

2-2002

## febE2002

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### Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "febE2002" (2002). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 933.  
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## SONATA

*In the heart of measure  
lies a wild surmise*

1.

to have something to say about things at last!

to say at least how many of them there are  
or how big one of them is or how much  
another one weighs or how much  
water it displaces when it drowns

it makes me feel superior to a rock  
that can't ever get out of its dream

yet it makes me feel I can stand firm  
while squadrons of blackbirds are driven far and wide  
eternally repelled by the enemy sky

2.

now here I want to put my hand inside you  
whenever you look at me just like that  
so I won't miss a single gesture on the landscape of your face  
whatever the rest of us might be doing down in there  
in the lost geology of our feelings  
where nothing lasts, where sierras of orgasm  
subside to abyssal plains next morning  
and fog horns sob among snickering gulls

3.

put yourself in my shoes,

things whimper

inside when the toe's too tight,

in Carnival

also the streets are hard the sea is wet

nothing changes but the blood forgets

all these smiling people signify an enormous villainy

the many practice on the few

you do this to me,

you bitch, except there's only one of you

4.

have you ever felt surrounded by a stare?

well I have and it's like living in the wrong part of France

oil refineries and housing projects and people

think La Vache Qui Rit is cheese

the names are right

and everything else is a bad movie, to put it mildly

in terms I can understand

sure I love the wind

even if it's not the mistral

but I'm suspicious of the sun

which has peeked into one too many windows

before it gets to me

poor me is what I mean

out of gas and no car to put it in

5.

People break laws to keep from having feelings,  
always hoping for firecrackers and parades  
of samba dancers prancing from the mirrors  
through the ruins of the public library  
tigers in the tennis court

culture packs its bags  
and flees by night across the borders of the obvious  
into whatever is up there where Canada used to be  
and you could frolic in the built-in skepticism  
of a bi-lingual society, if you call that society.  
My Uncle Owen wouldn't have gone there on a bet,  
Schenley's was good enough for him, *Begin the Beguine*.

22 February 2002

## FANTASIE IN C MAJOR

We have always been here. Rhineland  
not long ago, Vienna the winter  
before that, I licked your stone, rode  
beside the trolley car, all the music  
turns into words here, how can I change,  
all the commodities winter in sweat  
somewhere in the Everglades. We need  
a whole new fucking alphabet  
so many beer bottles on the wall.  
I don't know what's wrong with Schumann  
but love has something to do with it,  
that ruin, color of brass, a river, a bridge,  
Cain and Abel, snowstorm in a crystal ball.  
I see the final end of everything.  
It is a city south from here, a girl  
has a fantasy she rehearses nightly  
St Peter's Dome the obelisk a cat  
prowling through a poem's lines  
deep inside the shadows of a book.

22 February 2002

## WESTERN UNION

Skeleton bushes ruddy already with spring  
telegrams used to be great universities  
say what you know in ten words or less  
they can figure the rest out for themselves  
that's what culture *means* you don't have  
to say everything but here I'm doing it again

I love you for your obsessions, you're bad as springtime  
dependably coming back to that dog bone we love  
lick and somehow forget until a stupid leaf reminds  
by uncurling in chilly sunshine then I love you again

who cares who I mean by you, I don't even know  
who you mean by me, all my authority is what one  
word does to another in this endless nightmare  
we're in by the nature of language

no, I don't know

who *we* means either, I don't know anything  
I just proclaim what's passing through my head  
—a mouth is part of the head isn't it— that's what's  
so boring about these parties, everybody  
has to question everything, we should all go down  
to the Bad Dog Café and watch the strippers  
the last people on the planet with something to say.

23 February 2002

## CONTRA NATURAM

Don't you ever get tired of teasing the trumpeter  
shoving your sunlight down his bell? And the sailors  
with such white ankles sprawling drunk on sidewalks  
hauled home by shipmates, isn't it sad  
that time and weather (one word in French,  
that tells you something) are like a bully older brother  
who won't let one day go by without a punch,  
pinch, pratfall, preacher come to supper  
and all your books get thrown away? And things,  
things keep rhyming with one another (sun  
and trumpet calls, wet ankles and the moon),  
isn't it time for time to let the actual go free  
from the prison of the natural? I'll drink to that  
and sleep till then. Wake me when  
the last resemblance fades from shady thinking.

23 February 2002

FROM BEATNIK SLEEP AROUS'D

Watching it go by before it wakes —  
dream's undercoat protects me  
still a little bit from the day.

