

12-2002

decA2002

Robert Kelly
Bard College

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "decA2002" (2002). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 1002.
http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/1002

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JUDGING BY RESULTS

a separation in the cloth
reveals a field of flax in flower
where the work comes from
the honest stevedores who carry down the light

judging by results
you learn to see the thing
in the light of how it came to be,
the conditions of production
in such a silent world

judging by results
you choose to go out walking with this one
you can walk all the way to Uruguay
and still not figure out
the sources of music,

that affront to indolence.
Someday your aesthetics
will heal the body's wounds
when judging by results
you know the only thing of interest
is how it came to be itself

the sacred etymology of whatever it is.

1 December 2002

YOU

Well if I can't be you who can I be?
Is there a man at the door who sells roses
maybe he has a daughter she has a boyfriend
maybe I'm him? Or the steeplejack
falling through the Brooklyn air
remembers his brother he hasn't seen in years
and now never will again, I will be him,
the lost fratello hurtling through space
sweet as a squirrel from tree to tree.
Or the other brother, in Fresno, eating
eggs with chilis, that must be me.
But I really want to be you, please let me,
already I know how to drive your car
and step inside your own shadow every evening
and whistle even through your lips
though there are tunes you know I don't
and words I can't make you say no matter
how hard I try though I know them myself
and say them quietly pretending I'm you
and I can hear them in your voice
and twelve days later the roses are still fresh.

1 December 2002

CLUNY BREAKFAST

Paris 1954

hungry feasting city stones
on memory everything closed
just ruins to eat Cluny's
house off the boulevard
stones of locked churches
living ruins nobody goes

stone breakfast stare
all you like nobody home
nobody out the streets
are stone not dawn
yet and no food
I am remembering remembering

memory always a sour
cherry or overripe or
gone to sleep she frowns
the whole city frowns
when I ask her what
the word is if I went
to see her dance it would be
all the wrong philosophy

and does her body frown
how hungry I was that
morning I had money
nowhere to buy food
the bills in my pocket
were a letter in a language

I couldn't read, words
need time to open doors
message to some
other exile grown
ancient with waiting
aspetto un gran tempo
she says pulling her hair
back in Japanese
only her marvelous hips
tell me she is lying
when she turns her back
to me, apse and chapel
I lie down on the stones
to understand her
get my breath back slowly
time is asthma I am alone
in the whole city
everything has a rule
everything keeps it keeps me
away I am hungry
for the actual day, dawn
is on the anvil
the hammer of light
tries to break me again
pray an hour stand
empty for a hundred years
I am a foreigner I do not
know how to think.

2 December 2002

LAPDANCE

You have to yearn for me the way I yearn for you.

— I don't know how to yearn that much, teach me.

Just hear the way I am, the way my breath changes when you come into the room.

— How can I know that, how can I know what you're like when I'm not with you?

Feel it, feel me, feel me from where you are, it's not so far, we're both on the same earth,
the same air, please.

— But I do feel you, all the time, I think about you.

And I think about you, you know I do, but thinking is not enough.

— When we're not together, isn't thinking plenty?

Yes, plenty, but not enough. I think and yearn, you just think.

— Teach me to yearn, then, if you think I don't do it. What is it, this yearning?

Yearning means nothing is ever enough. Now is not now enough, here is not enough,
always more has to happen, I need more you.

— But here I am.

Yes, now you're here. But when you're not, then yearning is. And even now...

— Do you feel it now, this yearning?

Of course, even more when you're here, I want you closer.

— But I'm with you, see, I'm on your lap.

But I want you even closer than that.

— How can I get closer?

See, that question of yours reveals the absence of yearning. You're reasonable, you're content with what we have here and how together, I'm never like that, yearning is always on the other side of now, measuring, yearning, measuring, yearning, like people laying out the foundation of a house they'll live in all their lives, it can never be too big, can never be big enough, I keep laying out the boundary forever, be with me, be on the inside of everything, more, a little closer, want to be closer.

— But I'm happy with you, so happy with you, our time together, the time that is ours, our little place, completely ours.

But there is otherness all around our ours. Other people, other places. They own us, they keep us from being ours own, just our own.

— Yes, that's true. But don't think about them now, just think about me. About us. Or this. Or now.

But the other is a wind that howls outside the door, gives me no peace, I want you to want me

— I do want you

want me the way I want you, terribly, all the time, all the time.

— That does sound terrible.

It's not that I really always want it always that way always, I want you to want it, it's that I want us both to want it so much it hurts, and we have to soothe each other's yearning, up close or far away. I want it to hurt when I'm away.

— That makes it sound like yearning really means you want to hurt me. ... Is that what yearning really is, an anger that the other person is complete in herself, that you feel you need her more than you feel she needs you, and you hate that, you resent it, and want to hurt her, is that what yearning is?

I just want you, don't be so smart, I want you.

— That part is all right, don't worry, here I am, I hear you breathing. And when I can't hear you, I think of you.

I never know what you mean when you say you're thinking of me.

— I mean I'm thinking.

2 December 2002

COLORS LOST

So many, a web
away from here,
a scout is counting leaves
sorting them in great bronze heaps
to tell by mathematic purity
where you are

and in this web
where I do my waiting
(waiting also is weaving)
I guess at you by the sound of words

the inside ones
as I hear their easy friction
slip through the mind and leave what,

what kind of shadow does a word leave,
a thought, a stifled groan?

Because I am ashamed
of all the colors that I lost,
ashamed of them and losing them,

the vanished threads
somewhere looped in all their millions
over branches on some tree
grows somewhere I have also managed to forget.

