

1-2012

## janC2012

Robert Kelly  
*Bard College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "janC2012" (2012). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 351.  
[https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts/351](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/351)

This Manuscript is brought to you for free and open access by the Robert Kelly Archive at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Robert Kelly Manuscripts by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@bard.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@bard.edu).

= = = = =

1.

Willing to scare the barn  
so many deer on an ordinary lawn  
foxes in London wild boars in Berlin  
our children come home to be us  
we who are or were briefly  
briefly alive animal but then.

2.

Portuguese anthems rose rainy Sunday  
closepacked black church by the river  
I saw this with my camera  
I heard it with my book  
I rose on wings of self-deception  
high over the untrafficked harbor  
and saw far off the coastline of America  
looking like just a part of the rain.

3.

So there are things that thing you  
when you dare to look and be nobody—  
just an hour or so, somebody

always wants to get back behind the wheel  
and go, just go, we live by going  
and transcend by sitting down. Reading  
was a magic that taught men to sit still.

4. Now the woods are the color of the air and what to do?  
Things stumble into one another, becoming what they touch.  
Essences are pretty specious to begin with — o to live  
in a world without essences and only accidents, and from those  
glittering alphabets of endless happenstance  
read then write a new constitution of thatness, that is  
hereness, newness, and all such vanishments  
and kiss them wetly as they hurry past and disappear.

10 January 2012

## THE TRAP

We fell into belief,  
we believe in fact—  
a Latin participle  
meaning something  
made up. There's  
nothing to believe  
and no need to.  
Just taste everyone  
and persuade no one,  
touch and let go.

10 January 2012

[End of Notebook 340]

= = = = =

And afterwards were people on the road  
neck of the woods, a theremin  
humming in a young man's cabin,  
arguably innocent, one slim powerline  
quivers in the wind, trees encroaching  
the jarring of elements in Lucretius,  
melody is not natural to the world,  
there is a planet from which the alphabet,  
toast by the fireplace, be a girl, Montana  
maybe, wind your old watch, a waitress  
from Madeira, blonde, talk to her,  
let her remind you gently of the Virgin Birth,  
epiphany, the rights of man and the citizen,  
how many more strokes in this ideogram,  
Mendeleev, her poor father broke his collarbone,  
her sister waiting for her down in Dun Laoghaire,  
is it enough, love, enough love, the harbor,  
the big cannon pointing straight at Napoleon,  
almost there, coffee stain on her nice apron,  
she'd never read Pessoa, you touched  
meekly the socket of her thumb, her palm  
you read, tracing the lines you tried to see,  
told her all the good stuff, nobody needs  
to hear the rest, I learned it from a book,

I have no parents of my own, no broken bone,  
everything started just this minute now,  
all memories are false, mere molecular accidents,  
stirrings of the juices in the brain, no matter,  
I muttered all this and she listened patiently  
while the Irish Sea glistened in the morning sun.

10 January 2012

## ARS SCRIBENDI

Train yourself to write with your leg.

Your hip. The heel of your hand.

Ball of the foot. Back of your head.

Make your house learn to talk.

Goad it gently like a tired old ox.

10 January 2012

= = = = =

We have passed the angry time  
thee and I

I heard—who spoke  
or spake? Seemed like old uncle Seymour  
(called Simon)

who always thee'd people  
like a Quaker in a book he wasn't,  
husky-voiced  
from ruined lungs (poison gas, Argonne)  
talking to his youngest brother my father  
Samuel (called Jim)

telling of the wars they lived through,  
angry at the Boches, Nazis, Japs, Reds, Viet Cong,  
we had so many enemies  
but no more, no more war.

Does a man  
reach peace before a nation does,  
a one-man nirvana?

Or a couple of old gents  
long dead now (forty years, twenty years)  
linger peaceable in the dusty  
parlor of my back-mind  
where not much stirs,  
sun in old windows,  
not even a cat.

11 January 2012



## THE WHEEL

Counting the spokes of the wheel I come nine  
 what is this eccentricity of mine?  
 a spoke that floats, a spoke  
 reaching neither hub nor fellow of the wheel so  
 what is it doing there in my religion  
 like an arrow floating in the river or  
 the slack prick of one of those naked  
 ash-covered ascetics you still see  
 jiving around India, you and them, sadhus.  
 Apollonius saw them and learned offhand  
 that wisdom comes from nakedness—  
 bare skin just a reminder of the naked mind.

2.

The arrow goes to school  
 learns civility,  
 to point but not penetrate,  
 count, but not people.  
 The river it floats in  
 lasts longer than water.

3.

Thought Experiment: If Plato's writings had not been recovered during our Renaissance, and came to light only now, how would his strenuous and wordy dialogues be received? In a world of ordinary language philosophers and cognitive

sciences, would the *Timaeus* be tossed aside as a New Age guesswork? Would the whole corpus of his thought seem idle, elitist, relentlessly playful, full of easy ironies and glib victories, undoubtedly amusing, a Wodehouse of the mind?

4.

Bells ring. Centuries pass.

A beeper goes, a truck packs up.

5.

Think nothing. Know.

Do nothing. Be.

In the mysteries, Burkert tells us Aristotle tells us, the initiate comes to a station where *mathein* works no more, and gives way to *pathein*. No more learning: now it's time to experience.

