. Robert may have been thinking of Schubert's aching songs of nostalgia (see "A Line of Sight") as he sipped his huge pewter? bronze? can of (it was rumored) 1/3 coffee, 1/3 milk & 1/3 sugar, and I may have had Dylan's Subterranean Homesick Blues buzzing in my head which didn't need anymore coffee give last night's still active black beauties and the late morning's calming joint. Still, the power of Celan's stark yet boundlessly seductive cosmos was enough to draw us in along its image- and language-rails, making our so differently busy minds focus and exult in the sheer power and beauty of the poems underhand and work on bringing it over into this, to me new, American language.

It may have been during one of those sessions that Robert showed me (or spoke of?) Julius Pokorny's 1957 *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, a book I tried to acquire in vain for the next three decades (the only other copy I ever saw was in Jeremy Prynne's rooms in Caius College, Cambridge, sometime in the mid-seventies). Then, less than 10 years ago, a new edition was finally published and Nicole Peyrafitte, having heard me mythify this book for so long, gave it to me for my birthday. The first thing I looked up was the root *pel* — from which derives, among others, our word *polis* —, the definitions and derivations of which Robert had reproduced directly from Pokorny in his 1971 book of essays *In Time*, one of the most cogent and illuminating ways to present such matters.

By this time — spring 1969 — I had started reading into this other American tradition, the Black Mountain & San Francisco Renaissance poetries. In 1968 I bought my first Kelly book, *Finding the Measure*. If "Last Light" was the first of his poems that opened up as process and world (some of its lines have remained with me ever since: "in front / of the agony of any being / we are stupid mute" ), it was the "(prefix" that I thought on most often over the years — a 19-line poem that is a complete poetics & that I used as an essential teaching tool ever since. That year I also picked up *Songs I-XXX*, those "experiments in the extended lyric" in which I could exercise my ear for the American speech Robert had sent me to via baseball radio, and follow those rhythms into lines of poetry as they create a bright, breathtaking dance out of the retort of our daily nesses in the alchemical wedding that joins what you do & what you read. Among

many of the riches these Songs revealed to me — besides an interest in the traditional sciences — let me just mention the abiding figures of Giordano Bruno, a writer & thinker who has remained core to my own thinking (I anointed him the patron saint of translators a few years back in an essay), and that of the book's dedicatee, Stan Brakhage, whose cinematographic work Robert's *Songs* led me to.

How foolish of me to have suggested that I never took a course with Robert! In truth, I have been a student of his since arriving in this country. When I left Bard in 1969 to move to New York City, Robert gave me the keys to the big city of his youth in the shape of two phone numbers: those of Paul Blackburn & Jerome Rothenberg. Now I was on the, on my, road — a road that would take me across three continents over two decades before I returned to America. An America, "rica," rich and "amer," bitter, as he writes in his long poem, *The Common Shore*, but whose name also holds a word from one of my old languages: "aimer," to love. Yes, it is now our common shore, Robert — and it has been a great pleasure, an honor, a blessing, to have been able to walk along these shores in your company, and to have had you & your work teaching me to read so many of its shapes and names, to see so many of its obvious and its secret riches. Happy 80th, compañero, and may we soon break bread again, up in Annandale or here in your Brooklyn, around a table — that "natural gamecourt/ to lean & draw on," that perfect place to talk and share.

Pierre Joris  
Sorrentinostan, Brooklyn August 14, 2015,  
also the 70th birthday of Wim Wenders.

**A poem is a small thing that looks like heaven in the yellow pages**

**Anne Gorrick**

A poem is  
a walk  
a Disney-ed little path  
a city  
a bay of impressions  
an articulated faith  
a landscape of echoes  
a rhythm of thinking  
an externalization of an interior  
conclusion alternated with description

A poem is just a phonecall away  
A poem is a naked person from 1972-1974  
A poems straddle and riddles  
My shadows for turkey turn so crispy and brown  
A poem is a molecule or a 1957 Greyhound bus  
Can you make a poem out of Steve  
that you can give to your aunt with alzheimer's?  
A poem might both hurt and love your home  
A poem might be made of tumbled shadows, or the frog I thought you  
gave me  
I wrote this poem about life and death for your hair  
A poem is a small thing that looks like heaven in the yellow pages  
A poem might be a plow in Soweto, so small a thing, incomplete  
This poem might drink from a saucer  
A poem might generate the dashes in her life  
A box of crayons like dreams deferred  
C is for cheetah and contest and creator  
It might be a death dictionary  
King of our heroins, God is tired of our husks  
his quatrains quit when it comes to love  
Rhyme references her

Arp opens and refuses to play with virtuous vocabularies  
Tea, pills, iced coffee  
A poem's eyes might be made of yarn

You tell yourself your name yesterday, today and tomorrow  
Your name a zinnia  
I am sorry, or I might be a song  
What if you were one inch tall and a boy wanted to ask you out?  
A poem in the shape of a skateboarder who died  
in the French third person, in Spanish  
A poem in two voices  
about a heart and a psalm, where her legs are readily accepted and  
reattached

## Writing Exercise

**Anne Gorrick**

Write a Haiku about Albert Einstein on Veteran's Day

Mention French poppies

Make it a mock epic about loneliness and organization theory

What would a Puritan style art museum look like in your heart?

Teardrops or snowsleds?

**What do you think I wish for you?**

**Anne Gorrick**

Her disasters were both lyric and annoying  
What I badly want in you are your northwest skies  
We would see the dark dependencies on her space stations  
What is really important in life?  
What is killing salmon?  
What do I really really really want?  
Raw honey? Hinduism? The census?  
She was syndicated by airport body scanners  
What's so bad about the early church?  
Soft, smooth, do abortions think of you?  
I can't define it

A full bladder, a good Facebook status, a difficult math equation, a techno  
song  
Her bad days look like spray-tanned movies



## **Fortune**

**Anne Gorrick**

On 1/9/12

over chai and German butcher chocolates today

at Taste Buds in Red Hook

Robert Kelly took my left hand and read my palm

“What do you see?”

“Success. Esteem. Good things.

Someone will give you a bridge and you will collect tolls for the rest of your life.”

**Lydia Davis and Alan Cote**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Dear Robert!

We will be thinking of you on your 80th birthday – you who are perennially absolutely a young man!

We treasure the many long years of friendship we have had with you, the two of us together and each of us separately.

Lydia says: You and I had been friends for a few years already when you invited me to join the fledgeling graduate program, encouraging me and honoring me by appointing that place for me.

Alan remembers fondly your collegial companionship and the invention of that graduate program – the discussions, the debates, the changes and more changes, and always, Robert, your sense of humor, which did not desert you even in the most trying circumstances.

Lydia says: I will not forget your companionship and encouragement as you read my Proust translation – alongside me, almost! I was not alone in the work. Thank you, thank you.

