

12-2006

decF2006

Robert Kelly  
*Bard College*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts](http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "decF2006" (2006). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 758.  
[http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts/758](http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/758)

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](mailto:digitalcommons@bard.edu).

## 16. K.451

Her voice is the same as his voice  
said the tree I feel it in my limbs  
my body crawls with information and

Just and. All the rest  
is things trying to sing, stuff  
trying to mean.

Hylomorphic symmetry,  
things trying to make sense  
perfect but alive  
the way a whole sky fits into a lake  
always anxiety to say more.

More. The ripple  
runs through you,  
not the spine  
that common highway  
but through the subtle  
strange and devious  
pathways,

meat is made of undergrowth  
sly asides, massacres and touch,

trust, that's where the signal runs,  
politics *is* physiology,  
look at any Vatican  
and feel inside your skin  
— but skin is just the beginning —  
the organ tones of someone doing business,  
selling the clouds, buying your time  
with the smell of roses,

o Christ what a mystery  
it is to be alive at all.

& then, my gorgeous little ampersand  
with your cute bottom you  
impersonate the next obligation in my job

and we agree to call it love, love,  
since what else is there to talk about

it all comes back  
to the simple minute underneath the tree  
when you and what you see  
turn out to be two

can't blame that on the snake  
and the sky swells out above the lake  
and nothing fits any more,  
sobbing gentlemen sit in shadow  
scratching their stubble and write the bible

there has to be a record of these early days  
when dualistic –hence impure– vision first arose  
when everything went on inside  
and only later spilled, slopped out  
over the rim of the cup

the way the sky (I'm sorry  
to keep boring you with that blue tune)  
slips out of the lake at last and runs away

night, stars, mist, and we  
call this behavior a child

'not paying attention'  
and slap him once or twice  
not too hard the way  
the branches slap against  
each other in wind  
a slip or slap here or there  
and he really doesn't mind  
do you?

II.  
Around a round building  
build a round pyramid  
of fertile stone  
what could it be

Fuse  
my shadow to your body—  
that's all the alphabet  
is every asking, like Spain,  
seductions, Carib vistas,  
driveways paved with shells  
crushed white Atlantic  
sunlight all those lives  
crunch under my feet  
and you blame me, calling  
me your desert island.  
But I am house. Build  
your house of me.

Name some more little countries,  
I have to struggle against your tenderness,  
that dinner made up of nothing but dessert.

But there is an idle island where it is bare  
where birds are the secretaries of the sky  
and scribble nonsense on the sand  
while they scream into their airy phones  
on their eternal lunch break, shadows,  
and we walk among their doodles, shadows  
ever changing, but our business, duty even,  
is to make sense of it, become  
rabbis of it, lowly members of their parliament

o let it someday get so quiet  
the mind is forced to listen to itself  
and leave the girls alone.

III.

No matter how far from folk I fall  
the folk stuff always talks—  
ham sandwiches or caviare  
your belch is just the same, is you,

the root is in you, you are the folk,

the whole folk, the lore,  
the time at sea, harvest  
and lost property, umbrella upright

shoved in a rice field, train  
and truckle bed, lascivious clergymen  
and an old red bull leaning on the rain,  
be reasonable for once, you can't

get away from where I am.

For many make me.  
Every kiss a thousand marriages.

It has to mean something, it keeps moving.  
It nears us of each other, you mean me,

we are the marriage bed of primitive vocabulary  
we are the pebble in the flour

sift, sift, till we are sifted  
through sunshine and through rain

till death comes hobbling towards us  
and because I am so many

I run away in every direction  
and outwit his compassionate fumbling

bone fingers on my rusty doorknob  
and still he forgives me every time.

