

4-2002

aprC2002

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "aprC2002" (2002). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 942.
http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/942

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STANZA

Caught in stanzas caught in rooms
I talked about you last night as if your name
could deliver me into action

a touch

squeezed inside a touch,

making love on stairs,

up yours,

a word whispered in a telephone

to let a nervous interlocutor

know you're the one.

You're the one.

A sky comes over my head

and explains freedom

to the worst of unbelievers.

11 April 2002, Paris

ON THE AVENUE PETER THE FIRST OF SERBIA

All the chestnut trees won't help you, all
the winking blue green crosses
of the pharmacists homeo- or allopath,
all the stone hospitals, all the stone.

The knives on the brasserie tables
will do nothing for you, the cheese
in Fauchon's window, the lovers
nose to nose on the terrasses, noses,
eyes, chestnuts, soap, kisses, rivers,
stone — nothing.

And for you in particular
the sun has nothing special in mind when it goes up
or down, you are a maker of shadows, that's all,
for you the milkman brings nothing, the garbageman
takes nothing away, not for you the album
of stamps from the African colonies, not for you
or anyone like you the chestnut trees in the park,
you long for them, you look at them, they let you do that
but don't ask for anything more,

they're whitening now, in Zurich they will be pink,
in Chicago terribly absent, vanished, and not just for you,
but it's not for you in particular that the senator
sidles by with his bodyguard, not for you
the empty tunafish can on the sidewalk,

the cat was lucky but you're not part of it,
the cat's not for you, everybody's
waiting for somebody else, nobody's waiting for you,
not even death, that's how lucky you are,
luckier than a cat or a chestnut tree,
something for everyone but nothing for you,
none of it is for you, you're free,
free as a dead seagull on the canal,
free as the station when the train is gone,
free as a tree in the wind, free as the day before yesterday.

11 April 2002, Paris

THINGS SEEN

Dante's church

people pray

800 years

one sixteenth of that period

gone by

since I first saw it

visiting the world

the time holds

I am the beginning

of all things I remember

I am the end of everything I did

That is what a mirror is

or a tall window

open on the square

seeing everybody

nobody sees you.

11 April 2002, Paris

A man who would steal a pear from a pear tree
what else might he do?
Should a mother trust him with her child?

Give me a man who can steal
an apple from a linden tree
and he's the one I'll put my money on,

my silver tarnish faith,
and even more than him, a man
who leaves things where they are

too shy (or something) to look
a tree in the eye
hurries by, content with going.

11 April 2002, Paris

ODEON

What was I writing in the night?
Was it green and a dome
like the skull inside which
countless old bronze Buddhas ripen
to a calm thought that frees us all

or was I just weather, a desperate dog
sniffing at love's hindquarters hoping,
was it a word (no hope no fear)
that tells me only I am still here
a broken record and an athlete sprawls,

thrown stone, shatter glass, a book
in the window spills on the curb
read the word tread the word
we gave our lives for this lucidity

red and jungle gold the color the cover
Jules Verne zeppelin undersea a sky
full of coconuts

 a baffled imagination
heals itself by counting things

colors, German visitors, dirty nylon flag.
Maybe I really didn't fall.

He tried
to put me together before I was born
eager for the park, the beautiful, the pond.
Feed ducks, think theory — I'll be all right,
it is a city, it can take care without me,

but needs me to upset its balance, city,
boil carrots in coffee, shout
incomprehensible subjunctives in the street
just in case you're there to hear them,
hear me, be bad, louche behavior of foreigners
renews the city, o please listen to me,
flash your eyes to make me think you understand,

a word is the opposite of what I mean,
sheds from my desire as the apple absorbs
every frequency of light but red.

What it gives back.

You get what is left whenever feeling happens
no wonder you won't talk to me.
Wasn't it here I first met you, other end
of the couch, crowded bus, feet
join under one cushion, how, no smoking,
something happened here between us
long ago we wake to now.

12 April 2002, Paris

SOUS LE SCEAU D'AVICENNE

This recital
from which spirit
rises,
 mira,
spirit is what is told,

the recitation of verity
is what comes out of the mouth

on the rue Jacob the rue
des Saints-Pères the intersection
the schanigarten of this medicine

sit and ponder.