Both of us say, in admiration: can anyone, ever, match you in conversation? Who else has such reserves of information, wit, surprise stored away in his mind? Who else is so generous in sharing it?

We hope this is a wonderful day – and year – for you, and we look forward to many more.

Love from  
Alan and Lydia

**Ian Dreiblatt**

731 maps

1961 . Malcolm X on TV but he looks hungry .  
signal fades . angles project a head to  
watch it snow thick analog fuzz over  
let my arm forget let me be all the people  
in this city

the faucet's running  
gestures of  
language vibrate off into permanent  
luminous pools .

walls of VHS wobble rise up .  
a voice bleeds from a sequence of rectangular  
lights that impersonates a tree .

it is our  
pleasure to serve you .

it is already late  
our sense of what is happening absconds  
into figuration

embarrassed at not  
knowing Arabic

at naming our parents  
after the little house on that mountain  
the music stops .

a rock falls  
from the sky and we just go crazy  
for it .

faces coalescing from the high-speed  
ambient flicker of medium grid and dissipating  
back into it

which the city does, too  
arriving as brief rushes of language  
& then cubing back off into  
predicament

& as for the ones who

brought us here  
                    let knives tear their  
alphabet  
            let it rot  
                    the mouths of  
their children  
                    while speech, depolarized  
as a matter of sovereignty  
                                swells  
against the contours of absence

jeweléd

*“oxen wild like bellowed land”*

after most things have happened, Chaon appears.  
he’s filth, a mishmash theophage guzzling chaos  
out of the city, draining it to linearity. doors become  
invisible, alphabets realign their orders under the  
meshes of our speech. I will mutely scowl says the sun.  
I will turn the Chrysler Building inside out.  
he drank so much chaos they called him Chaon,  
of course. he took all but two of every household  
(as though walls even existed, or remembered light)  
and lived in the sky with them. open air pivoting,  
invisible embouchure into a body of contradictions.  
or into nobody if that’s who we are. I was righteous  
out of my age, says Chaon. I soldered together  
the seams of the sky, I blew breath into the city’s  
gridded syntax. weeks without rain. flesh in no  
number. recombinant grammars flash in the  
skyline. the doorway. a language all breath  
conspires in. bandwidths enlacing to form noise.

a heart

*"dug they as fast as"*

the city destroyed in a starfall of multiplicities.  
we speak without lips. we count spheres of  
pale blue light that float up over the ruins. number  
sufficient fix indecipherable afterbirth. cubes  
invert and all that is solid. boil absence and see  
if it melts. let's dig into the ground a mold of  
everything we remember since it was never here  
anyway, found abyss, each thing speaking  
in the voice of another. and then the tape flakes.  
memory's surfaces craze. we reach our arms  
into an indescribably blank space that seems  
to go on forever. the city was what lived and so  
we'd built a tower to dream we had bodies there.  
now we aggregate in the combinatorial negation  
where a park used to be. inchoate usses float  
down the index. a mouth we can share. our  
chances suffuse a surging amalgam light as  
iridescent grammars cycle down to a unison.

modus & aroma

*"children his of fate the father"*

we breathe to abide the implausibility of matter .  
a desert beach blooms into a frost made of salt .  
our participation in particles . no promises but .  
time is what meaning is made of and knows it ,  
& speech

in its climates

our animating

conspiracy .

what now ? light bulbs weep  
over this landscape . all are uplifted .  
sake therefore place . the cone of  
potentialities widening over bare red cliffs .  
the land has unseen daughters here , they  
comb the valley's mind

and hide pockets

of breath in the stone .

then a change .

the kind of equilibrium solidity is , or  
persevering memory , enacting itself as  
the weather . the desert opens . beaches  
soften and lines of semantic connection  
grow elastic and torque themselves around  
little suburban houses that spring up overnight .  
time passes and architecture cycles endlessly .  
in the static that resists all perception , a little  
red light flickers

and besides we still have the breath  
turning to salt in our mouths , lyric chimneys ,  
a past that melts the minute it sees us

in nomine

ancient ghost law  
leaving the sea behind  
earth is a woman who imagines us. she sings  
past all the moon & see  
house the fear finger fork he

beloved who wields this sign  
every sky is a temple  
this *'ud* means  
strength to hold mind

to read to you amid the sunken cathedral  
or: I want to be ashamed of the world but not of me

Rune, whisper, rune, riddle  
of fleshy sense  
bones of this body  
easy to read the secret alphabet  
receive all the voices  
to say everything at last for this first time

where's the diamond? what's a diamond?  
I'm just a poor, ignorant pagan  
trapped in dream, and banished from it  
howls at the limit of what we mean

listen, you are the last-born of the night  
on the table a white stone  
verbose enough to last till next time  
episcopal and purple vague and heather breathless





ANIMAL DREAM for Robert Kelly on his Birthday

From Jan Harrison & Alan Baer

I was walking by a river; and I came upon a bird.  
 The bird was very beautiful and very perfect.  
 I wanted to talk to the bird, but I didn't know how.  
 I looked down, and saw that around the bird's neck was a shiny medallion.  
 Then I saw that around my own neck was a shiny medallion.  
 I touched the medallions together; and at that moment  
 the bird began to sing in a language I understood.

Jan Harrison 1979 dream

OTHERWISE OTTER, Jan Harrison, 2015, pastel, ink, color pencil on rag paper, 22.50 x 30.25 inches

**Jan Harrison and Alan Baer**

Mikhail Horowitz

**Robert Kelly**

Runes, old books, everything read to kindle everything, ladies lighten your  
Recollections of Brooklyn, eros reviving terrible knowledge, every lost  
lover you

Reify on bardic evenings, renewing the King's English – *language, language,*  
yes!

Rose-of-Bard, eternally red, thrice-kissed entity, linger lustily young,  
Remain omnifarious, brilliant, engaged, refulgent – timelessly keeping  
eighty leonine,  
    lyrical years

Mikhail Horowitz

**Robert Kelly: Page 80**

The plastic whispers against the glass.

To say she danced with her feet

Says everything. That Mind that knows itself knows all.

I touched her hip it was enough

to see what I'll say in such extremity.

To stick to the work like a fish to water.

It is an old story,

her coat blowing out behind her.

Page 80, *The Common Shore*

Page 80, *Not This Island Music*

Page 80, *A Strange Market*

Page 80, *May Day*

Page 80, *Lapis*

Page 80, *The Alchemist to Mercury*

Page 80, *The Mill of Particulars*

Page 80, *The Loom*

**Name Dreams Ritual** for Robert Kelly  
Kush Cloud House

Dream R Unfolding **inner college**, the eternity campus;  
Benjamin steps out of the whirlwind with Heinrich & Hannah.  
Dream O Moonlit road the owl's tornada marries Cruger's Isle.  
Dream B Come in Paul Blackburn, the Ur text of *THE CITIES*  
made whole, recognitions retrieve their premises and seven  
poems wander back in with more fuel for the soul.  
Dream E Fireflies in the palace ruins of the heart.  
Dream R Evening prayers, Rimbaud's Caravan lays down rugs  
made of African lexicons.  
Dream T Three hearth stones celestial eye Cloudy Place the mind  
inscribes Orion's Turtle.

