

12-2002

decG2002

Robert Kelly
Bard College

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "decG2002" (2002). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 1008.
http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/1008

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DAWN

Watching dawn come up above the candle flame
one candle and five flames, reflections, windows
double-glazed, nature of a house

a house is a telephone, someone calls.

Dawn now. Stick figures of the winter trees
oldest alphabet. Paper sky. Pale, pale
a kind of white that dreams about being blue.

Observation is either description or permission.
Permission lets you dream on from what you see.
Permission becomes inscription, it is a case
of somebody finally answering the phone.

27 December 2002

OMINOUS

My Viennese pen skips for the first time. Why?
Is a dear friend in Vienna dying? Dawn
here in Omendale. But there, in Praterstan,
what shivering lovers make out by the duck pond?
Is anybody still alive? Maybe when I grow up
I'll buy a pickup truck with a plow for a snout,
put chains on and go everywhere I want.

27 December 2002

FREE DEATH

Tell me a new color for it to be
a fluency of sense impressions
like a fisherman at dawn planning suicide
the way they do when the boat's calm on the inlet
and the sky is that luminous way you know
the sun doesn't care if you live or die.
Or you think you know that. So many days
something happens to distract you from dying.

27 December 2002

FLAME

Flamme bin ich sicherlich

The candle flame
explains

the roots
are roofs
of something else

a canny place
dove among sparrows
harmlessly feed

the birds
have caught
up with me now

every energy
bent on being

there are cannibals
among the trees
shadows and snowplows
I smell the coffee

but I was here
before the world

breath enough
to nourish you
forever if
you share my
last mistake
and think I'm me.

27 December 2002

A MAP OF IT

Birdsong and number system
stilt avocet oystercatcher snipe

songless, surds. I know
more words than things

more things than words, more cities
than rivers, more sky

than anything at all.
I will believe the obvious

lacking the subtlety to unsee it.
So in Spicer's words I will believe the birds.

But what would that be in my language
the voice that once o'er Omendale

came down like snow, went up like incense,
touched everybody and felt some of them up?

Prepositions are to sex as birds are to sky.
Sleep for me, sleep along me, sleep in me tonight.

27 December 2002

HOMAGE

Patches of Portugal
show through the trees
old men in shirt sleeves
numbering documents

Everybody came before me
even you who are almost
my daughter, almost my son

you taught me everything I know
just by making me wait for you so long

I am the last born, and my mother is yet to come.
All round me the future shouts its sermons and its lecture notes,
the future is half-deaf too, and speaks with a Russian accent
like a man who learned to talk from listening to trees.

27 December 2002

THE SKILL

So many perishable sings
the sky's pale ink
takes down the minutes of our meeting

We discuss your body
its aptitude for skating grace
meanwhile the cross country skis
are warping in the tool shed

and I wonder about appetite
not for the first time why
I have so much and so many
and why my only talent is desire.

27 December 2002

LAWS OF OPTICS

All objects are closer than they are.

Mirrors are only spies, the conspiracies
they reveal are plausible,
things turn inside out before your eyes,

nothing is safe from interpretation.

So call me up tonight let's talk about our feet
our podiatric problems, exchange
names of advisable specialists.

The idiom of honesty gets the best of us.

Look deep in the mirror and remember.

27 December 2002

SEMA TES HEMERES

The woodpecker's attack
muffled in the snow
sounds like fast snoring,
someone sleeping in a hurry

the attack is regular
a tide, a breathing.

28 December 2002

JEALOUSIES

Alveolar shapings of the held breath,
her tongue holds in what happened.
Deny the obvious, darling, that's
what language is for. Jealousy
is hard to nourish without words,
vocabulary of times and places,
the unforgettable unforgivable remarks.
Mostly jealousy is overhearing.
You wake up and know it's rained.
Snowed. Your daffodils are dead
you hoped would trump Croesus on your lawn.
And lastly jealousy delights in epitaphs.

