

8-2003

augD2003

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "augD2003" (2003). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 906.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/906

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WHEN THE LIGHTS CAME BACK ON

so what are the words I wanted
so badly to be writing but couldn't write
when I was doing something else

with the dark I wanted to be writing?
now that I can be writing all
I have to write about is that.

14 August 2003

“have to write about”

what can someone have
so firmly — or is it loosely,
squirming in the hand — held
that we can write it,

be bold enough to write it
down? Isn't writing
itself the fetter
that holds to have?

14 August 2003

[scrap from an old poem:]

My life is one more of those
novels I never got around to reading
by Malraux or Henry James.

14 VIII 03

DREAMING ALL DAY LONG

How do you spell Rapahannock
or does fear come first
like a quotation from Shakespeare?

Each child will now make one up
and print it neatly on a strip of oaktag
to display above the cakes on sale
at the Mothers' Guild booth in the lobby

but of what building?
No one tells me.
Or who the mothers are.
Is it a battle, a river, the rainforest's
last lost tribe?

15 August 2003

CRITIQUE

This kind of poem is playing with the Mind Train
the way young boys played with their Gilbert or Lionel trains
setting up tracks all over the living room
at Christmas and living for the hot transformer
under their hands the speed the speed and the
crashes they could make happen
when the powerful black locomotive with real steam
leaps off the rails and smashes through Shoebox Town
and scatters the cotton snow around Lake Shaving Mirror.

15 August 2003

[Technological note: Lionel was best for trains, Gilbert for chemistry sets.]

INVENZIONE

The hard thing about making something up
is that you have to get it right.

There are no measurements
except how it fits into the world
like driving a car at full speed through a narrow gap
judging the future by the size of your desire
— either it's perfect or an utter disaster.

15 August 2003

GATE OF HORN

On the feast (yesterday) of the Assumption
of the Body of the Blessed Virgin Mary
living into heaven, someone
unaware of the occasion
was making fun of the Virgin Birth
(another mystery) or not so
much of it as of the forty-some percent
of American Christians who still
believe in it, and of the (even more
ridiculous by the hypothesis)
twenty-some percent of non-Christians who do,
believe in the Virgin Birth.
But what is the hypothesis?
Things are as we think they seem
forever. And what does it really
mean, to believe in something,
something different? Isn't it a story
we just carry in our hearts, a dream
remembered? All dreams are true,
have truth filigreed through the plot line,
images, shadows, she and he, the me
I find in dream. But why did I sit
smiling like (seemingly) all the rest,
amused at the credulity (is that
what it is?) of all those Americans
and not try to find out what they or I
or anyone would really mean

by saying *He was born of a Virgin*,
why would someone want that to be true,
or what even it means, true or not true,
and (under all) if true, what that meant about us,
now, sitting there eating salmon, drinking wine.

16 August 2003

PREGUNTA

When everything starts being
will it be me?

Did the strange white bird
we saw in Millerton
have a role to play
not just a portent
happening to our heads
but an *arriving disappearance*
this quarkish world
no sooner seen than gone?

It changed something,
Looking through old
furniture later we knew
but didn't say This
is why we made the wrong
turn coming down the mountain,
to see this bird now,
never before, white as gull
but not a gull, flapping
like a crow but in no
Guide to Eastern Birds,

to see that bird then
and not know it, but know
we live in the moment
of not recognizing the bird

always the moment
of not knowing at all
but noticing and storing
one more conscious
enigma in the heart
as if we were most
alive when we know least,

the important
thing we have seen.

16 August 2003

PAN

Wait for the bus
it understands
the road

Climb
the stairs they
remember the sky

Movement
is knowing

Everything tells.

17 August 2003

Goose cry
over maple
summer middle
someone
has to get born

17 VIII 03

THE CONVERT

Let it speak

let it decide

this isn't a poem

it is a religion

like Sappho.

Your religion

it just happened

to you,

I love you, this

is your circumcision.

18 August 2003

WAITING THINGS

Myrioi means ten thousand men
or something like them

we share grammar
at least, Lady,
our local magic
is logic,
they all approach you
salivating

the truth of their feelings
the stress of contradiction
—more this, no, more that—
makes out cultura

you know all this already
but till now you didn't
know it from me.

Now you do. That makes me
at last a lover.

18 August 2003

A BOOK OF DOUBT

1.

I keep wondering if this is enough.

Of course.

But is that to the wondering or to the is?

It is.

Which.

Ever.

2.

If you have a word
you don't need an answer.

Or have one already.

Just make yourself
a question that fits.

3.

Cid says he writes "a book a day."

Somebody has to.

He's eighty, and broke, and in Kyoto.

But there's always another day.

4.

I want to help out
but can do it
only by doubt.

All this rainy weather
green mold on the oven mitt.

18 August 2003

BLAGOSLOVENIE

I keep hearing
the tenor sing that
from Janacek's pagan mass.
But who knows
who's being blessed
or what blessed means?

There must be rules of grammar I don't know
number, gender, case,
a drum repeating a intimate remark.

Spoken mathematics
bless me,
I lost my rile
but won the war
bless me,
is that who you mean?

Or what it means
to mean?

Blessed art thou
but art thou not
the fount of blessing?

Bless you, bless you,
a whole book without a single noun.

18 August 2003

WORKSHOP

Distance is so hard,
the phallic paradox of space,

so hard to reach you,
the hard
voices, voices.

Earphones for your head
he said —

we have to learn
the alphabet that angels use
when it's their turn to write down
fast the idle hopes of men.

reworked from 2001 text,
revised 19 August 2003

SPHINXES

I suppose we are lucky we have so much to be afraid of.
I'm still getting used to staircases. Doors. Closets. Hallways.
Cellars. And that's just the spaces. The shapes they do to space
looking up at me with vague amusement,

Their elbows propped in front of them on the bed,
Their breasts swinging loose and rich in the shadow
Their raised torso makes, a shadow I study with terror
All the mysteries I don't want to die not knowing, still wanting.

And that's just a woman stretched across my bed.
My head. What will I do when the real terrors come
Tormenting me with incomprehensible details
The pan of tepid water, the soiled white string, the broken glass?

reworked from 2001 text,
revised 19 August 2003

It's always swiss cheese they give mice in cartoons
presumably so the holes can signify This Is Cheese.

But the poor mice! No cheddar, no feta, no camembert! [20 VIII 03]