But experience's word, *pathein*, means also to suffer. To endure. To let it happen, let it be. So in a sense Aristotle may not wholly have not intended, learning leads to suffering. But this thing called suffering is the mind's awareness of itself perceiving. Awareness.

6.

Equestrian energy.

Take a white horse

to the end of the world.

Let him go, follow

him all the way back.

In this manner  
find out where you are.

7.

The first act is best  
in every opera.  
Usually the longest too.  
All the rest is afterlude,  
footnote tune,  
filling in the gaps. Drama  
lives in its first deed.

*Im Anfang war die Tat.*

Everything is implied by that.  
Every story happens instantly.  
Like the sky, all there at once.

12 January 2012

= = = = =

Let the music master  
old commercial associations  
Mahler's Seventh soft hell waiting  
hawk hits your window  
calls you back to you call this life?

Soft soft hell, mean sentimental devils  
remind you that there's no lap left  
to burrow in, no Mozart's sister,  
no Cosima.

Music's like that  
leaves you high and dry—  
literal the idiom,  
your hand reaches out for  
even an empty cup.

13 January 2012

## AMONG TREES

1.

If I were people I would run on roads  
I would be ugly thing among the beautiful  
commonplace of trees and cars and wet highways  
wet highways once I heard a voice  
telling me where my death is, Your death  
is not here, it said, your death is in  
another country. Then I will be taken  
out of the equation, the answer will change  
slightly. And their highways too  
will gleam in sunlight after pre-dawn rain.

2.

Wait, I have work to do  
I have buzzing in my ears  
all the cicadas of August  
inhabit me, I am  
a monster of hearing it.  
Listen, I turn random  
noises into language  
for you—not so big a change.  
And you are not so very far.

3.

Unspeakable witness

spoke, saying I am...

“I am deeply affected by where I am, the trees all around me when I wake. How can I not attend to the trees and tell their stories, lost as they mostly are in remembering? The trees are old yogis cherishing their undistracted awareness. They stand. The trees are playful girls shimmying around me in the wind. Cold wind. Often though the trees stay still and look at me. Who can endure the inspection of a tree, they look at me with so many eyes. The yew tree right outside my window, it moves differently from all the rest, different from the wind, it looks in, I fumble among loose metaphors, a tree always makes me feel slipshod, half-finished. Yes, I have windows, yes, I live in a house. But for five or six critical years as a young man I lived in an apartment from whose five windows no blade of grass or any growing thing could be seen. Once in those days I visited a friend in Riverdale and stayed the night, woke and the windows were full of sun and leaf shadows wavering and trees, trees. I began to sob, I cried, I sobbed with resentment at my life, I wanted to be with trees, I confess it now. I am a sluttish Druid, in love with all of them, full of worshipful neglect and shy to touch. A tree is a presence, sheer presence, what the man from Romania called kratophany, the show of power, power of presence for this morning moment taking form. These forms. Around me. Every day they remake my mind.

13 January 2012

= = = = =

What can I do  
with my new mind  
but tell you, tell  
you everything  
I used to do. The kiss  
of silence on us both.

13 January 2012

## **SOMEONE QUOTES ME**

but I don't know where I said it  
somewhere, in someone  
else's mouth maybe,  
or I found it on the ground

a scrap of paper I picked  
up with reverence because  
they told me Jews do that,  
everything might have

the name of God on it  
everything must be lifted  
from the ground and said  
so I said it out loud

onto its own piece of paper  
and you heard so you know  
what name finally got spoken  
because you understood.

14 January 2012



*Inula helenium*

“Elegant pain”

after years

I hear again

the misheard flower

yellow and heals.

14 January 2012

## **RED OCTAGONS**

They pretend to slow down  
they pretend to stop  
but the radio keeps going  
as if the whole car and its man  
were just an afterthought,  
reverb, made by the music.

14 January 2012

## THE CITY OF THE WORLD

has no streets  
a few animal tracks  
spoor, marga, we get to follow  
between trees over rocks  
sand rat paw prints in deserts—

the city of the world  
shimmers in a man's head  
a woman's head  
they think their way  
forward, forums,  
marketplace of all that seems.

Dragon weather over them  
all round them the breath  
of all the dead before them,  
their last breaths linger  
as our atmosphere

the city of the world is ours  
we trudge along our misconceptions  
sticking closely to  
wherever we have strayed before

we open the doors of illusion  
and shelter in vanity

but the world is there  
all round the city  
when we dream sometimes we see it

or sense it dimly  
the way a clam might sometimes intuit  
a mighty ocean around his snug shell.

15 January 2012

= = = = =

Why do I always draw five  
when not a six-point star  
why not Jewry?  
A priestless sect  
perplexed with scholarship—  
must have room for me.  
Pure linguistics and smart food.

15 January 2012

= = = = =

Try to calm the angry jogger  
in you. Dying, the play says  
Henry, you're scaring me! Woman's voice.  
Calm the pumping heart—a man  
has only so many heartbeats in him  
assigned by fate—don't use them up  
on flexercise machines. You  
are not a gizmo, you are Time  
itself, beautifully ensorcelled into flesh  
to do the work of Time in one another,  
telos, tell us a story sing us a song  
don't just bounce there with your  
sweat pouring out. What good is sweat to us?  
And what quality of life does a jogger have  
fleeing invisible enemies panting over winter roads?

15 January 2012