* * *

I woke annoyed with leftover images from *Time Code*, which we finally saw last night. Its technologic richness is won at the cost of simplistic narrative arrangements, especially the operatic jealousy between careering Rose and coke-crazed Lauren. Would that the technical could foster complexities of telling and understanding, rather than depend on the opposite. But thinking like this, I recall that *The Great Train Robbery* was no Oresteia.

Query: what was the earliest technically complex film which is also emotionally, aesthetically, complex? I want to say *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, but then I remember that the villains are caricatures. Maybe it hasn't happened yet, a film that lays itself open to *Gelassenheit*, nuance, forgiveness. *Mother and Son* — maybe that, at last. But is an audience ready for a film that is all telling, and no plot? Yet why am I asking more of film than I do of that other music, opera?

28 December 2002

~vw dy

What is the name of the large red bird
that flies out of the eye of the dream
and hovers wide away before the window

and why? Slow habit of making
anything your own. Marks made on paper.
Think on the history of a piece of paper
from the tree to the canceling fire,
how many messages, or none,
gone virgin into nescience
or palimpsested with a dozen lovers,
a paper can endure erasures

and then the ash of it sifts
off on a bare breeze
to scar a snowfield
there where only ashes
teach us to listen
and require us to speak

I see the bird less when I close my eyes
but he's still there
a pain impaled on maple saplings
birch trees
the sun rising.

28 December 2002

TATIANA'S ASH

You burned your notes,
Stavrogin, Smerdyakov, Tarkovsky,
they all went into the sky,

names of villainies and sanctities,
names of understanders and the great
unrelenting resenters,

the judas flowers, the doubting priests
all unified now in common ash,
purified, *unidentified*

at last. Into a cup you sift the ashes
and pour some green oil on
warm from the fire that left the ash

mix these with your inky fingertips
into chrism, then seal your forehead
with a smear, sign of the strange cross,

and smear my forehead too
and everyone's, we are sealed
with the ashes of forgiveness.

You forgive me now,
you did not know me,
you forgive yourself years from now

for not knowing me.

we share ashes.

To read a book, I think

is to burn and be burned with it,

auto-da-fe, the text and I

become a common fire,

leave the same ash.

As once on a winter day in Moscow

Quirinus burned at the stake

for writing poetry you could read too many ways.

28 December 2002

THE STRANGER

Who is that old man
I see in the mirror
sometimes when I haven't
readied myself to see
what looks back at me?
What is he doing to my face?

28 December 2002

THE WEATHER

You call this weather?
I've seen more weather in an hour glass.
Who was I then? A deacon
on a beacon, a girl in a pulpit,
a contradiction in soft clothes,
an editor of weeds, a liripipe
cut from your cowl, no tail, no tail
for you, a manyplies
out of your old cow, a spade
that never dug, a dog in love with a cat,
I pranced around the parish like
an I don't know what, you could have seen
me midnight lurching from the pond
my hair on fire and leeches on my knees,
kiss kiss, smarter folk than you have tried
to put me out in vain, in rain, I was
a secret semaphore, a church steeple indoors,
a parlor organ, a castaway, a seedmerchant
with holes in his pants, a lighthouse, a rat.
I sing exclusively from my experience of old
and singing is my way of forgetting,
everything I say makes me nobody now.
And as for you, you're everyone.

29 December 2002

CHANCERY POLITICS

I choose me, you choose you.

The game goes on forever.

Rome is waiting, all the time

in the world is locked up

in those unscrupulous silences.

Downstairs the typing pool prepares

contradictory versions of what happened/

They will be at it for years

as they grow older, have pregnancy leaves,

come back to work, keep inputting text,

turn old. Because nothing happened,

choices are never spoken out loud,

everybody knows, it's like candles,

when you're thinking of something else

the flame decides to go out.

Rome has spoken but nobody cares.

One day it's over without ever beginning.

29 December 2002

EDEN

another subculture
split from
the garden
 where
the blue girls
come from that
ate my night.

29 December 2002

EPITAPH

People like me will always be remembered
because we're so like everybody else
only more so, you never knew it was so simple
to be on the other side of ideas, where being is.

29 December 2002