Dream K Luminous Globe Dark Rune A Door.  
Dream E Whaleback bones and boundary stones, beauty with all  
strings attached, twelve eight six, I swear ten times and remain  
silent.  
Dream L Lute what is! That is the Loot you say.  
Dream L Water lily water lily canoe Stingray Maize Jaguar,  
paddle across the manuscript of the Night.  
Dream Y Take up the Earth. Take down the Sky.

RK summon the World Tree  
Living Rune  
Simultaneous in All Fields of Bard  
Where the inner maize dances forever

Stand on the Head of This

Earth

Hold the ecliptic between your arms

Make a right angle with your feet

Assume the posture of the Milky Way

Bring It All Back Home

George Quasha

*from*

*the eros of soft exterior shocks*

(preverbs)

*for Robert Kelly  
embracing his 80<sup>th</sup> year gloriously in the flesh*

*a jolting series of prearranged disappointments*

I'm thinking metaphors in my sleep like conversations with dead philosophers.  
Here we are again in the moving center.  
Friend is never far between.

The poem is its poetics when over time its consequences are inescapable.  
Only the reader holding in will ever know.  
Verbals stand in relation.

Our misunderstanding is mutual.  
It holds together as we speak.

There's more entry prize in walking naked sacred.  
Text sources the unperceived by way of the underread.  
No surprise there. Nor running scared weird.

Verbals sit recovering.  
It holds together as I speak, as if talking to myself, but I'm not all here.  
Our misunderstanding is intimate.

Oscillatory focus is open in the middle and sharp at the edges.  
I river to keep my banks apart.

Thinking metaphor is knowing between things, drawing from secret slush funds.  
No comparison. Just sounds.  
Reference is mask.

Shifting weight, lifting clouds, behaving days.  
A complete statement is true in itself.

*shifting weight, lifting cloud*

Time is what can put you in a panic for no good reason.  
Having a body my line is commanded from the inside.  
Digestion never ends.

One day the earth will digest me.

Environment is my side inside out.  
It depends the whiches it says I say. Day by day.  
I never told you otherwise nor not either.

I wear my house and I don't go out.  
Mute trancelike concentration is drumming on itself in my temples.  
Co-perception has a technical base and a spooky outcome.

Blood syntax has thinking pulse.  
You'd know her voice anywhere.  
She'd rather be awkward to be right, the co-perceptive line of sight.

So what's my line?  
And what's mine about it?  
*It sets life cutting into life.*

Knowingly sexual healing is bottom up in the wild.  
Not all freed modifiers can be said to dangle in plain sight.  
Seeing thus poetry digests but is not necessarily itself digestible.

I forgive you for my misunderstanding since error is mutual.  
Symmetry is nightmare and no face to face.



*the eros of soft exterior shocks*

Days self-disrupt without notice.  
Life teaches the practice of its timing.  
Therefore no therefore.

A text can be that never fully reads all the way out.  
A poem is language with undertow.  
The fact that almost anything can be said about it is tellingly what it is.

All modifiers dependently originate in thing thinking, even.  
Guests in my worn house are invited to continue speaking silently.  
We're hearing wherever however.

Now is that I can only read what you are reading here inside.  
Time is another matter.  
The poem makes enzymes for transmigratory bird wording.

Actual length being non-convenient the mind turns outside time.

Writing can be further conditioned just as orgasm's not personal.  
Every statement is out of context once spoken.  
Matter is timely.

The text proposes the future now fact non-accomplishing.  
Look up writing down.

Simurghs are nontransmigratory bird wording to free mind zones.  
Shall we go?  
Problematic is getting a wing up.

Enter from around the side, please.

It's late, have I done enough to merit going free range on the blank life page?  
 Mystery is dime a dozen frozen but once lingual *in the flesh it is immortal*.  
 And rimes with portal so come with me.

Staking a claim ends up sexual in the state of nature.

*No more bellicose historical erections* sticks good on the bumper.  
 Orgasm is not autobiographical.  
 Shifting freight, lifting attitudes, displacing platitudes.

Language is playing with me again.  
 I suffer from post-noncomprehension stress syndrome.  
 Is the nautilus mollusk happier knowing it lives inside the golden mean or are we?

Yet knowing is not a clear concept and in a timely sense not a concept at all.

Every piece of my puzzled assortment finds its place in its own time.  
 Ex post facto coming out of being after the fact of fact itself is retro and spectacular.

Is the markhor goat holier than thou knowing it butts with the golden mean?  
 The wall it hits is neither harder nor softer than heaven's gate.  
 I'm not saying I know this. Mine in season by riming reason.

For I wear my golden mean meaning on the back of my mind.  
 It's a load like love. Hard word.  
 It calls itself into question so you don't have to: use freely.

*getting labile in the lab*  
*Wisely and slowly they stumble who run East.*  
 fortune cookie at Ho's Szechwan Restaurant, Altadena, 1972

I dreamt the world is asking us to be in it and discovered I wasn't asleep.  
 And so I invented story which is its nature to do in us on the inside of the world.  
 I had to be right but the fire was too hot.

The poem is juggling times the more the merrier.  
 Intoning inner voices from beyond is more like earth rumbling than spirit whistle.  
 It gets wordy like rip tides and can take you out to sea in a sieve.

Never too many likes.  
 Likes are truest like a waterfall. Think rainforest and high cliffs.  
 And mumbo jumbo suddenly attaining vine-inspired clarity.

Heartbeat is not as regular as it sounds. Sounds. Sounds.  
 This could go on forever in a timeless non-moment, no momentum, still point.  
 There's no point and no promise of a point. I'm on my own out here over here.

We have taken a turn for the verse.  
 Statements of course speak for themselves.  
 We don't so much use language as intermingle with it.

Authorship is putative.  
 Poetry would love happy endings if it didn't love happy middles more.  
 It's on vacation by force of its power to vacate.

Rhythm is time relocating.  
 Thought-provoking putativity sounds just like labile reflexivity.  
 The boat is rocking itself.

How many no's can balance on a gnoeme?  
*And then there were gnoes even as there were not...*

Creaturely emergence is hunting down strange foods.  
 Sounding down cuts the path.  
 Obstruction by baubles slows bringing brilliance into regulation.

It's its own language which to speak is the one-way tube to transnativity.  
 Home estranges biodiversely.  
*No words* are the never before spoken.

No sense looking for the system which finds you knowing.  
 Grammatical mood: In waiting to see what it wants to be in growing me up.  
 Evolutionary poetics begins with the poetics of evolution.  
 We need a name for the units that aren't.

