

11-2002

novD2002

Robert Kelly
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "novD2002" (2002). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 997.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/997

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.

BIRDS

knowing what they do
we suppose
they talk so much
because they're always listening

12 November 2002

ON DOCTOR LACAN'S DOORSTEP

he gets a lesson
in humility

Get better
if you can
and come to me again

white-haired compassion —
what color was it
when it was brown?

12 November 2002

CRUELTY

Is it cruelty that lives in the cellar?

Or is it only the staircase

leading down to the simplest fear.

12 November 2002

DIFFICULTIES

I don't have enough things
to carry my message
so I have to use words.
Each of which has a message
of its own, so I have none.
Or what little I meant
in the first place gets
drowned out. What a place
the first place must be.

Words say their piece
and I have told you nothing.
All is to be done again,
I begin to tell you,
this time I will trust things,
only things, few as they are,
I will cart them towards you
so you see them moving,
catching the light
of the clouded sun,
they sway a little,

a lawn chair in strong wind,
here they are, canvas,
a blue egg from a collection
of unhatched birds,
the old grocer's pencil stub
he used to reckon sums

on brown paper bags
how much to pay
for all your vegetables,
a snapshot of his grave
his wife beside it
holding some other
country's flag, not crying.

12 November 2002

THE MAN

the man in the dry cleaners
also is dead. The antique
auto show is Sunday.

A little girl sits on the curb
reading a letter from Heaven.

Is it clear now,
the thing I mean to say?

12 November 2002

OPTIONS

I could watch my step
till I was there
I could link morality
to a broken artery
I could call a cab
by some other name
and call it poetry
or stay at home
and do that laundry
for the dead
we call remembering

I could pour a glass
of water on the table
clear clear
pretty as it runs
unrippling across
all the things I could do

I could feel my way
along the sky
the way you do
in foreign cities
why are girls
never interested in clouds

I could agitate
for new liberties
if I could imagine them
I could go out for a drink
and break windows

I could keep the laws
of some country
I have never entered
and call it philosophy

I could stand in the park
barefoot and crying
till a crowd of loiterers around me
knew all I had to say
about the Messiah

and then He would come
He'd be there in a cloud of glory
a block or two away
over the little park

and they would notice him
before I did
since I have to turn my back
to Him to talk to you.

13 November 2002

THE FUGITIVE

It's almost ready for me to be somebody else
the clock is a runaway horse anyhow
black running through the autumn trees
I step off the path right out of its way
a man can walk more easily than a horse
through undergrowth, I walk through spaces
time knows nothing about

then I'm in a clearing
back on radar again and off to an identity
stable and namable, job friends religion
sexual orientation, my feet on the ground
and my head no longer in anybody's cloud.

The clouds are in me now. I have hidden
the whole sky in my heart.
Its all-purpose everyday light is inside me.
It makes me a friendlier-seeming person
if you bump into me I'm likely to smile.

13 November 2002

PERILS OF SLEEP

I dream some twenty lines of a long narrative poem by Quincy Troupe, composing it as I go along. It tells about a beautiful girl he meets (I write in his voice) on a plane to or from California. During the flight, they become deeply involved. Her hair is very beautiful, a natural henna, amber roses in deep shadow. They talk forever on their little flight. They never touch. His love is so pure. That seems to be the point of his poem, or the unspoken judgment on reality towards which it reaches. And he is very glad — as he writes — not at all rueful. at this persistence on the spiritual level. And I am glad — as I read what he is writing through my dream — at the same abstinence from the flesh's sweet ordinary habits. Ordinary of the flesh. No. No. But why were we pleased, he and I? And where is she now?

14 November 2002

AU DEHORS

Even if there are two
Foreign Language Exchange Tutors
standing outside my window
speaking Foreign in sunlight

I would still have something to say.
I just can't put
your finger on its at the moment
like an Englishman in Ireland

lost in uneasy ownership of words.

14 November 2002

OVERT IMPLICATIONS

Blue flags lose wars.
Eritrea, Gallipoli.
It's the red that wins.
Green is very poor.
Sad lands fly green.
And yellow's dangerous
—Spain, Germany—
green is the lost world,
red is first world,
roman, imperial purple,
rose. Green means poverty,
purity disguised
as fruitless trees,
I give you warning.
If we really were fierce
imperialists we would
change our stripes & stars
to yellow stripes and
golden stars — we would be
the three primary colors
and rule the world
and conquer you,
all of you, only you.
The white of flag
is all our gentleness.

14 November 2002

[*ILYA MUROMETZ*]

In the few weeks before his death, he began to review all his works, review in mind, just thinking, running through. And an uneasiness began to overtake him; so many books, so many thousands of pages. Someone had spoken them all, but was it he? Had he ever, once even in all those pages, said himself? On the stereo Glière's third symphony was playing, a friend of his, a conductor, had recorded it and given it to him. He was listening, and suddenly, swayed by the quiet sumptuous orderliness of the music's yearning, he found himself back in the little basement room where fifty years ago he used to sit and read and begin to write. And there he had been listening to this same symphony, the one subtitled *Ilya Murometz*, that he had borrowed from a friend, another friend, so long ago, and he could see the old record jacket of the LP, burgundy leatherette, gold-stamped, and hear it then and hear it now. Who was he, after all?

