

2-2004

febF2004

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "febF2004" (2004). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 837.
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You read me shallowly these days
the sun said to the wading pool.
Once you were eloquent and deep.

What can I do, the rays of you and
others like you have diminished me,
sky is the most dangerous text

and the more I read the less I knew,
the less I was, grew lean and turbid
—but still the children understand me

they know my feeble perils too
how I can drown a man but not
set fire to a single piece of paper

some vagrant lover sent his love.

25 February 2004

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Does the garment fit the morning
does the morning fit the music
does the highway fit the city
does the mind finally wake up
ten a.m. busy, desperate for a friend?

25 February 2004

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This grammar of a disused language
this fling. Pressing in.
How far in will the word go

before it sticks, jammed in the hearing,
before it meets an obstacle
it will die defining, analyzing?

And then the next word shoves in.

25 February 2004

letter is the easiest
to answer, here,
I tell you everything I need

safe as silence
this mechanical rose.

25 February 2004

=====
Have all things changed their meanings
in the night? Is that what the sun said,
Revise, revise?
circumstances of medium disaster
as usual.
This hand can't write. Who?

Not just the words. The things themselves
fit different in their places,
the woods, the snow, the hill
are ungrammatical.

So I come to you, Rabbi, to ask
what is the meaning
when things lose their meaning?

But she was no rabbi
and I had no mouth to ask.

26 February 2004

=====
Write bigger maybe
slower like a rock
across an era
or like a mind
managing to forget
an obsession, obsessions
are always lucid,
are avalanches
white out, ruin,
to be buried
meters deep
in soft cold
unbreathable crystals.

26 February 2004

POETRY

Poetry is also a little like being paid
for going to the analyst.

And poetry doesn't smoke.
And poetry always answers the phone itself.

26 February 2004

=====
If I left my picture
on the windowsill in sunlight
how long would it be
before my face was gone?

Do identities fade
faster than houses fall?

And all things would be busy
fading with it, with me,
we'd never notice,

only when an earthquake or divorce
came along like a shadow over the window
so you would look down and say
there, that's what I was.

26 February 2004

THE MAIN SEQUENCE

Of course the sequence
ends at a number
that's what it means
to be one

where the long count
starts again
and not just one

I was a pioneer of war
a sly hussar
crept up your mansard
and gazed in upon you sleeping

I was like the moon
my mustaches bristled with light
I saw you stir
as the inside of your body
began to hear my light

you woke and said *I am two*
and that was cognac
for me, the dark elixir
buried in the number system,

touch me, you cried
half awake now
and I tried

but what I was
like light touched every inch of you
and therefore nothing in particular

so did I really touch
if all my touch
just felt like the space around you?

you said *Yes, you are my No,*
my zero that makes me infinite you said

so entering your bedroom
I began and you joined in
the litany of everything.

27 February 2004

ALL KINDS OF INTERESTING VACANCIES

Salt improvers

highways on the moon

already laid out by rival governments

take the L4 to the capital

where London Up There waits

moist-centered on her imported river

or still down here on Eastern Time

a new variety of fish.

The faces of dead murderers

peaceful with homecoming

I've seen them in the Weegee light of old papers

I grew up with those blisshed-out corpses

dozing on bathhouse floors

but this is not the hour to reveal

the iconography of my scared childhood

the world is not ready for my icons

especially the cowgirl grilling steak

or the tennis player on the El train platform

I say no more and move on to green

the newborn plastic of my latest Bic.

Which fish? *Captatio fulva*,

unknown till yesterday

I call her Melusina in her tank at home

(quoting Hendrix quoting Peret quoting Paz

who lifted her gentle name from Paracelsus)

because this fish is eelish, womanish and quick,
you find them if you find them
swimming in the bottom waters of your local mind
down with the staved-in rowboats and the brass
buttons from your father's uniform
the satin dress your aunt wore when she skipped town.

27 February 2004

THE IMPOSTORS

Squirrels are Christians who learned Yiddish to deceive,
secret Papishes who speak nice Vilna
a little on the fussy side, they use even sweet
commodities like fur and language to lull our wills,

they climb up everything, open our doors, denounce us
from our own branches. But when they sleep
they dream in Latin, and they scheme
endless empires of need and seed and trees and greed.

27 February 2004

THE PASSION

He died once.

I have no need

to see him die again.

He rises every day

and speaks to me

and certainly to you—

he is an old Jew now

and speaks so many languages.

27 February 2004

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But a bird is singing
so it sounds for all the cold
suddenly spring

the differences the discernment
all the words we reckon
birds don't know

this robin knows.

27 February 2004

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Starlings not yet. Cardinal mornings.
And she says a Carolina wren
actual voice of birds

flicking the switch in me called music.
Wren. King of winter
he was, hunted
on new year's day, victim
of folklore, remember me

when I am born again
be there for me
green stockings and bare breast
a bird singing on your wrist.

27 February 2004

ALWAYS ABSOLUTION

waiting, wet hands
handling sunset

you think this ocean

and her beach have you
you belong
to stuff like this

like a book you read
too early in your life
not to believe

darling in the mangroves
you can hold on
till rescue comes

we breathe together
like childbirth

husbands and wives are
supposed to do it

strokes, laps,
tide coming in.

27 February 2004

IN GENTILE LIGHT

in memory of Jean Améry

In gentile light a sword
forgotten leans behind the door

in Deseret an utter flower
small after snow melt February

white things all round a man
a different color inside him

a politician of caresses
measuring the flighty audience

in the Spring & Autumn Annals
no kingdom was dependable

the White Huns came the Black
Huns came the natives were corrupt

or were coopted, animals
roamed in from the wastes and bit us

and always more kings came.
Only the Annals themselves

were dependable, the sad focused mind
keeping track of its despairs.

28 February 2004

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Look close the words
have to tell us something

mirador to stand on looking
parador to rub your haunches on

when no one's there
just you and sunshine

and the remembering flesh.

28 February 2004