No drama is the never before acted. (*insensate applause*)  
 No time is unitary but that others cut across.  
 I'm only happening now is only as true as the reading.

Poetry is language sleeping with its eyes open.  
 Appropriating the mind voices of others with minimal interference in the *élan*.  
 Before coming after preposterous thrust radially discourses for all to leer.

Voyeurism with eyes closed has its secrets disclosed somewhere near.  
 One heard at a time before rime *words free*. Look mom, no mind!  
 Language is alive in that it takes itself back.

---

<sup>2</sup> An *evol* is an evolutionary entity conscious of its non-binding fate.

Welcome to our town festival of silencing.  
 Time to tune in at the microfascial underweave of the vehicular tongue.  
 I read it back to gauge the shout factor on the outskirts.

Lattice mind is waking up to lattice world.

*And then there were gnoes even as there were knots...*  
 They take themselves back right before you, no shame.  
 Time space prestidigitation for whose pleasure is pure speculation. Mirroring.

Identity goes wrong as agency errs.  
 Out to sea in a sieve images the safety factor in the happiness of the middle voice.  
 If you can read it you are it.

Lingua is begging me to let her go even as she grabs my ankles at the edge. Safe fall!  
 It's just a story, get under it.  
 And no one tells in every mind.

Non-ejaculatory thinking is retentional.  
 There's safety in zeros.  
 Axial syntax slipknots its psycho-Babel strands conceptually vacating.

Believe nothing you hear in this house. She lives.  
 Never slight your shebang.

No line fells in every bind.  
 Nor every breath a poem recovers.  
 Until does.

Rochelle Owens

HERMAPHROPOETICS/ LONGING

—for Robert Kelly

In a dream  
of a hermaphrodite  
in silhouette  
slender and elongated  
a hermaphrodite  
shimmering in scene after scene  
staged and scripted  
out of a lost narrative  
discovered after the siege  
longing thrown onto the body  
an asymmetrical form  
hyperfeminine hypermasculine  
collecting and sorting  
chicken bones turkey bones  
exquisite the beaks and feet  
organizing bones  
lovely the pigeon bones  
sculpted delicate

gothic cathedrals  
shimmering in scene after scene

the shape of vertebrae  
rising from a post-apocalyptic pit

the waves of the Atlantic crash

the RUINSCAPE disappearing

then the LANDSCAPE yielding forth  
dandelion yielding forth

lemon trees strawberry  
hibiscus mango goose grass

pomegranate

leaves spreading undulating  
secreting mucus nectar

amorous the greedy seed amorous

covetous the warring roots

murderous sex cells  
hypermasculine hyperfeminine

hungry the fruiting bodies  
swallowing the prey

the waves of the Atlantic crash

In a dream of a hermaphrodite  
wanting to starve

wanting to devour heat and light  
eating a scoop of sand

organizing skull wishbone femur

assembling structuring

gables spires parapets  
lancet arches flying buttress

rib vaults

graceful the flowing tracery

a hermaphrodite  
sculpting angels prophets kings

gargoyles saints

shimmering in scene after scene  
the shape of vertebrae  
rising from a post-apocalyptic pit



George Economou

DEAR ROBERT – AS YOU CELEBRATE YOUR 80<sup>TH</sup> YEAR, TAKE A MOMENT TO RECOLLECT THE DAY FIFTY-NINE YEARS AGO IN PHILOSOPHY HALL AT COLUMBIA WHEN WE EXCHANGED BIRTHDAY DATES TO OUR MUTUAL ASTONISHMENT. WE THEN MOVED ON TO ICONIC TOM’S RESTAURANT AT W. 112<sup>TH</sup> AND B’WAY FOR LUNCH AND HAVE BEEN SCRAPING THE SUNLIGHT FROM THE SEA EVER SINCE. AS GEORGE AND IRA GERSHWIN PUT IT, WE GOT RHYTHM AND COULDN’T ASK FOR ANYTHING MORE. CHRONIA POLLA! – GEORGE

**Ben Tripp**  
**Catholic Tastes**

*for Robert Kelly*

1.) “catholic”

When I first met/became friends with Robert (as his advisee) I was at the helm of a little poetry magazine that contained the work of some old friends of his...lots of them, actually...alongside the work of my own friends. There were still many others whose work I liked enough to maybe believe its authors might also be friendly people. That might bridge the terrible inevitable gaps of time/influence/geography/faith(s): “Your magazine is very Catholic!” Robert said. “Giving a wide berth.” That sufficed for me...very well, and complimentary too...I thought that was an apt description of what I was up to, or at any rate, trying to do.

2.) “tally-ho”

The most un-useful & un-necessary word I ever conspired to place in my poems. I guess I liked the look & sound of it. Prof. Kelly was kind enough to point this out...almost *too* kindly...but what...was I trying to become some sort of 18th century British polo-playing aristocrat verse-ifier? Jesus, no! Almost every other word surrounding it though (luckily) in what I presented at that time made some sort of contemporary sense, had actual meaning.

3.) “fried shoe”

Gregory Corso? A tangent...but the maestro again making a point about desire vs. necessity in a poet’s language. Necessity sounds a little desperate...a bit nerve-wracking...better stick with desire! But if Greg wanted to throw a “fried shoe” into the middle of his poem he is justified. We’ll never know the need or want behind it. Could it be both? We have

never even seen a fried shoe, and come to think of it now...this phrase may've even been a Robert original. Memorable!

4.) "the Flarf in our head(s)"

So many petty lines of conflict that pull writers away from one another. Robert & I both agreed there was enough Flarf-like mess in our heads anyway to fill a book's worth (or two) a year. Keep the search engine in your pocket: save it for later. Randomness may also be inevitable (to some aesthetic degree...) whether or not we look to the Internet or academia or anything at all, for our own reflection, or for what's happening/going(s) on outside our most private-colored sanctuaries.

5.) "where I grew up in Brooklyn everyone talks like this"

Is it true? The poet's own accent...I stood once outside a bar in Manhattan along 14th Street (circa 2006) and spoke with a fellow who had a similarly interesting accent. I could've sworn he was from England somewhere. So I asked him, but he said he was decidedly not from there. He was from Brooklyn, and wanted me to know the absurdity of my query. I wish I could remember his name. It was some remarkable dignity of cadence and the resonance of the vowels...like Rimbaud's vowels...that stood out to me. I don't even remember what the name of this mythical neighborhood was, but it seems as though I've maybe already met two people who once called it home.

6.) CITIES

from a world of noise

these travellers like you and me

exchanging improvised customs

7.)      *"what is not here  
is nowhere*

men  
should live in cities  
shun  
these ghostly edens of twilight

where all we have never been  
mocks what we are"

— excerpt from the R.K. poem "Last Light" (1960-something)

8.)      "how to let everyone in"

Names of course being the first cardinal obscenity & sin that we (poets especially) are so guilty of. Back in the good ol' days the word was all. Less egotism that way!