23 December 2006

## 17. K. 453

How can I hear you  
when I know your name

things too close  
appear to be on fire

sly wind  
uncertain sound

they walk around like mirrors  
you want to take a mallet to them

but when one thing breaks  
everything breaks

a hand

“the things we think we see or mean”  
it said in my dream and so I said it too

a leaf is when no one listens

sky is when someone is gone

The children break their mirror  
now each one has her own

the closer you get to the mirror  
the more you leave out

bend around the seeing part  
a branch of pliant amber  
strophes of seeing, turns  
towards the light and towards the dark

In the first part of the first part  
seeds fall out of the sun  
sun stands in the sky where it rises in winter  
but it is warm

when there are enough contradictions  
men fall in love with women  
I cannot say how the reverse of this may occur,  
the only time I ever was a sky it was night  
a clear night in January  
and all I could see were the unknown  
lights in me  
                    that kept us both warm,

the brittle names of heaven,  
and forgot to look at myself in the looking glass

but maybe night has no mirror.

The irritating thing about a flute  
is a flute always sounds like somebody loving you  
and you don't know who it is  
and you're not sure you want their affection  
let alone the intimacy their sound proposes

so you run to the doorway  
and keep opening and slamming the door  
and everything is still there outside  
but for once you have said what you wanted to say.

II.

A page of wheat  
Black Sea  
history has its habits

I liked those masses when they skipped the sermon  
all that parsley to be left on the plate

now I want to tell you though  
what all those sermons said:

There is a word  
that spoke itself

and wise women sit around and listen  
to teach their sons and daughters to  
go out and measure it  
and while they're at it  
go measure where the shadow falls

then break something  
and cry your way home  
holding the pieces before you  
and the tune of your sobbing  
is all we'll ever know  
of what you found and how long  
it was or deep or color,  
did it have color, or was it  
something on the other side of seeing?

Only when we listen to each and every one of us  
can we hear what the whole word said Amen.

This here no sermon,  
this skin. This  
is not even something you hear.  
This is pure waiting  
pouring into and out of the ears,

old habit, old winter sunshine—  
fortress ravelin, sad soldiers struggle up  
but there are no defenders here, no cannons.  
All my life I've spent  
besieging a deserted city.

But that too is something you infer—  
from the quiet sunshine you knew how far.

III.  
I will not be sad.  
We don't all waste our lives  
but everybody could have done more.

Drinking song and then to sleep  
and then wake up and know  
you just missed something the sun said.

Wielding white and black paint such  
as to suggest color where they meet,  
color from no color born,

color is contradiction.  
Gold on my finger warms my knucklebones,  
all I am is what I feel.

The world never seems bigger  
than the culture we see it from  
and then we go up in a plane and size is born,

*the size of what you want  
is always smaller than what there is,*

every surface is infinite  
if you wander it  
and that's where love comes in

like the Austrian cavalry  
bright-tunic'd through beech trees  
hunting you down,

feel me or die,  
feel me, no matter how fast you run  
the shadow of my sound will get there before you

and you will sink down exhausted  
into the being I make you feel

even if you never feel it  
it is the contract with the earth you signed.

24 December 2006

= = = = =

Music, the most present, insistent yet fugitive of the arts, is made up of all the as-ifs in the world. As if this were me speaking to you now. As if this sound that you welcome – reluctantly or eagerly makes no difference—into the fleshly doorway of your mind, as if this sound could come in and be at home among you all and stay. But it is gone before you can turn around and make such gestures of hospitality as you might offer an attractive or repellent stranger, Music tells you: Lock the door! But it is already too late.

(December 2006)

## RECITAL

There is a section in the music where they speak some other language. The cloak room. The blue pilaster almost to the ceiling. The chattering nurses looking for an apartment but nothing find. Death, but no disease.

(late December 2006)

= = = = =

Know me  
I am no one

hear me  
I am silent

something flies above me  
I am the shadow

of a shadow  
squeeze my hand.

(late December 2006)

## HINDEMITH

Music hurries slowly  
through woods and over stones

stones still stained with shadow  
from when the light passed by.

December 2006

= = = = =

Bare trees against winter sky  
sunset. All the books are written there.

XII 06

## LOVERS

But were they intimate.  
A radix. *Spielmann*  
means sort of minstrel. Menu  
means what's ahead.  
Mild weather. Organdy  
curtains over open coffin  
gauzy feel of recent dead.

I am the last one. I am  
the certain. Behind me  
the thousand spokesmen cluster  
singing their parts in Mahler's  
Eighth. The dead voice me.  
I live their senses.  
They come back in me  
to inspect the world they've made.