3 December 2002

PROTASES

If I believed in analysis
I would do something about my left hand

if I were a good Christian
I would pay more attention to the salt

but as it is, a skeptic pagan
has the world to do his doubts for him

so I can repose neatly indolent
between the hardy thorn and the withering rose.

Everything changes, nothing lasts,
and we call this nothing 'matter'

and say it somehow came before the world.

3 December 2002

SIGNALS

responding to signals in earth's environment
we kill each other and destroy — right now
who can give a rational explanation
of Gettysburg? it runs on killing
that's all we know about it

but the thinking
to call it that, these words reflect
is dingy thinking, murky with some resentment
that doesn't even know its enemy,
resentment and fear

revision
might cure the text
but what will cure me?

I leave the symptom pathic on the page.

THE DREAM DISEASE

Last night I dreamed a leper's dream.
I had it. I had always had it
and somehow, why, I had gone to be tested
and I had it. What to do now.
And gradually people got to know
and my life began to go away from me
like the waves receding down the beach.

I was in the diner with my wife.
What to do now. A leper
is all about going away
or being gone from. A leper is someone
on his way to no one, empty
cash register, coffee urn,
a piece of rye toast lying on the floor.

2.

What did the diner have to do with dying?
Is a sound enough to say the sense?
Ask those poor Bible pagans whoever they were
made love to Dinah and died.
Sit in the diner and get ready to die.
Do we look all our lives
for a word to die in? Leper,
does her lap repeal leper?
We sit side by side in the green diner
but it wasn't about dying,
everybody dies, not everybody goes so far away.

3.

And where is this away?

My father said when I was just beginning to talk

I always wanted the car to go

off the road and through the trees away

up through the gaunt pine trees south of Callicoon,

go there, that way?

The young leper

sees his road is a lost road,

invisible, no car

goes there. Soldiers go there, and animals,

and sometimes lovers hiding from their lives

an hour, to feel the lost

simplicity of another person's skin,

there, an hour, that way.

4 December 2002

LOST IN THE MUTINY

this pen dangerous to touch
it commits you
to what has been said

writing is always a sort of suicide

to take your life
into your hand
and throw it down

in the anonymous
alphabet of lost
lovers, all those Eves
arrogant innocent nakedness.

How do you hide your body?
In the leaves. How do you hide a word?
Write it down.

5 December 2002

THE SUITOR

I sit with my rice bowl
speaking Japanese
I was born in an old movie
about people in the rain

now every doorway is flush with its wall
to keep rough travelers like me
from weeping on the doorstep
or when I'm happy singing drunken Japanese

the streets are ok and the rain stops
but the buildings never let me in
a wraith has a hard time with doorknobs
sometimes through the keyhole

I can speak a little word or two
and follow them inside the room
where you sit reading Japanese
then you look up and vaguely ask

your mind still in the book Who is that?
and I tell you I am the cat, come home at last,
do you remember? And you pretend you remember.

Every woman loves a shadow in the corner of the room.

5 December 2002

Now the snow begins.
I woke up early enough
to see the world before the snow.
Sparrows and finches know
their house too. Suddenly
we are brothers in the sisterhood of space
and everything holds.
Nowhere to fall.
Beautiful mindlessness of snow,
so tender, a blissful idiot's smile
forgiving the world
where car doors slam, cars drive away,
birds seem to stay.
Everything gets simpler.

I am an apostle of the absolute.
Birds eat faster when the snow begins.

They know. Fear is the beginning
of wisdom, the Bible says.
Watching the tiny crystals of the dry snow
I begin to say it too. And hurry
to tell you, before the snow
finishes capping the stone Buddha out there
and putting out all the hidden
candles we know are still burning in the woods.

5 December 2002

LATECOMER

You come in late and sit down next to me.
I feel sleep on you, it makes me drowsy
right in the middle of what I'm blithering,
you seem so close to dream and all that private
lucid space nobody ever tells, ever,
but your face does, cold with winter waking.
It is shocking to be so close to someone's sleep.

5 December 2002

COAT OF ARMS

Everything is coming closer to where it is.

Time takes time to get here

but there's no room inside space

or is there? What about the inside of the inside,

isn't there always some room in the in,

some outside the outside?

No reason for words to stop meaning

just because they run out of things.

What do snowplows dream all summer?

Things don't dream. Or if they d

that's a space so far inside we can't

even count the stubble on its chin

so long we've been sleeping. Sometimes

wind whips a flag around its mast

so many times there's no flag to be seen

a golden field with three black swans

wrapped around the pole and you

don't even know I'm there, a newfangled

emperor of your heart getting ready to rule.

I start out by taking all your time

and say this word love a lot that fills all space.

6 December 2002

NEXT DOOR

The van drives up
a man leaps out
knocks on the door

a hollow sound
there are people home
the engine runs

he says words
in a morning voice
but on my windowsill

a mist condenses
on the crystal ball
I don't want to read.

2.

There's always somebody living over the fence
the planet next door
in the night of time
we sometimes hear dishes rattling over there
in alien kitchens and
somebody's dog has been digging in our yard.

6 December 2002

THE PROCESS

Is it too late to know everything?

Is the forest nearer than it is?

The hill is higher this morning, I can see that.

When things change the way earth changes

nobody notices

we all say It must be me my eyes are changing

I still want to know everything

And I have never climbed over the little hill behind my house

though I know vaguely what goes on there

trees and some deer sometimes and always a stream

then beyond that vaguely a highway

I can hear it doing business in the night.

6 December 2002