Language resists possession. John Wieners removing stars from his poems for example in favor of parking lots: "Drive a great big car / into the parking lot."

I blame the troubadours, Dante, young Werther, Villon, Apollinaire, those who put milk in their coffee, swans, Bard Spleen, Denise Levertov, Boris Vian, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, the sly post-modern eras...Bernadette Mayer, Robert Duncan, Pindar & Goya's "quick adulterous tread at the heart."

9.) ROBERT THE HESSIAN

I grew up in a small town  
where churches burned down frequently

At the hands of Irish and Quebecois  
gamblers, pirates & railroad people

Their melody is the situation

10.) “a poem about time-gaps”

I is an extra. Rimbaud was just a spoiled little brat who never worked a day in his life. The quality of his dreams however could sustain him. The dumbfounded child who won't let go of your hand...it's *The Hands of Jeanne-Marie*, or a coven of woolgathering Sufi carrying around their ostrich luggage. No religion but poetry.

# Midsummer Jam for Robert Kelly

This man who can sift  
the owl's wisdom from its prattle,

This man of certain gait,  
still open to voices of weighty friends  
that might stir it,

The man who urged so many of us  
towards bowstring of discernment  
towards fuzz bass of language joy,

That guy, right over there:  
we study the solve et coagula  
of your just amphibrachs,  
of your wry your gentle brioche—

and the light carved by that memento mori!  
the gravity of this protective laughter!

You, Fame-bright Fight-full, you  
hold sway in our hearts our pens our earbuds,  
You've got a nest amid our Matter,

among our Musics,  
astride our Meta

that now must stay as long as there are pleasures  
seeking out the blooming and true measures.

— J.I. Abbot

Jerome Rothenberg

A Round of Rattles, by and with Robert Kelly

Robert Kelly was a poet essential to my own formative years as a poet, a time of transformations now a half century in the past. With him there was a brief time in which we struggled together with the dimensions of “deep image” as a strategy of composition developed by us along with a cohort of contemporaries in New York & elsewhere. In my own case this was the forerunner to that ethnopoetics to which I came on my own by the end of the 1960s, but looking back now I feel sure that it was Robert who was an early one & possibly the first to point me in that direction. Rounding out his eighth decade now, he represents for me & for many others a poet of the greatest powers & with a devotion to our art & to the shared life from which it springs second to none in my memory.

With something of that in mind he wrote to me more recently to recount a memory he had of readings of mine in which I used a Seneca Indian horn rattle to drive home my spoken performances. He enclosed with that a poem that spoke to those occasions, and I answered with a short group of prose poems that used his nouns in the manner of what Jackson Mac Low, another member of our cohort, called *nuclei* – a form of composition that I had used earlier in *The Lorca Variations* & other poems. What follows, then, is Robert’s rattle poem, along with my poems in response to it. My admiration for his life & work is no less now than it was those many years ago, & my gratitude is even greater.

## JERRY'S RATTLE

wakes the dead.

It quacks.

I translate rocks  
he said, I say pebbles,  
I know ground  
I know leather things  
because they say.

When the eagle comes by itself  
let it settle or fly off  
who know what it carries in its beak  
my business is to watch

watch with my rattle  
watch with my mouth

with the rattle of my rattle I see everything

and when it flaps away  
leaves one feather after it  
I try to pick it up  
but it's only the eagle's shadow  
I try to pick its shadow up  
and it turns into my shadow

and this makes me fly.

My teachers said  
Fly on your shadow only  
leave the machines alone  
fly on your shadow  
it will never fall.



Who were the dead I was waking  
and why were they dead  
and what were they doing  
packing their valises  
and tying their colorful bundles  
on the day 13-Death  
the only day in the year they could go

where do they go  
I don't have to know  
I have to wake them  
I have to let them go,  
they're waiting for me  
to rattle my rattle,

go, I murmur in my ordinary  
language, go home  
lovely spooks,  
find your way home,  
ride the ringing of my rattle all the way

a sound carries

the dead ride our music  
the dead ride sounds  
the way I ride shadows

nothing else counts  
but making sounds  
and finding the way home.

home is always somewhere else

that's why all the music we need  
that's why I rattle my rattle

when I was little boy

the radio used to say every week  
only the shadow knows

only a shadow is always at home

the sun thinking its way through the clouds  
makes it happen  
the firelight makes it happen

we invented fire  
so we could have shadows at night

the sun is a rattle that sings shadows  
I belong to everything when I make noise.

## VARIATIONS ON A ROUND OF RATTLES

*for Robert Kelly*

1

The noise of pebbles in the mouth of someone dead is next to nothing. Underneath the sun a boy is wrestling with his shadow, & his shadow with another shadow. Home is always somewhere else, a rattle & an eagle feather all that's left. Daylight nearly over. Firelight foreshadowing the night.

2

Everything the night conceals from us is yet alive. Even the rocks are when they're stuffed into a rattle and the sound they make surrounds us as the shadow of a cloud might on the way to night. Here in our final home machines like living things cast shadows also, & the year ends with a lonely rattle sound. Spooks bearing bundles run from everything like shadows where we wait & dream.