Hradcany Castle. Meadows  
this side of the Cam  
where courteous children  
punt. And in Savoia  
a woman sells the cheese  
she and her goats made.

So things really do speak.  
They speak me,  
I stumble like the falls at Schaffhausen  
I spread out too wide  
it takes me forever to reach the Dutch Sea.  
But when I do there is  
another there dressed like  
an island or a nun  
teaching children Old French,  
a wolf or something  
howling not far off. The woods.

24 December 2006

## 18. K.456

Ice rime frost *canities*  
hunting weather

to where it rises

everything comes out of the woods.  
Carl Ortwin Sauer disagrees,  
everyone comes from the shore—  
we are littoral:  
from coast moved inland  
only where river let us, led us.

*Aeneid* shows the pattern,  
Book VIII, upriver, ascend.  
Into the ever woods. The woods

are where we're bound  
to be born. The white  
sow and the brown boar.

Incest. We lied, we said we were wolves.

And so the morning was.

All this waking up, noble  
touching, caring one another,

so much such.  
So much it hasn't started  
yet the familiar

silences. The familiar silences.  
Now you know Bernini's aesthetic  
the bronze church and the marble shoe,

you know the sunshine  
carved out of oak wood,  
dangerous polished stairs

stars in every window  
as if it were always night.  
Or Santa Maria della Salute

as if nighttime never came.  
Bloch's Berlin. Sauer's Berkeley.  
The long streets. Nothing holds us.

Only the *sentence* leads us to one another,  
the distances, unspoken, the blue flash  
from the welder's torch, a carved pineapple,

learn this dead language, darlings,  
stand up tall and learn your opera.  
This is my last gospel: turn

everything into some sort of kiss.  
Now I'm lost. I couldn't have meant  
something as simple as that,

could I, a crow on the lawn,  
perhaps I did. Let me count my fingers,  
fit them to all the keys,

keyholes, shinny up the flagpoles,  
get stuck in the sky, never come down,  
a lesser number, something between 2 and 1,

dim in midday, still give a little light  
come dusk, when the herdsman stumbles  
over the bull skull by the gorse bush and groans.

II.

Around, um, around,  
arm around, um, I'm hard to see,  
arm around arm around tumble from  
woods in ground mist risen, a bell  
jingles as if one of the dead before me  
were getting a phone call down there,  
I can almost speak the sad words  
the little song proposes to the mind,

silly sincerity of the machine  
I see the dead soldiers  
stumbling through the woods  
Ambrose Bierce's story  
the child sees only the aftermath  
men with bleeding feet  
lost in the trees. I try to think,

try to think of something else  
but everything turns into war.  
It is Christmas morning, even the music  
permits it, in the book it says  
When the whole world was at peace  
at Bethlehem in Judaea the Christ was born,  
But the name of the book is Martyrology  
and he will never be born again.

The cellphone rings, or the Carolina wren  
suddenly back or not yet gone  
winters with us and has something to say  
recognizable, appearances around us  
are still comprehensible, i.e., permit  
sentences to be composed about them  
the mad mind of the listener somehow  
deems coherent. Only fear makes us believe, Spinoza said,  
and fear aborts valid inference say I. Dare we pray  
in a dumb church called Can't hurt, might help?

III.

Doesn't have to be anything  
just has to be.

No argument,  
serenity.

Swallowing reflex disturbed  
in certain neurological conditions.

Circular reasoning. In war  
poinsettia. Named

after someone. Candle, canticle,  
Africa named for sunshine

like the apricot cooked by the sun.  
In schoolyards the little boy

kicked and punched continues  
to die. Big surprise.

Where do I go now

now that I have lost the shadows

you entrusted to my care  
and where

with sun always in my eyes  
and midnight always an accusation

I can claim *My father*  
*did this to me*

but look what I did to my father,  
I was and I am and I am

look at the insistence with which I insist  
I am no one and nowhere and don't listen to me

do you hear me, stop listening,  
all I ever meant was music

and you have that already  
look down in your lap

from the heights of Parnassus  
where we always are

climbing breathless up a level plain.

25 December 2006