Kelli’s Paraphrase of Donne’s “Meditation XVII”

DONNE

PERCHANCE he for whom this bell tolls may be so ill as that he knows not it tolls for him. And per chance I may think myself so much better than I am, as that they who are about me, and see my state, may have caused it to toll for me, and I know not that. The church is catholic, universal, so are all her actions; all that she does, belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that head which is my head too, and ingraffed into that body, whereof I am a member. And when she buries a man, that action concerns me; all mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated; God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God's hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again, for that library where every book shall lie open to one another; as therefore the bell that rings to a sermon, calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come; so this bell calls us all: but how much more me, who am brought so near the door by this sickness.

There was a contention as far as a suit (in which, piety and dignity, religion and estimation, were mingled) which of the religious orders should ring to prayers first in the morning; and it was determined, that they should ring first that rose earliest. If we understand aright the dignity of this bell, that tolls for our evening prayer, we would be glad to make it ours, by rising early, in that application, that it might be ours as well as his, whose indeed it is. The bell doth toll for him, that thinks it doth; and though it intermit again, yet from that minute, that that occasion wrought upon him, he is united to God. Who casts not up his eye to the sun when it rises? But who takes off his eye from a comet, when that breaks out? who bends not his ear to any bell, which upon any occasion rings? But who can remove it from that bell, which is passing a piece of himself out of this world?

Kelli’s Paraphrase

The bell that is ringing and announcing someone’s approaching death might be for someone who hears it, but is so sick that he does not realize the bell is announcing his death. And as ill as I am, maybe that bell is ringing my death notice but I don’t know it because I think I am healthier than I really am. My friends, though, perhaps know the truth and have asked the bells ring for me. But even if the bell isn’t ringing for me specifically, because the church is universal, and we are all connected through the church (from birth to death), then when anything happens to another, I am part of that experience. Each life is a page in a book written by God, but death does not mean that God tears out that page and separates it from the other pages. Instead, God translates that page into a new language, using tools of translation like war, illness, age, and corporal punishment. Death is merely a transformation into a new language, and we all will be translated. In the end, God will take our lives, like leaves in a book, and bind them into one, and we shall exist as one. Because we all share the same fate, the bell that rings for one, really rings for us all, but it is especially relevant to me, for I have been closer to death because of my illness.

The different religious orders had an argument about which group should be called to prayers first each morning. The ruling was that the order who rose first should be called in first. When hearing the bell, we would be glad to call it ours if we truly understood its importance. And if someone thinks the bell rings for him, then it does, and at that moment, he is connected to God and cannot be separated.
No man is an island. entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

Neither can we call this a begging of misery, or a borrowing of misery, as though we were not miserable enough of ourselves, but must fetch in more from the next house, in taking upon us the misery of our neighbors. Truly it were an excusable covetousness if we did; for affliction is a treasure, and scarce any man hath enough of it. No man hath affliction enough, that is not matured and ripened by it, and made fit for God by that affliction. If a man carry treasure in bullion or in a wedge of gold, and have none coined into current moneys, his treasure will not defray him as he travels. Tribulation is treasure in the nature of it, but it is not current money in the use of it, except we get nearer and nearer our home, heaven, by it. Another may be sick too, and sick to death, and this affliction may lie in his bowels, as gold in a mine, and be of no use to him; but this bell that tells me of his affliction, digs out, and applies that gold to me: if by this consideration of another's danger, I take mine own into contemplation, and so secure myself, by making my recourse to my God, who is our only security.

No one lives in complete isolation from another. We have a collective bond because we are all part of humanity, and we all share in the same fate. We should never ask who the funeral bell is ringing for, because in reality it always is ringing for us.

And seeing the world like this, claiming each funeral bell as our own, is not wallowing in misery (like we don’t have enough of our own misery and must borrow more from someone else). Though even if we did so, we could excuse such greediness because suffering and hardship make us stronger – they make us more fit for God and his mercy (which we do not deserve). We really don’t suffer enough if it helps make us more worthy of God. But suffering is like the person who has wealth but not in a form that he can spend where he is at. Suffering does us no good here in terms of getting ahead or profit. Instead, it is valuable because it takes us closer to heaven. And even those who have suffering but do not understand it’s worth, that suffering can be valuable to another who witnesses his hardship and learns from it. If I can become more aware of my own mortality and the need for a more virtuous life by seeing the suffering of others, or hearing the bell ring for someone else, then I become more secure in my salvation because this makes me closer to God, who is the only path to heaven.
Kelli’s Paraphrase of Frost’s “Mending Wall”
(line breaks are my own to help organize different movements in the poem)

**FROST**

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs.

The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.

And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:

There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors'.

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows?'
But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself.

**Kelli’s Paraphrase**

There is something that dislikes walls and tries hard to bring them down. Sometimes the ground buckles from freezing and causes the rocks in the walls to fall down, creating spaces that two people can walk through, shoulder to shoulder. Hunters can also bring down walls as they chase rabbits, who hide in between the stones. The hunters tear the stones apart to get to the rabbits and please their dogs. I know this because I’ve had to follow them and fix the wall where they have torn it down.

These gaps seem to appear, though no one has seen or heard them being made, but they always are here in the spring when my neighbor and I come to check on the wall. I tell him about the gaps, and we meet, as we have done before, to walk the wall, each on one side. We handle the boulders that have fallen on our own side of the wall. Some are more square like a loaf of bread, and some are more round like a ball. Getting them to stay in place requires a spell: “Don’t move until we’ve turned our backs on you!” Our fingers become ragged from lifting and stacking the stones. This is like a game we play with the wall between us like a barrier in sports. Really, it isn’t more than just a game.

Over there is where we have no need for a wall because his pine trees and my apple orchard create a barrier, and I tell him that he doesn’t have to worry about my apples eating his pine cones. He just replies, “Good fences make good neighbors.”

Spring makes me prone to teasing, and I always wonder if I can plant a new idea in his head. So I ask, “Why do they make good neighbors? Don’t walls keep people friendly if they have cows that might get out? But we don’t have cows, so why do we need a wall? If it were up to me, I would ask what I wanted to keep in or keep out of my property before I built a wall. I’d also ask who I would offend by building a wall. You know, something out there doesn’t like walls, and wants to tear them down.” At that, I could say “Elves” to indicate that they’re the ones who tear down walls, but it really isn’t elves, not exactly. Plus, I’d rather he say it without my prompting him.
I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me–
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

I watch him on his side of the wall, with a stone in each hand – not carrying them in his palms, but holding them at the tops. It makes me think of men in the stone-age, using rocks as weapons, and his actions seem to be shadowy, but not the shade of the wood or trees, but instead the darkness of one who lives in ignorance, just as those savages did. But my neighbor is oblivious to my teasing and won’t back down from the tradition he learned from his father that he takes pride in repeating: “Good fences make good neighbors.”