

8-2002

augA2002

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "augA2002" (2002). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 967.
http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/967

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LACTUCA

A leaf of this lettuce
left for your head
and one to curl
around the cup of your buttock

and you are back where Gihon starts,
wrong side of the tracks in Eden
where tough girls and their men
stayed put when Eve and Adam left,

it takes more than an angel
with his tool on fire
to get you out of town

I go there in dream to visit you
but you're there most of the time
among the passionate vegetables

—imagine how wild your lovers are,
and how the news gets ardently analyzed
every day in the green agora!

Adam obeyed but you and your people
stonewalled in Paradise,
held the high ground you called
The Innocence of All Sensation,

hence never sinned and never sorrowed.

So a leaf is only for the cool of it
against your skin, the light touch
of what grows by itself in the world,

you wear it or discard it as you choose
as someone might listen to music or turn it off
depending on his body's weather,
shameless, tough-minded, ergo beautiful.

1 August 2002

IT ALL COMES OUT IN THE WISH

says the Analyst, the waking whispers
tell you *this*, this is what I want.
And then you know. We don't
need doctors we need courage
to kiss our wishes every morning
and write them down.

Study this bible
thereafter: in these foiled particulars
or granted favors discover
the features of the Founder's face:
your mind asleep inside desire.

1 August 2002

LA VIE

la vie
l'invite

l'envie
t'inscrit

ton thé
t'attend

la vie
m'amende.

1 August 2002

THE IDENTITY

I am a small stone statue
wrapped in an ancient piece of
yellow silk. I am seven inches tall
and am Virmanlis the Leper God
whose ruined body shows the soul
of anyone who stands in front of me:

I rot with you, or suddenly am smooth.
I represent you, citizen — when you see me
you look inside yourself. I am the fulcrum
of the world, for I depend on you.

Of limestone someone made me
with goat horn horns and amber eyes.
Not even I know where the silk comes from
you wrap me in each night,
Carasoy or far away or will there be
a bird in your bush again
nobody knows.

But I know why
it's yellow: cowardice.
For only cowards notice everything,
fear everything. And that color
means the eternity of Earth.
I am detestable and dependable,
I will never leave you.

Hold me in the mercy of the cloth
against your cheek and breast even
and know that somewhere close and permanent
is one who knows you as you really are.
We heal each other with our spit.

1 August 2002

THE MEANS

Will I ever get another chance
to say this now?

No,
so here it is, a weapon
that will work
against bad magic,

especially the kind
you make against yourself
all night and call it dream

which should mean gladness
leg over a horse's back
and far away.

Your mind's in charge.

Attune it
and the world comes
tame alongside

it has no choice
but be what you will.

1 August 2002

new Lammas

COME HOME WITH ME

So much of an invitation
as might a tired merchant seaman say
come home and find his wife asleep
and lie down beside her and not know
a few minutes later which was which
since both are tangled in the trackless sleep

dreaming of the sea is everybody's business.

1 August 2002

NIGHT'S SUNDIAL

Finding my way to the place
the place helped. Trying to stay
and build a house there
(or whatever it is we mean
when we say I live here)
it was the distance that helped,
the tension of where I was
as against where some others were
or wanted me to be, the wind
say, or the shadows on my own
lawn always pointing away.

1 August 2002

PROCESSION

All of them on their way somewhere else,
foundlings, property of the state,
raindrops brushed off a madman's windshield

driving fast. Who are these people
who wake with me?

We share

not a language but a need to speak,

does language come later?

They have no teeth, their wrist watches
have been taken from them, their eyes
are all they're left with,

they shout with their eyes,
or is it something else, the bone
of which all our cries are hung,
who are they when they cry,

they still have their skin,
some of it and some of them,
the meat of feelings, because a skin
means being someone
different from the next one

from the one before,
they try to dance as they go,
travel waltz, terror czardas,

hurrying to get there
before the time is up

and they have no time.