An unremembered dream works best,  
a pneumatic sort of hush between  
what was and what is. Both of them

look pretty sketchy now.

Don't be here, don't be now.

Be between.

24 February 2002



## CREPUSCULE DU JOUR

I take it that's the comfortable  
vegetable velvet sort of masturbation  
tide D'Annunzio was after  
in his famous *Dawn shears off*  
*shadow* poem that Bjoerling sang  
brighter than the sunrise it deplored,  
contradiction on contradiction.  
Gin with diet tonic. Be ashamed  
to live among so many secrets  
like rain always looking for some dark  
yielding dusty place to hide.  
Hence planets round their suns,  
hence phantom matter cruising in the sky  
or watching itself go by, the way you sit  
with binoculars trying to hypnotize  
bare locust trees to fill up with birds,  
in scopic lust. I watch your movie till I go blind.

24 February 2002

## THE SUN AND A VIOLIN

Threaded together  
weaving helical  
ascensions every  
glimpse a challenge

the Green Knight  
stands before me  
in the sky  
Die if you dare

tenderness  
I am crying now  
of a young man's neck  
I used to know.

25 February 2002

(This is what John Henry Smelter's first sonata did to me.)

## ON MY WAY

On my way to eternity I went through time  
it took a while  
to understand  
what all the standing meant

waiting for miracles  
waiting for explanations  
that would fit observation and comprehension  
together firmly and raptly

as two bodies know each other  
and all this waiting all this wanting was  
itself the explanation

by the time I was timeless again  
I knew everything I was capable of understanding  
nobody taught me everybody did.

25 February 2002

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On my way to eternity I was timeless a long time  
then I was old. Being young was an alternative  
I hadn't considered till now — being young  
is like a smooth shiny book that lies in your lap  
you can't or wont keep your fingertips from stroking.

25 February 2002

## A MAN NAMED EVERYBODY

A man named everybody came walking through the door  
he led a horse behind him and his shoulders were broad  
he was talking fast as a toilet flushes and his shoes  
looked like they just came out of the store, seemed to me  
the horse was in control, kept nudging his senator  
along with his big dry nose till they stood at the bar.  
Dante for me and Hell for the horse he said or seemed to  
I'm not good at these Near Western accents Ohio  
West Virginia up the holler it might have been Hell for my  
house and I have no horse, there is this animal no man can ride,  
he walks behind me he walks at my side he is me but not mine  
I can do nothing with myself and there's nobody else.  
I think he said that but I'm really not sure, my eyesight is poor,  
I always love talking to strangers so I asked how his tricks were  
and he bought me a glass of something I'd never tasted before,  
friendship is as rare as a rabbit with horns, he said, a word  
spoke in kindness goes further than Galveston, I could barely  
hold onto the rim of his meaning if he actually meant anything,  
it didn't matter, words are nice all by themselves, probably  
I got everything wrong, I love making mistakes with strangers  
where else would tomorrow come from, o please take advantage of me.

25 February 2002

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Remembering the full moonlight last night,  
be the moon. I had to go out and feed  
the birds this morning. Be the birds.  
Surround my life with your particulars

until my skin is Maori'd with your shadows  
and you are utterly inscribed in me. He prayed  
like the ghost of a drowned sailor still  
trying to sweet-talk the sea.

26 February 2002

## SAGES OF CONTRADICTION

Be against everything

lean against everything

be everything you used to hate

be everything.

26 February 2002

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Call as you pass by  
mountebanks of harmony  
trick me at two a.m.  
make me think this music's mine

because I hear it, almost  
it hears itself inside me  
song of the world sad as it really is  
sad as mirrors sad as doors

friendship governments disease  
all spoken by an intelligent violin.  
Then the busker shifts off down the street  
but I am the street and nothing ends.

26 February 2002



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paltry, on the way to  
back  
whatever side that is  
the bearer  
of all our tidings

sunlast pressed down  
into the adam yield

a mark in dirt  
someone walked by

2.

said to be cool of the evening  
when this hearthope  
was the heat of the night

marl pit digger  
whitehand shapes  
all the divinities you could

see try remember  
dress them in your silks  
when nobody's listening

27 February 2002

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The private transaction of revelation.

To witness is sharing  
strip club scope  
solemn high mass

I know you go to mass because the music  
because you look through the mirror

make fun of me I believe in your body

the suddenness of being someone  
all at once who was never before

theogony. You marry my eyes.

