

11-5-2013

novC2013

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### Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "novC2013" (2013). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 16.  
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no matter, no matter how many years,  
the manumission of memory  
I appeal to the court,

forget me  
in the forgiveness that is like fire,

what did they use to fire their ovens  
to bake the bricks, the ruddy mud  
strengthened with straw,

for the least thing holds the mass together,  
straw from upstate, from where I am now,  
and the sumptuous meadows crowd with grass,  
and the cornstalks of November,  
and the smell of straw

on which the ram  
and his kindred bed down, the sheep  
of Wurtemberg idle on the hill  
virtuously grazing on the actual,

and I smell the straw of Brooklyn, straw  
an immigrant like all the rest of us,  
Samuel and Owen and Thomas,  
straw, straw.

And in the earth  
even, the memories do not abandon,  
we taste the dead inside the roots

of what we eat, the dead  
inside us take flight in our music,  
give their sermons in our dim poetries,  
and to them we speak and write and carve  
something into something else  
and call it ours.

We are theirs,  
straws left over from their grassy days,  
from their wheat and barley,  
the sloppy music we remember  
from all their decent intervals,  
*tonus Peregrinus*, neums of a  
song half sung through crying,

so who am I

I said  
meaning  
what do I remember?

all that happened in and around me  
is another animal,

one more  
running away  
over a hill I can't follow,

they throw straw

on the fire  
to make smoke, the smoke  
tells them things, smoke signals from the Vatican?  
no, the broken-down old Irishmen  
who landed in Vinland  
carrying their silence and their crucifixes,  
who lived among the Indians and said no word,  
monks all of them,  
womanless, childless,  
wordless in God's silence,

what was there to say?  
They huddled over little fires,  
tossed dry grass in  
for some sweet smoke,  
or in autumn, cold like now,  
roared their fires with husks and cobs and straw,  
cob for the slow and straw for the blaze,  
and were content.

We live in their smoke,  
all the beautiful old confusions of Europe,  
odic force and Christian values,  
chivalry and blue flower,  
swirl in their campfires,  
monks, madmen,  
what did they leave behind them

to infect us when we  
in our turn got  
washed up on the shore.

Venus mercenaria, the common clam,  
by the millions even in these  
scant salt waters up the Hudson,  
their names, their names on everything,

and what would be the Latin for this hour,  
cold knees. remembering Brooklyn,  
what a brick feels like  
plucked out of cold mud  
with the grass blades still clinging,

what is the cure for memory,  
for looking at this world and seeing another?  
America. Sure, the whole place is a church  
but who knows to what god?

## THE DOG

*(for the new Tarot)*

It doesn't love anybody  
and nobody loves it.

It is ugly  
the way a man is.

Always ready  
for the next thing.

The next thing makes  
us ugly, he is ugly,  
stupid and fierce.

Like a man.

He stands  
on four legs, stolid,  
ready for the next thing,  
he faces us directly  
like a man,  
straight ahead,  
not looking up.

His name is Ready,  
Ready Dog.

Behind him we see  
if we can break the almost  
hypnotic ill-will of his glance  
two whaleback hills  
left from a recent  
glaciation. A dog

**in a landscape  
tell us all we need  
to know.**

**The earth  
is not malevolent,  
not stupid, not fierce.  
And everything has happened  
already,  
so there's nothing  
to be ready for.**

**The Dog means  
don't do it  
whatever it is,**

**The Dog  
means a broken record  
of a song you never liked  
they played all through  
your childhood.**

**Don't do it. The Dog  
means your husband  
will beat you, your wife  
cheat, your children  
convert to ugly religions.**

**The Dog means the wrong god.**

**4 November 2013**

## THE CELLAR DOOR

The cellar door  
stands open.

It leads down  
to a little Galilee  
between the earth and  
how much of heaven  
fits in a house,

a between place  
like between your eyes.

Such words  
we rest on things,  
hoping they don't  
slip off by night.

It is day now,  
you can see this  
innocent aperture  
leads gently down—  
would you go down there  
with me  
if I call you  
by the name of another?

2.

Why should we lie.

There are so many ways  
into a single house.

I offer the low path,  
humid, cool down there,  
whitewashed stone walls  
gentle menace of furnace,  
sump pump, dust.

Cool dust,  
not so different  
from remembering.

3.

The picture  
is out of breath.

It just wants you  
to go in.

Humble yourself  
to the low  
ceiling of the actual.

Talk to whoever  
you meet down there.

Later you can  
help him up the stairs.

5 November 2013

## THE TREE

The tree is named Marie.  
She stands slim and tall  
out of uncertain shrubbery.  
Slim but not so  
young is all that —  
even the slightest tree  
can be old, smart  
and cool and free,  
can say what she  
likes and what she means.

She is unusual  
in answering to a name —  
usually things and silent  
processes leave  
such absurdities to us.  
But she consents.  
She raises her head  
to heaven and  
consents and consents.