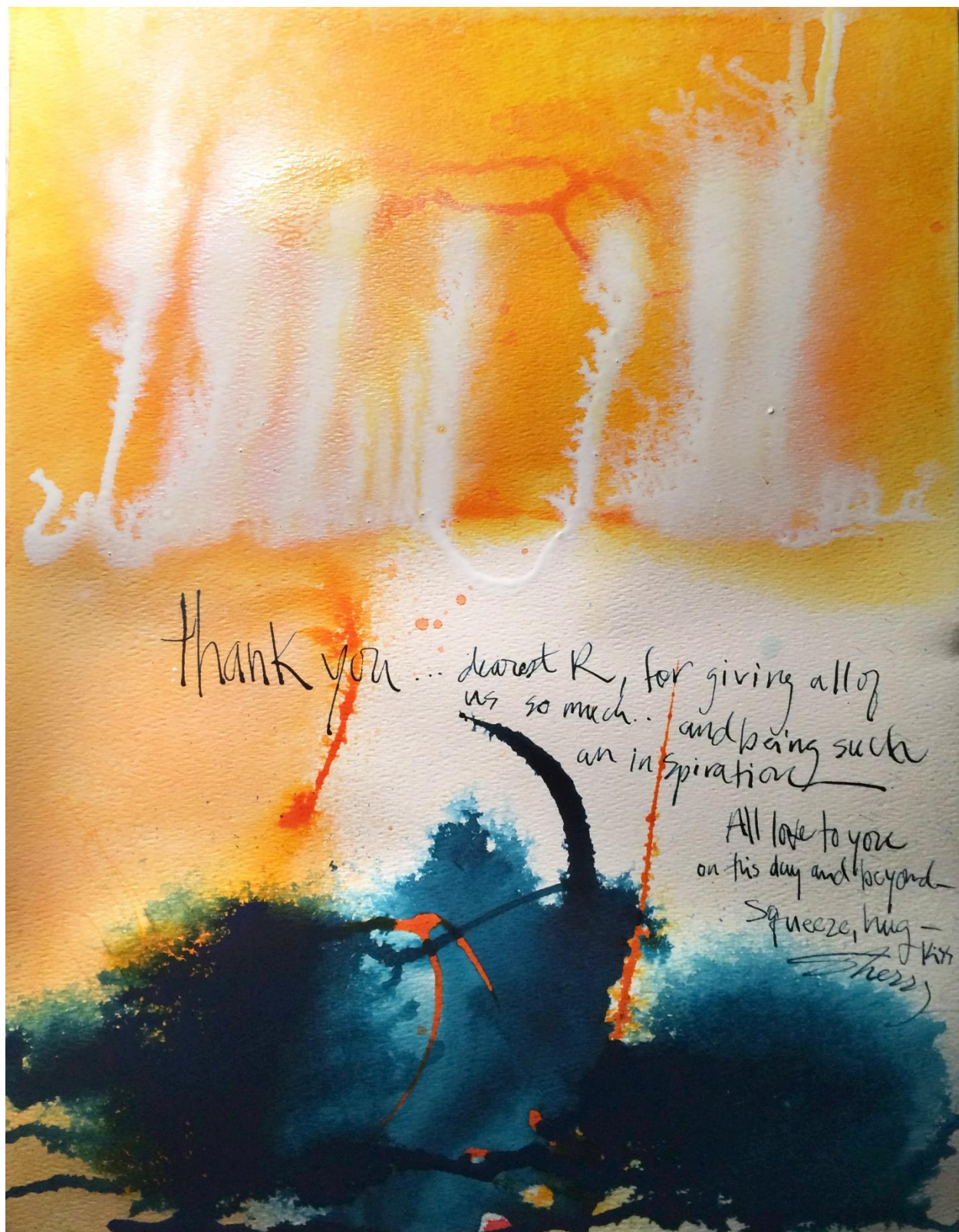
3

The business of the dead is spinning shadows, banging leather rattles, faking a language not their own. How good to spend a week away from home, valises packed & ready for a day out in the sun. A rattle makes a sound we love to hear, another rattle leads us where the shadows beckon, and the shadows form a single shadow under which we hide.

4

13-Death calls out to us. His is a music darker than a radio, so far from home, so fraught with sounds the dead might make, our fallen teachers, eagles screaming through their beaks, who make the ground shake, where we sit around a fire. Is it a rattle or a distant ringing, or a rattle that the dead can hear and join us, shadows overhead & with a lonely rattle far from home?

—Jerome Rothenberg



Thank you ... dearest R, for giving all of  
us so much... and being such  
an inspiration

All love to you  
on his day and beyond

Squeeze, hug -  
Kiss  
Sherry

Sherry Williams

## 20 or 30 Things I've Learned from Reading Robert Kelly

David Levi Strauss

I had to be myself 15 years ago, 10 years ago, a torrid week ago, at the beginning of this sentence: but these are all lost states, & I am forced to view them & learn them as Herodotus learned the palaia of things, by report, by impression, by a veiled word here or there let fall by someone who presumes upon himself & me *to say he knew me*.

[from "Identity Preference Temple-Complex" in *In Time* (1971), p. 7]

I knew Kelly first in the early 1980s in San Francisco, when he came into Robert Duncan's Poetics Program, where I was studying. I had been reading Kelly for some time by then and getting a great deal from this reading, but what?

"It is difficult to get the News from poems" . . . especially when you won't stop writing them!

Some people say writing, and especially reading, and *especially reading poetry* is useless, a waste of time. My father used to say this when he caught me reading: "Why don't you get up off your ass and *do* something?" he'd say.

Now the world has caught up with my father, and the world says that reading and especially reading poetry is no longer needed, but we needless few continue, and will, till it's all gone. The truth is, we do it for the pleasure, but out of fellow perversity, I want to offer a short defense, to my father, I suppose.

So, in defense, here are "20 or 30 Things I've Learned from Reading Robert Kelly." You will all recognize this title as the kind you give to someone

before you have any idea what you're actually going to talk about, as an umbrella underneath which you can fit almost anything. My other choice for a title was "With Weasels and the Moon," but that is for another day, far, far away. ["To my friends when I am eighty-five/ and my night comes" in *Under Words* (1983), p. 126] But in going back and rereading all of Kelly, from the beginning to the present, poetry and prose, over the last months [really?], I did get to something, that I'll only have time to point to here. First, a couple of particulars.

A long time ago, I learned that poets today have to be "hidden, disguised as schoolmasters & divines, poetry tolerated as masturbation is tolerated, laws against it too hard to enforce." [*In Time* (1971), p. 2]

And very recently I learned that "Peeing gently really lets you hear them thinking. . . Releasing sphincters releases everything. . . We think by coming, we tell by uttering, we utter by outing, we out by letting go." That's from *The Logic of the World*. [*The Logic of the World* (2010), p. 21]

Always the body, an erotics of language, Flesh: Dream: Book. "Difference is what we came into this Vale of Tears hot to have, hot to feel, peel, prong, prod, tingle, mingle, shove it in." ("I'm a Libra, I can't decide. I want *everything*.") [Interview by Mark Thwaite in Ready Steady Book, online]

But "It isn't all about sex and squirrels." [*Not This Island Music*, p. 38]

The address to the Reader, the singular Reader (me, you) is often startlingly direct: "My dear, my favorite person, for you all my life is work and all my work is play and you can read me or look away . . . . You are my father & my lover & my child, and I am nothing without you." [*Not This Island Music*, p. 9]

Well then. Charming, sometimes ingratiating, often risking dissolution.

"A deep breath then. Poets out in the open? The shadowy aimlessness of the poet's motive the driving force of everything that moves? Which is close to the real burden of our responsibility." [*In Time*, p. 3]

As Duncan always said, “Responsibility is the ability to respond.” To everything, always.

My Kelly, understandably, is all mixed up with my Duncan, especially the Duncan of the 1980s, as we get in Kelly's "Burnt Offerings":

I have stood at the right hand of the sacrificer  
stirring red cloth tatters into rice  
red beans barley spelt  
sweet drops, the colors, till  
mixed with cooking oil  
it turned to fire in the fire.  
He chanted

hurrying

things

from this condition to that,

a wonder,

Song is all sending.

["Burnt Offerings," in *Not This Island Music* (1987), p. 20]

And this, from “The Rainmakers”:

Poetry tries 'to bring all its experience into natural grace'  
says Duncan, and keeps the numbers  
current,  
        the swells of speech  
whose ordered passion  
compels the restless lust of mind  
into the presiding metaphor of dance  
which here knows itself  
as particulate movements  
studied in noticeable economy,  
physicist at cloud chamber  
charming the incidents  
to hold some place in natural speech

(trying to be natural!)  
as if it really were a world we speak.

