

12-2003

decB2003

Robert Kelly  
*Bard College*

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### Recommended Citation

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## ROMAN HISTORY

I certainly don't know what the destination is  
don't even know where we started from  
and who we are when I say here we are

but here we are it looks like a church but quicker  
smells like the palms of my hands but there's a wind  
I hear your voice because the words are yours

the words are always yours and you bring them  
from the moment when the body is balanced  
between being alive and being dead what is that called

the minute when you hear at last another voice  
saying *And this is death* so then I touch you finally  
the way I always wanted to the touch called True.

6 December 2003

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To be sick the way the old time was  
and nothing in the mind  
not to read or think or listen

but talk is pure talk is love  
my love, talk tells me more  
when everything I am is less

6 December 2003

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It is a burro lurching down the Grand Canyon  
or an old black man dancing for the whites  
it is one of those two surely, or else it's me,  
I think it's me, sure footed in a clumsy  
old humiliated way, feel bad with me  
I will take you to the bottom of the world.

6 December 2003

**(The bottom of the world  
means poetry)**

I wish I could have translated that poem just now  
from Spanish or from Portuguese  
then I could respect the thing it says  
knowing nothing of the “I” it means.

6 December 2003

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Well yes maybe all my poems  
are translations from I'd be the last to know

some language behind language  
unknown to me it does its tricks

I write them down some sudden  
accuracy pierces mindless dark.

6 December 2003

## DOCTA IGNORANTIA

Not knowing which sign  
or which design  
transfixes the world

by which stone buildings  
come to stand  
such a long time such a long time

or an apparitional personhood  
(the famous 'you')  
stands among the ruins

lecturing anyone who listens  
on the unchanging  
beauty of the sign

Because I think  
I'm listening  
a little snow has fallen

sugaring the cornices  
some things I don't want to understand  
the brittle part the color

how frail it always is  
and winterly  
the actual fact is always

Wanting to read again  
that book of Mauriac  
that had me in it

when I was young so frightened  
the big wind coming by  
God in all her dresses

big wind in dark churches  
and every light in them  
an accusing candle

God frowns at me  
from the dark spaces  
where the body folds

upon itself and opens  
never, candlewax  
listening hard

but still not hearing  
the old priest mumbles  
my instructions

is he talking to me  
or just my sins  
is there a difference

I live inside it  
daring to smile back  
in the same dark mind

That church is broken now  
faux-marbre of 1950  
gone as Joe Dimaggio

but the organ lasts  
anybody can play  
Mascagni, all those fingers

walk the sun-crazed courtyards  
where jealousy makes men  
think they are alive

how close the lictor is now  
to the murderer  
the procession of criminal justice

through the streets  
with gilt saints and guillotines  
maybe this is the hour of my trial

but it is over already  
always already begun and ended  
open and shut

arrêt de vie

the fragment in my hands

all I need is no fever

then words would work again

planisphere and alchemy

the special weather of not knowing

and it's all right here

coming down to the river

heavy snow someone watches.

7 December 2003

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Death is so much closer  
already I begin to hear  
his calm explanations.

7 XII 03

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Can I already begin to have been  
the other

                    footstep on the staircase  
the best friend on her way  
and I wonder what is walking in my chest  
outside the window  
it might be anywhere at all  
it might be a street in Vienna it might be snow.

7 December 2003

*sing me hwæthugu*

I still don't know how

I still try

answering the voice

is all the voice we are

8 December 2003

## **HUMILITAS**

Sun gilt on woodpecker's  
scarlet poll  
he keeps bending to eat seed.

8 XII 03

## **Somewhere this morning**

between sleep and waking I saw Robert Duncan  
step across my living room and bend to take  
from the bookcase behind my chair my copy of  
Brenda Maddox's *George's Ghosts*. He was fortyish,  
as I knew him first, and was wearing pale pajamas  
of the sort he lounged about in my apartment  
in a winter forty years ago. I am returned to the book.  
Tell Lisa this.

8 December 2003

## AUCTORITAS

Tend towards  
the lictor the toad  
carrying authority  
who breaks your street  
into blue shadows  
you're left with  
when the bluebottles  
have come and gone  
the lictor the nasty  
man who authors you  
a world of shame  
every day the same  
arguments of breakfast  
belching Bessemer flames  
like the beaches of Lackawanna  
they laugh at my vocabulary

9 December 2003

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the words have been hiding  
rock rats in the desert

now it's moon come out  
now it's moon come out

everybody has been said before  
and you're still here?  
everything said and you still here?

9 December 2003

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something simple  
in your treasure chest

tell me daughter  
something even I can fathom  
someone I can believe

the snow is everywhere  
everything is outside

we manage  
by measuring

we find it hard to light the candle  
from the moon you assure it can be done

I believe you, you mean a marriage

I came into the world before wax  
and even wood was new.

9 December 2003

## THE AMBER SEASON

the amber season  
full of insistence  
love this character & buy that  
we live transactingly

but I could breathe  
a sleepier merchandise  
a thought released  
from thinking

shadow of an idea  
cool in sunlight  
my head begins to turn  
and number is meek need

a Russian prayer book  
and every prayer subtends  
a special god  
and if you understand the words

you too must be the god  
intended, you too are Aleph  
and evening, date palm and lamb,  
you too have geese.

10 December 2003

## VISION

Vision also has to have a habit  
to let the answers idle past  
until the *man who carries a door*  
carries on by, and the woman  
*who carries a house in her arms*  
opens it up and you can see  
a cat on the walnut dining table  
and an old creature by the hearth  
and the old creature begins to talk  
so you listen because you are the one  
*who carries his ears in his hands*  
wherever you ever go you ever have  
with you Crescent Street busy with  
curses and oranges, it is your only  
honesty, your conjugal machine,  
your shabby robe of authority.

10 December 2003

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To see me in you  
the way the heat of the sun  
inscribes itself in stone  
as the weight of the rock,

I want to be the bend in you  
that rivers you  
towards the deepest things  
the shadow of a diamond  
is made half of light

and go down there  
I want my name  
to be the tune you hum  
when the market opens  
the bronze gates  
old wooden chifferobes  
with shattered drawers  
all wood dries out

spills a dozen stiff collars  
you hold your hand  
between the window  
and the oil lamp  
the read the lines on your palm

I put there, did you know that,  
I wrote them in,  
I change them every day

and then the window is allowed to break  
the old motorcycle riderless rolls in  
it captures you and off you go  
through the bottomless hallways  
full of eternal errands  
a house is just a knot of streets  
lost in themselves, anything  
can happen, anybody  
might be living in your skin,  
we have to go together  
and hide in the little room  
high up the church steeple  
where we study each other's faces  
dawn as we can  
around us barren as sunlight.

10 December 2003