Everything happens to her  
but nothing happens to the tree.  
How slim she moves  
slow in the whirl around her,

**if we didn't have to  
believe so thick in time  
we could see her dance.  
Accomplish for yourself  
her assent  
and time will stop.  
Any tree can tell you that.**

**5 November 2013**

## THE PROPHET

His prophecies all come true  
in and as the children  
round him.

People call them  
his daughters  
but we know better —  
these little girls  
are all of his fathers,  
a man needs many  
fathers,

    especially a man like him  
with long beard, baldheaded,  
words in his mouth,  
speaking for the gods.

He is a prophet,  
he sleeps all the time.  
All around him  
his fathers are playing  
sprightly, tender,  
doing deep intelligence  
in the sunshine  
of his brow.

**What can this mean?**

**It means that prophecy**

**is truth**

**and truth**

**a kind of dream**

**that has us**

**and we wake.**

**5 November 2013**

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**I thought it would never come to this  
but the tree is standing,  
the sky supported by it,  
the earth patient as never before.**

**Truly it is now.**

**I hear a him and a her  
love-palavering  
beneath the falling leaves.**

**The elements align  
as if this solid world  
is just their sleep,  
and whatever happens in the wind,  
our minds, is just  
their pillow talk.**

**Some birds fly by,  
it must be morning —  
could the world be  
in love with me?**

**Sunlight shouting in the trees.**

**5 November 2013**

## THE SHOE

Gurdjieff said you could  
cover the world with leather  
or just put on a pair of shoes.  
Same effect for you,  
different for the planet.

This is not that kind of shoe.  
Dainty, tall, needle-heeled,  
dainty, faintly silly, the kind  
that goes with New Year's Eve  
and empty champagne glasses  
littering the lawn  
of Schuyler House years ago  
no, wait — that's  
just a memory,  
just an ordinary  
mental thing  
no leather.

A shoe has very little memory  
though a lot it could remember,  
a shoe gradually takes on  
the deformation of the foot  
and does a little damage  
of its own,  
slowly though,

slow.

**This shoe  
(any shoe)  
is waiting for you.  
If the shoe fits,  
we say, little reckoning  
how rare that is  
and what terribilità  
when that happens,  
a good fit,  
the primal wound,  
the promised land  
invaded, a well  
in the desert, hold me,  
love scalds me,  
they scold me, old men  
with beards,  
jabbering prophecies.**

**A shoe  
is always listening.**

**In the picture  
the shoe is patent leather  
and gleams like coal  
gleams like calm sea at night,  
all the comparisons**

fit neatly in its last,  
snug in its pointy toe.  
There is no living  
being in this image —  
an absence speaks,  
the implied woman —  
all dressed up, or off  
in bed now or  
dancing barefoot  
on the lawn at Schuyler  
House years ago,  
no, no,  
no memory, no  
more than me and you,  
remember, on the lawn,  
when you said I felt  
like the wind, no, stop,  
the shoe is empty.

That's what it means.  
Think about everything  
that is missing  
while all the rest  
is still here.  
Shoes are about going,  
an empty shoe  
is about being gone.

**Think deeply  
about absence,  
permanence,  
the sea at midnight,  
the empty rowboat,  
the champagne, grass  
stretching over the prairies,  
wind styling the grass  
vanishing in it,  
the wind. The wind.**

**5 November 2013**

## THE HUSBAND

*(Tarots)*

He holds a hammer in his hand.

He holds a wounded sparrow in his hand.

He holds a yardstick in his hand.

He holds a letter in his hand he hasn't finished reading.

*And never will.*

He holds a key in his hand.

He holds an antique ormolu clock on his hand.

*He tells old time.*

He holds a book in his hand, it's open, pages riffled by wind.

He holds a kitten curled up on his palm.

He holds a photo of a lost love in his hand.

*He has forgotten her name.*

He holds a mirror in his hand but does not look at it.

*Who knows what he would see?*

He holds an ear of corn half-eaten in his hand.

He holds a bottle perhaps of water in his hand.

*He is sustained by the simplest things.*

He holds a rifle in his hand.

*Does he know how to use it? Not sure.*

He holds a butterfly net in his hand.

*He feels ridiculous but he loves things.*

He holds his hand out and a dragon-fly lands on it.

**He holds his father's cane in his hand.**

**He holds a big map of China all open and dangling.**

**He holds a silk stocking draped across his wrist.**

**He holds a branch of holly in his hand.**

**He holds a wad of paper money in his hand.**

**He holds a pair of scissors in his hand.**

**He holds a bell in his hand.**

**He holds a dogleash in his hand but no dog is there.**

**He holds a wooden flute in his hand.**

**He holds a red ball in his hand.**

**He holds a kitchen strainer in his hand.**

**He holds a stone in his hand.**

**He holds nothing in his hand.**

**5 November 2013**