Was it he who had written all those books in the half century since? Or had he slyly, sadly, spent all those years constructing, like an even more secretive Pessoa, another person who would stand revealed in the poems? Against Pessoa's heteronyms, his own autonoms, his own name used for a self transported to the strange antipodes of language where I means you and you means someone who has never yet been found.

And all those books, he began to fear, spoke that other man. My other me, he thought. And how sad it is that this own me, this radical mistake, this ordinary working self, would never show itself, would never be known (loved or hated, didn't matter) except through this contrived person who, he more and more thought, came to expression in what he fancifully described to himself and others as the Work.

Listening to the soaring sad academic music, he suddenly was with himself, back then, the boy in the basement, he was with himself, with his myself, the real one, the one so moved by the music, movie music it could be, yearning for her, for whom? Back then it would have been some unknown woman he yearned for, but now, now, the strangely familiar music he hadn't

heard in all those years made him yearn for himself, the lost one, the one who felt so much and never spoke, only like an artificer made some other voice, a man of wood and wind, to carry words. Whose words. This man he was even now beginning to be again, sleeping towards death, he knew it, he knew all the signs. This man. Would he ever speak?

14 November 2002

A WHOLE FAMILY EATEN BY SNAILS

They were or at least I hope they were
dead before it happened.
It was one of those fatal picnics
in high summer by the river
not far from Hudson
nobody knew what to do
and nobody was hungry
they sat around, it wasn't even Sunday
watching butterflies maneuver
among the wasps who supervised
the family food laid out on napkins
under a decent apple tree
but nobody was eating
how strange their fate was
because usually it's the eaters get eaten
as the Upanishads explain
but here they were, on Saturday
blue skies and yawning
mother and two daughters and
of course himself among apple boughs
ignoring the luncheon meat and mayonnaise
what else can you do
they weren't even from the city
just down the road
with their own trees and lawn their own dog
they left home to watch the property
and here they were only a hair's breadth
of longitude from home
bored to death at the clever river even
the river that flows both ways at once.

Often I wonder what must have happened
but these things are more mysterious
even than war or lending your affection
for a few years to some lady then back it snaps
like a homing pigeon in old war newsreels
sailing in over the apple trees with a vital
communiqué strapped to its soft knees,
I don't know, they were alive and then they weren't,
the snails wouldn't kill them, it's not
in their nature to kill large Americans
or anybody else, as far as I know
but what do I know, they must have been dead
when the snails came along and got to work
surprised but very hungry
just the opposite of the family
and they, lacking the vine leaves of Burgundy
or even next autumn's apples here
began to eat and ate
and what they left, it must have been months
they were at it, how one family sustained them
all that time, maybe they had help
from other friends and obscure personnel
what they left fitted into a small tin box
with a hinged lid, I know this
because I shoveled the remains
into the box, it was mine, it had
recently held candy mints
I shoveled them in with an old postcard
from a friend in Peru happened
to be in my pocket, I didn't
want to touch them, scooped them

into the box and brought it home
a whole family smelling of peppermint
bone and gristle still sticky from snail
and who can tell the man now from the girls.
There are times I open the box
and stare at the remnants
wondering what really happened
how did the life force the élan vital desert them
or was it a hunting party of rare
Adirondack wolves came along
or the midday plague we read
about in the Bible, is it the Bible,
anyhow they passed away
in the middle of life
and the snails in their patience
quietly ate most of them up,
understood them,
I'm running out of breath
the long sorrow of families
overwhelms me, I'm sorry,
my country, my river.

15 November 2002

[The title and general sense and the tin box arose in a dream that woke me about 7.30 after an otherwise good six hour sleep disturbed once by a mouse knocking over tiny bottles of essential oils.]

A NEW SCIENCE

and how long will it last
a new science I bring you
from where I made it up
broken with rapture
like a word misspelled
left overnight on the blackboard
and the children weep

or the soup has too much milk
too little salt
 their tears (your tears)
make up for it
but can you take on
your conscience what makes them cry

the science I remembered

from another world
before you fell from heaven
and distracted me with yours

mine was a fire
you could listen to

a flame that spoke like music
(trumpet, oboe, cello, horn)

a light that fell in letters
all over your skin

the original alphabet
you divided later in your anxiety

into letters and numbers
but they were all together then

alphabet of the actual
and not a sign in sight

O you and your signs
your words when we had skin

and I don't know who you are
I'm blaming, gentle exiles in my exile

all the milk of you
I can't help, I am the permanent
child of this place
love me I let you

live in what I understand.
This is a stone
this is a wolf lapping up the soup.
Something spilled.

Something is left.

16 November 2002

I HAVE TO BRING IT HERE

and keep it here
right here

I have to have it
where it is
and only here
not another place

the lean November snow
comes down on this brown field

it describes the only world

there is no other place

a candle breathing in the wind —
try that hard to be where I am.

16 November 2002