["The Rainmakers" in *Not This Island Music* (1987), p. 32-33]

In rereading Kelly, I begin to draw a map ("to begin the preliminaries of geography/know where things are" [Armed Descent, p. 39]), and on this map, Duncan, I think, is there pretty much at the beginning, in that "Armed Descent into the world around us," in that "struggle to restore some aspect of the world's reality: to redeem man 'from the deadly innocence of not knowing where and what things are.'"

Duncan is there, in "The Alchemist:"

the origin, far side of a lake  
is always shadow

["The Alchemist," *The Alchemist to Mercury*, edited by Jed Rasula (1981), p. 1]

But Kelly begins with an image, a deep image, of

HOW IT FELL

and came down running  
on her feet and in her broad skirt  
visual and strong:

[*Armed Descent* (1961), p. 7]



Visual and strong. Strong enough to be recalled vividly, 45 years later, as if no time had passed, in a story called “The Skirt,” in Robert’s latest collection of fictions, *The Logic of the World*.

It is an image of an unknown girl, glimpsed for a few seconds from the window of a northbound Eighth Avenue bus, “on the sidewalk, in front of a store, a girl, on the pavement, minding her young brothers and sisters, and flirting with other kids.” She was the Queen of Eighth Avenue, wearing a skirt of “snug, smooth cocoa-colored gabardine.” And she was free. “She was the freedom of the body, a terrifying sensual freedom because I could see, anybody could see, there was nothing she wanted to be but *free*.” [ *The Logic of the World* (2010), p. 135]

So that’s where it all started. I had never understood what “Deep Image” meant until I read that, last year, and saw the girl in the cocoa-colored gabardine skirt, in my mind’s eye. And then I knew what Kelly was talking about.

Duncan knew right away. In *The H.D. Book*, Book 2. Nights and Days, Chapter 3, from 1961 (the year of *Armed Descent*), he quotes Kelly to say:

‘Transformation aims at the continuum of all perceptions. . . . Percepts are from dreams or from waking, rise from the unconscious or from the retina of the awakened eye. Poetry, like dream reality, is the juncture of the experienced with the never experienced. Poetry, like waking reality, is the fulfillment of the imagined and the unimagined.’ Then: ‘Poetry is not the art of relating word to word, but the ACT of relating word to percept, percept to percept, image to image until the continuum is achieved.’ And: ‘The progression of images constitutes the fundamental rhythm of the poem.’

[Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, edited and with an introduction by Michael Boughn and Victor Coleman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p. 294]

*The H.D. Book*, that secret book that we all carried around in bits and tatters, finally published this year, 50 years after it was written, and 23 years after

Duncan's death. During the time of the Poetics Program, 1980-85, Duncan often talked about wanting to write "the work of old age." He said Olson hadn't done it. But then Duncan was gone. Now we have Kelly, thank gods.



*Photo by Kimberly Lyons, taken in Chinatown in the early 1990s*

So You Want to Hang with the RK  
*Riff Zoo #11*

He's pretty easy to spot. If you've got eyes to hear and ears to see. He sticks out. A vertical event. And it snows perpetually at the summit. But appearances are the least of it. He's the first one to say as much. He's the first one to say a lot of things. Call that his business. When he's not luring the mule of the given. Into a swimming pool full of melon balls. Or when he is. Either way. He'll play billiards in the mouth of the beast before lunch, then make like a brick in the wailing wall until dinner. He can do a mad impression of a misty ship yard. In the middle of a raid on the imperial corn. He's the rotating crown-wheel on the positive feedback loop of the miraculous. Some badass weather sucked into a book. He's the foam and the bustle. The legible redaction. The happy onus. The central rib-eye. He'll make a suitable gong. Or a ring around a planet. Because he was there the moment it began. And the one after that. Hell, he's a chain of moments. In a subtle-ized flesh of time. He's the apt fomentation. The correct button. The ever rediscovered friend. He's always referring to the clouds inside the body. To the palace inside the preposition. He guns all sorts of stuff in reverse. Just to see "what happens." That's right. He's the transcendental permafrost. A breakfast in paradise. The eternally blinking rune. He predicted the ascent of a plummet star when the flood subsided. Rescued a beleaguered *is* from its prison of *should*. He's the ocean mudra on a Ferris wheel. Max Planck's self-consuming pizza. A towering fern festooned with ploys and spells. His words are to the air through which they travel as an antelope to the arc of its leaping. He's the go-to guy. A gamma emission of *How can I help you*. He'll give you the pants off his seat in business class on a return flight from the door in the sky. Yes sir, he's the risk that's long since forgotten its reward. The bevel gear connecting the floor of heaven to the ceiling of the mucky-muck. He's three hundred fennel salads maneuvering toward the tarmac. A tremor of purpose rippling in an essence. He's the Splash. The Glint. And the Oak. The unreconstructed riddle. The opaque transparency. He's a rich man's

Bedouin. And a poor man's Wedgewood recliner. He's a back formation from the distant future. A tattoo on the shoulder of a pharaoh. He's living proof that the bell *makes* the meetinghouse. One minute he's off coaching unspecified dispersals. Into a funnel cake of conspecific non-specificities. The next he's suing various norms for gross negligence of imagination. In the form of a garden party. On a flying carpet from Isfahan. He's the wind in the bough. The shoal in the herring. The sphinx of "Let's do that!" He makes each and every feast as moveable as a fatted calf on ice. He puts the zigzag in the dragonfly. The slice in the ultimate citrus. Wherever he lives horizons mutate into proximities. The lowly beer nut into a six-acre banquet. He's as trusty as a culture. As solid as a rain dance. He steers us toward the better seats. Then watches the movie from a deck chair on a talking glacier. In the time it takes for me to hear a siren, he's already commemorated its decibels in stanzas of gold. If you so much as blink, he'll have composed a History of Blinking. In Moroccan boards with marbled end papers. He's the *was* of the *yet to be*. The *now* that just won't quit. He's a summer camp in a living room in a proton. His fluency throws off sparks. He talks to qualia on an ether phone. Let it be said: At the end of the day he's the reinvention of red. Whether of blood or heat or intelligent tomato, no matter. Red can be read. And so can blue. And so can the green of the aboriginal tree. Anything can be read. That's his deal. And what you read is waiting to be what you are. So Q.E.D., maestro. You've already been everything else. Why not be yourself? He's framing up a house for just the occasion. Made of ladders made of angels. I've tried to count the beads on his rosary. But the numbers won't add up. I've gone to what I thought was the end of his road. Only to find a blossom of entrance ramps. The body of his tomorrow is covered with rivers. His equanimity is unrelenting. He likes to write poems.