Look at those teenage angels
bellybuttoning across the street

for wisdom is a house with seven gates
seven turnstiles
a wide intersection full of bicycles

wisdom is everybody going somewhere different
going fast

 this street I came long ago to see
because so many people lived and some still do.

2,

the visionary recital the door
open on a courtyard
young chestnut trees and a redhead
reciting his catechism
kilims spread and Sirius overhead
brass faucet on the old stone horse trough

mild night on the planet of probation
coming. Fitful
lunch beneath the school of medicine.

12 April 2002, Paris

The ordinary things

skeptic

grain in a bowl bowl in a window

words that sound like things

and having heard the chemical

marriage when the thing comes along

and meets the word

and the child

suddenly conjugates reality

this word long heard

with this bright new thing

unioned each

enriched by the suchness of the other

inexhaustible delight

that *this is that*

this feeling in me

is what others spoke of and now it's mine

all reverence and submissiveness

stems from those silken nuptials,

mysticals, the word and its thing

the authenticity

when convention and perception meet.

13 April 2002, Paris

NATURAL

How poetry a natural base if no one sees the moon
and the sun is weather forecast smile and rain
just an irritant and thirst unknown and hunger
a political remark?

How Lorca now and a horse
a road? Somewhere else
there is a moon a man
with dusty feet on a white road, a sparrow
a fountain. Not here.

Sometimes I think
poetry keeps our contract with that place
a deposit of faith, a vatican of ordinary words.

13 April 2002, Paris

JESUS EPUISE RETOMBE

Among the stones. The stories.

At this station he
exhausted falls again

down on such stone. The word
dejected sprawls
among the shadows of the columns

shadowy frescoes a man
struggles with an angel hard
but the angel almost

smiles. The Angel Almost.
What do you do
when they struggle against you

and you are above it all
but love every moment
every man of them,

you, a god among men,
an angel wrestle-dancing a young Jew.
We are touched in the hollow of the thigh.

We fall.

This is incarnation.

Born among rocks

We are love again, no word

but what the soft warm

hollows of our mouths

speaks. To have used

up the whole dream and be born.

To be here again,

no further, but no further away.

13 April 2002

Saint-Sulpice, Paris

THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE WORLD: SAINT SULPICE CHAPTER

1.

Before the English stole geography, stole the earth,
The Zero Degree Meridian passed through Paris.
Right through this church — down the wall across the floor
A thin brass line. A brass line before they stole the measure.

2.

If you sit in the angel chapel and look down the nave
You see a marble panel, ruddy, intricately patterned,
A beachscape, you think, a view of the pleasant
Frightening place where the land meets the sea.
Late in the 19th century painters happened to see this panel
And impressionism happened to be born.
Secret of their art: if you can see this, all can be shown.

3.

In this church were baptized long ago
The Marquis de Sade and Charles Baudelaire.

13 April 2002, Paris

LOVE STORY

I am a city as you deal with me
room for you plenty and measureless streets
stone lawn electric white
but unreliable the way a city is sometimes
every fucking thing is closed.

13 April 2002, Paris

THE DESIGN

One to wonder

Two to do

Three to threaten

Four to get

Five to fight

Six to success

Seven to save

Eight to wait

Nine to know

And Ten to tell.

Now pick up the phone and remember.

14 April 2002, Paris

And when it's done
a boulevard is always crowded
things move
like words overheard
in Alabama, two
old crackers talking
about what neither of them knows.

14 April 2002, Paris

POSTCARD

It isn't that everything has to happen again,
it isn't. It is that it never stopped happening,
it never stops. That's what the hand
said to the thigh and the thigh agreed, adding
A door is not the same as a real conversation.

14 April 2002, Paris

PLACE DES VOSGES

Kissing passersby again
in Sunday traffic
all those sweet babies
the pigeons the sparrows
a perfectly dry fountain
this pure white dust
the grass. The forbidden.
The kiss the pass the kiss
they all go by lured by
such kisses, whose, air's
love's forcefield, starsex
the breeze hugs them
as they move, caresses you
as you sit still. Suddenly
nowhere to be but on earth.

14 April 2002, Paris

VITRAUX

Serenity of windows
vaults the all
above them gloom or color
tourists trudge through Our Lady

what are they looking for
in this vast place, a hint
of heaven, colors of the overheard
pulse of God's heart

splayed open into light?
And what am I looking for
looking at them,
is seeing always looking for a brother?

14 April 2002, Pars