27 February 2002

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Why can't I remember what you wore  
the day nothing happened, the blue mountain  
wore a wooden church, the car wore white,  
it was a wedding in Austria we still are married,  
and then I do remember, remember a snapshot  
of the scene and all the colors chevron together  
like an animal waking up and running away.  
Everything goes into the woods. The woods  
wear us to distract the sky, we mill around  
preaching and repenting fast as water flows  
repenting of every touch. Nobody loves today  
me enough. And the woods, the open  
secret of the planet, forever from the north.  
But your eyes are the cities on the plain  
opening doors here and there in all that seen.  
You wore the habit of my thought, I sinned,  
I wanted to make sin my special tree.

28 February 2002

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*Ça se sent*

So here's the problem. There is a space. It is represented on a piece of white paper as a black rectangle of the same proportions as the paper on which it rests, though somewhat smaller. That is to say, everything we say or see is nested in something just like it but a little bigger, a little paler. Where is the edge of anything?

In the black — which, now that we look close and hold the paper still against the shivering of wind, windows open, cars passing, might just be very dark — there are two smaller rectangles, differently proportioned, differently disposed: upright or erect. Windows, they are windows. We see that at once, two of them. Illuminated. One window inhabited by people, one void of apparent person. The disposition of these smaller rectangles — at center and right of the dark oblong, the primary mark they inhabit — suggests, by ease of symmetry, a third window we can't see. Lightless, it might still be there.

Or there may be no window there at all, just uninterrupted busywork of brick or block.

We are fascinated by what we see. What are those people doing? The ones in the window to the right, the ones with most light. How are they using their light?

What is going on in the dimly lit middle of the dark, what we take to be the middle window? Visible enough to see that no one is there. Why is there no one in the room? Because it comes to that. Windows are not just holes in walls, not at all. Windows are the eyes of rooms, the eye the wind comes through, yes, but the eye the room sees out through. The room is looking at us. Why is there nobody in it?

An illuminated room (it must be a room) is looking out at us. It makes us uneasy, this eye that sees us when we're trying to look into that other room and see what those people are up to, when we're trying to decide if all that dark over to the left of the picture conceals yet another window, another room in which something really interesting is going on, something that happens only in the most severe dark.

Uneasy as we may be, we are still compelled (that is not too strong a word for the way we are moved), under all, before all, after all, compelled to gaze hard as we can against that third window, which may not even exist as such. It may just be wall. But what are they doing in there? A dark window is as bad as a wall. What are they doing?

Now the passion play begins, the eternal pantomime of what our minds know to be going on, always be going on, in the dark. There is no mercy in the dark, no suspension of narrative or image. The story plunges on harder than ever, we are stuck with what we remember, we are stuck with everything we ever thought. That is the hard thing about dark windows. Black glass through which we cannot see, which we cannot break, because this is a picture, picture of a glossy smooth black surface from which we cannot successfully detach our thoughts or dissuade them from knowing what they know, can't stop thinking they know, from what must, must, be going on. In there.

28 February 2002

Amtrak

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Dog under ground. Under  
earth a dig is running,  
my fear tracks him realer than radar

trots below me, waits his hour.  
Our hour. The minute when I meet  
the dog under the ground.

Dark fur  
his dusty fur, black teeth  
his dusty mouth, his closed  
cruel dusty eyes.

Only his hunger  
is wet with desire, I feel him pacing  
always with me, undistracted,  
no place for him to go  
but where I go,  
the dog  
beneath the ground.

28 February 2002

NYC

## ARCHITECTURES

If you write words over words  
you enshrine essences  
of what they mean. What they said  
says you now, essences  
in other words  
declare.

The cathedral  
called me. You also  
have one. As to say  
this stone loves you too.  
We have built so many churches  
in France, our churches here  
unseen, they vanish in trees,  
stores, endless boulevards  
of apartment houses, nobody  
needs spires, nobody needs  
shapely spaces, we have hips  
that don't believe in God.  
Are God. The streets  
are the only heaven ever.  
We all know that, we have  
only what we are, one  
another sometimes, a wind  
almost always, the rich answers  
in the hands of a thing.  
It was strangely quiet  
when I crossed Fifth,  
I listened and all the people

passing seemed to listen too.  
To hear the echoes  
of what no one said  
while the dying sun  
still hammered on the glass.

28 February 2002

NYC