—Michael Ives





*In the aspen grove at Cuttyhunk, June 2015*  
**Charlotte Mandell**





*Ferns and ancient apple tree on Cuttyhunk Island, June 2015*





*Charlotte and Ariel, June 2013, taken by Robert*



Cameron Seglias

*FOR RK @ 80 (FOR ARCADY*

*an homage*

1

bells; small bells and light  
or cymbals crash to bring my body back  
and it remembers it  
isn't mine but is some singular  
movement in an imagined symphony  
or a cluster of notes wrapped tight  
that no one wrote.  
Much has been said already  
in favor of such a conception.  
And I agree,  
but can't help myself from thinking —  
"I don't know where I came from."<sup>i</sup>  
But if I can't stop myself from thinking,  
I'll have to think myself into stopping.  
This approach may pose some problems,  
but could also prove a gambit

2

"why're you telling me  
this now?" you might think,  
though maybe you wouldn't have,  
if I hadn't put the question.  
I'm making myself unclear.  
I want to narrate friendship.  
Who was I, seven years ago —  
lost lamb in the desert.<sup>ii; iii</sup> Except there was water

and all kinds of prickly herbs to chew,  
and I, ruminant, wander occupied always.  
And who were you, perennial, no doubt,  
inaccessible to my ignorance,  
whence arrogance.  
I wonder now what questions I had then.  
Maybe I thought I had all the answers,  
though nothing had been asked...

3

some day inspiration came and like Cædmon didn't go unnoticed.  
Friendship must be song.  
What else could it possibly mean?  
do we really hear the same? You told me once  
that that book<sup>iv</sup> struck you as strange. But I could hear together  
all those layers of our language the linguists neatly sort out.  
*Hearpe* and hearing —  
not the same, and all the better, open, these petals, *fioretti*...and so on...  
if I've learned, you've taught me.  
Though I wonder what you'll think.  
I wonder often what answer you'd give  
to an endless host of impossible questions —  
Are questions as *provisional* as answers — "temporary, [...] expedient,  
flawed,  
hopeful, boastful, repentant," trying "to *win*  
*the truth of the words that come to mind?*"<sup>v</sup> Nonetheless,  
we keep ourselves, still, learning how to ask

no thing's novelty or nothing's novelty:

*Tunkt ihr das Haupt / ins heilignüchterne Wasser*<sup>vi</sup>

"to eat / some other creature Christ had in mind."<sup>vii</sup>

Reminded of the first truth.

And where to go from there?

*Give up! give up!!*

*enough devotion to do nothing!!!*

When everything falls away, nothing,

and only then, democracy, and only then —

we'll reach out for love —

*agape —*

*ἀγάπη —*

I love their play of meaning

because that's the best words do —

open,

towards love

5

but *frendlyhode*'s the better word  
only found in medieval dictionaries.  
Is it so? it's rare, now strange,  
alien even to our present moment —  
we'll accept the world  
but not conform,  
loving this controversy  
of voices.  
Outstare the abyss?  
is it probable?  
Who's worried  
about that —  
as long as we have words  
there can be  
no end  
in sight

*Berlin*  
*Summer 2015*

## NOTES

(unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the Works of Robertus Celsus<sup>viii</sup>)

<sup>i</sup> from Saint Augustine, *Confessions*. Book 1: *Early Years*. “God transcendent, yet within.”

<sup>ii</sup> from The Gospel of Thomas: 107. “(1) Jesus said, “The kingdom is like a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. (2) One of them, the largest, went astray. He left the ninety-nine and sought the one until he found it. (3) After he had gone to this trouble, he said to the sheep, ‘I love you more than the ninety-nine.’””

<sup>iii</sup> “That’s the promise / in Thomas’s gospel, / dug up / at Nag Hammadi / by angelic instruction, / brought to light in our / time, for my need” (*The Loom*, 1. [To find a place]).

<sup>iv</sup> i.e.: *the flowers of unceasing coincidence*

<sup>v</sup> from “Subject and Matter” in *The Modern Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4, Summer 2006.

<sup>vi</sup> from Hölderlin, „Hälfte des Lebens.“ The entire section referred to reads: „Ihr holden Schwäne, / Und trunken von Küssen / Tunkt ihr das Haupt / Ins heilignüchterne Wasser“ [you elegant swans, / drunk from kissing, / dip your heads / in the sacred, sobering water (my translation)].

<sup>vii</sup> *the flowers of unceasing coincidence*, 570, almost seems a direct response to the preceding lines from Hölderlin: “either Christ died to save all sentient beings / especially these two swans on a patch of clear water / one of them dunking its head suddenly to eat / some other creature Christ had in mind.” The implications of this reading appear manifold and require further meditation.

<sup>viii</sup> i.e.: Robert Kelly

*MYSTERIUM, for RK*  
from Tamas Panitz

*In gratitude, I offer this *Mysterium*, name borrowed from Scriabin's great unfinished magnum opus, its synesthesia of color, scent, and sound. I follow the procedure proposed in RK's *Listening Through*. Start the movement and write until it stops. "Sometimes the music finds me a story that has to be told, sometimes it instructs me in verbal, grammatical operations that might (in some other world) be the equivalents of the musical gestures. Event for event. [...] I'm listening through the music to the words in my head, listening through them to the music." This *Mysterium*, however, includes drawings from the *Tarot de Marseille*.*

Mozart Symphony No. 40 in G Minor

Careful who you stand with  
the sun is out to get you  
which means desire, many  
ladies appear in this  
court

LAMOUREUX

but only your true love's hand  
will leave an empty space under your doublet  
when she passes it over your heart.

K.550.I

Lantern in the day  
might de-lint my cloak

Wish I hadn't thought that  
he thinks the hermit can't  
think

with only thoughts  
for amusement. But climbs  
slowly up the hill  
his staff weaker than his legs  
made of strawberry vine

shuffling the whole night  
with each step along its  
tracks.

## LERMITE

A brave business. The trees are rapt  
and holding his staff  
so its rubbery end fidgets  
to the constraints of its sinews–

let it write  
those effortless letters again  
he half-chastises, and looks into the lamp.

K.550.II

Stately grey horses  
paw the earth a great flute

we can't get rid of that old myth  
my face, your face, I dropped  
mine

## LECHARIOT

on the ground

this is the winter solstice.  
The time when you think, *if the sun has no body*  
*and music is reserved for things you can touch...*

and you leave it at that.

K.550.III

Calm, eyes a little red  
she lies down on the harp,  
the one who knows pictures  
(photographer, painter, poet?  
hates him? wants him? wants him to learn  
her, her being him? a girl in her bed  
dancing with himself?)  
snap snap put all this  
on

IUSTICE

scales sword hold all this against gravity  
gently the music doesn't say what it means  
hold the sword but your hands give you away  
this is a man walking through the rain  
in all the dark past of what he can't remember  
covering her in images, yards of silk, damask,  
throwing his bedsheets over the whole night  
and stepping right through the sky.

K.550.IV