They move along, driven? drawn?
by someone else's certainty,
the boots of their jailers, the terrible
clean fingers of accountants,
the monsters that stir in the abyss of human law.
Whoever it is, it's always one of us,
we do this, one of us
is always the one, one who does not know
what he's doing and who he's doing to,
but he's the one, the one I fail to recognize.

2.

What is working with me here?
Who are these people
in whose midst I have been walking
for fifty years, not of them, not against them,
always a part of them and always apart,

Holocaust or withered rose,
how can I know how long my arms are,
how far away this skin in
I think I touch?

sometimes it's me in the movies
seeing the camps liberated
the dead walk out
and look at me with living eyes,
I am a child, I think of the house

that Ussher built, how “they had put her
living in the tomb” and all that world fell down,

and sometimes her skin is your skin
close against me when we’re almost asleep,
and I feel those stories coming towards me again,
on cardboard and rough manila paper and inky foolscap
from the ruined schoolroom of the heart,

and then I have no choice but to read them
out loud inside myself, as if I wrote them, as if
this were my story I was telling

and it is nobody’s, all of them, walking
till they stop, stopping till I hear them,
and I can never know who they think they’re talking to,
what they take me for,
and how long ago this single moment is.

2 August 2002

WHAT ZEUS'S ORACLE AT DODONA TOLD ME

Is there any certainty? *Forgetting.*

Or it may have been *forget it.*

Whatever

I feel or know will be forgotten

forever or a little while or now.

And I will not know why I am speaking.

But you will know, you'll always know,

the link that synapses between us

will tell you what I no longer know,

the certainty is that something always happens,

nothing ever lasts.

Put that

in your imported flower pot

and let it grow, lavender of Occitan

or hot Diego basil, everything

grows out of anything, haven't I told you

a thousand times already,

every tune is made of only that.

Sing it, with me, you don't

need all the colors,

only this drop of dew or whatever it is

left on the lawn

that holds so much morning in itself,

the rest is up to your painter's eye
your violinist's nimbleness in time,
to go there and be very there and never stay.

Then stammer out the glory that you see.
I almost believe you.
Since if it's here it's everywhere.

2 August 2002

BETWEEN

Between forgetting and remembering
suddenly is a breathless gate.
God you think in the bronze pin
on which this gate's hinge turns.

But only love give access to the mind —

that is the bitter truth the paltry philosophs
and busy mages work so hard to deny
or sugarcoat with reason and apocalypse.

2 August 2002

OLD ORACLE

They had a thing called a juke box,
a boy would go shove or slip coins in it
to make it play a song
whose words or title formed a text
he meant to be delivered
as if from him to the girl
sitting upright in their booth
anxious to hear what texts he means
but anxious not to show it,
sits knees temporarily close together
and smiles down at her rum and coke
till he finishes his cabala and comes back.

Then they scrutinize each other's eyes
while the machine pronounces
what the boy thinks he thinks about her
and she hears what she wants to hear
and there they sit, the oracle accurate enough
to keep their thighs touching under the pink
formica table gleaming with spilled drinks.

I spent my afternoons and nights in that country
studying the operations of this oracle
which I gradually learned how to operate
girllessly all by myself, slid nickels in
closed my eyes and jabbed a finger randomly
and listened to what the world might say to me.

How strangely different the same text
means to one from what it means to two.
What an extraordinary machine that was,
meaning dwells in the receiving.

And when at four a.m. the bars would close
I'd walk exalted through the humid streets
able to interpret everything I heard or saw
as messages hurrying to meet me,
newly wakened seagulls flapping from the harbor.

2 August 2002

<TWO FRAGMENTS FROM SOME OTHER DAY>

Liberty

Liberty is a painting
you find scrapped in the street
you take it home and study it a while
then paint your own face into the picture
adding the eyes last.

The Kingdom of Heaven

The kingdom of heaven
is like a towel
that wiped the face of a dying man
then dried out in the sun.
Now on some grey morning
it will finally be ready for you.

(transcribed 2 August 2002)

Rose of those

someone looking at me
doesn't see me at all
something listening carefully
hears nothing

let go and you will have me in your hands.

2 august 2002