

7-2000

JulB2000

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "JulB2000" (2000). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 1074.
http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/1074

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THE FOURTH OF JULY

The Fourth of July is a woman in a red dress
hurrying to take it off before the sun sets

independence comes just before decadence
how long do we have o pioneers

we have tunneled through the dark sky
to find planets islanded in emptiness

more barren than this rock archipelago of
consciousness moment on and moment off

seapeaks of Ordinary Mind breaking loose
out of the turbulence of mental reactions

o to be truly dependent again for a day
on the man next door and the girl across the street

to be dependent on place on all places
this city and all who do their traffic here

to be dependent without reaction
that would be liberty at last.

4 July 2000

Being tired or arrived
being Arab or under
being peninsula
being athwart or over or begun
being another one

before being first
before being one
before being before
a wave touched
a shore before before

a sure as doubt
as sure assure
before any out
being pure pure
as I want

a formula every
a saying that is common

will it rain soon
mow your lawn.

4 July 2000

BEDDOES IN BASEL

There is a part of every day that feels like Sunday
this is a pop song you understand not philosophy
like those girls he hired to dance his *Bridges in the Sky*
or from the sky their bodies are not actual their bodies
are moves and moves are scheduled are mathematics
they can't be as near as you can be a sphinx browsing
on my skin the wind scouring raspberry canes vexing
a wind lifts me someone is coming chemicals are true
I think I have almost finished dying now. This
is my final stratagem I breached the Great Wall
I drank dry the inland sea suddenly I am certain
I know everyone who ever lived I am explained.

4 July 2000

Too many to think about.
Be a peach and advertise
Teach the masses to amass
The downtrodden to tread up

It can't be done. Take off
Your uniform, the war's over
Try to mingle with your victims
You still don't think you did anything wrong.

4 July 2000

What am I thinking about now
Is a question I want you to answer
Since you're the only one who knows
How to hear the inside of my head

Inside the body of the word.

4 July 2000

Mediators wait for quarrels —

What do lovers need
To send them to work?

Hard rocks of cold beaches
Or anything at all.

4 July 2000

Near enough to be a remembering place
— crow step on mown now —
because you held here
in woolen coating fashions awry

an epitome of all your striving
all your flower wars and she is here
now, alkahest and mercury at once
she dissolves you into her gold

this is the Lost Silver Process of the ancients
— ship bounding on wave eagle in heaven —
you have these things and gold
came late but came true your weird wedding

when you come to write this down
be sure to use an Arab pen
infantry of those marching waves letters
moving unfaltering to the left

the way the Sun does our Master from Iran.

5 July 2000

Mostly for the slain
we wield this book
a Faerie Queene
against the principles
of unexamined life

everything's got to be a
fucking battle
or else you're dead
a sparrow
falls from the argument
God is a hard-hearted man

The thing about alcohol is this
everybody is drunk at the very same hour
Li Po and last night the same
a drunk has no history
oracle of the empty

bottle the empty book
the drunk mind has to fill
we write so much to keep alive
the memory of all who ever lived
and some live still

each one was the mother of a word

a word we have to speak.

5 July 2000

ORACION AL SANTA BARBARA

Saint Barbara with your cup and sword
Barbara with your body on fire
You are Shango, god of war.

You make the little babies roar
Under the shelter of big trees,
You teach us to hear their cries

As instantaneous poetry
We can't help but say with our own lips.
Teach us to use what is at hand

And have no patience with eternities.

5 July 2000

There are places in places where we yearn
and then the faltering cornet player snarls
Will Weary's Tune (my ruine) and all
the Cadillacs overheat on mountain roads
but gleam just as pretty in the sun.

Maybe more so. We get what we pay for
and what we want is Christine slipping
from the throne and into a monastery
— an inner life is realm enough and then some—
or Jakob bothering that angel (sickness
blesses us) dry sunlight on an old bridge
over the Po plain. A silly name and the horn

שי

howls again, sometimes the breath
runs out of music but the *will to sound's*
important mouth wolfs up the world

5 July 2000

Picture this, a lonesome gladness
operating on a dime. I'll build you
sphinxes all you want, a plenty
of corn-stuffed kine, water even
to shunt along your lap, water
on its way to heaven. Be near my east
and I'll take care, your hap of jungle
spills my reed sea, be my pyramid
and you my kiss me, miner.
Break my seal is all I ask, soror,
uxor, fund of the lake and yellow
miracle bereft of sunset
so now you know. You always know.

7 July 2000
[first poem composed on new Vaio]

Chine sorrow surer upon axon,
a keen disaster, will you, and be home.
Dvorak listened to our sorry prose
and harped it — is that
what you think made the cycle spin,
European beauty music?

Be after! There is no polity
that does not listen its way
snug in our skin, *that's* the devious
melody you can't get out of your
and so forth, backbone of an ape
and the jawbone of an angel

or does the animal do our high palavering,
poesy and starnosed rhetoric
burrowing through the stodge
that passes for human thinking?

Then our company stands out from the dock
and hoists a philosophic gonfalon
spanked by a hard wet breeze
and doesn't really care what meaning
comes to operate its singular address.
Luck is better any day than skill —
That's true because it used to be in French.

7 July 2000

a fragment from Berlioz's song for Margu rite:

D'amour l'ardente flamme,

Love's fierce flaming

Devours my happy days

Consume mes beaux jours.

my peace of mind

is gone forever

Ah! la paix de mon  me

A donc fui pour toujours!

Son d part, son absence

he abandons me (it
abandoned me),

I lost my soul in him, in his leaving,

Sont pour moi le cercueil,

his absence makes the prison cell I'm in

And so far from his presence

Et loin de sa pr sence,

everything does me wrong,

everything hurts me

Tout me para t en deuil.

Alors ma pauvre t te

my poor head's

Se d range bient t,

totally fucked up

Mon faible coeur s'arr te —

my weak heart stumbles —

7 July 2000

1602/2000

Is it there now? Is it the Indian island
at last again,

 Caliban with a clam,
Gosnold gazing out on Buzzards Bay

wondering Which way?

 Still we wonder,
 still cluelessly wonderful
we are, we immigrants.

All the certainties
 are numb with wonder,
 are full of numbers,

and no one knows
why such distances
are given,

 glory, glory,
 the heart has no longitude
we go by periplus

always in sight of land, landfall, port of call,

and why did we come?

 We came from reality
 to find reality, found a luscious desert
 it will take a thousand years
to make as ordinary as we are.
Poor Albion is magic still.

8 July 2000

Can we appease ever
the multiplying principle
lord of cannons count
of commentaries?
My only treatise will be
Against Survival.

8 July 2000

FOOTNOTE TO *DEATH'S JEST BOOK*

for Thomas Lovell Beddoes

Imagine Death – you see a skeleton
in moldy bedsheets swingeing
a rusty scythe with sad bright edge —
as ashen mage.

But try to imagine Life
and no picture comes to mind,
Life is invisible and all around at once,
the imageless sum of all images.

Which proves that Death is just
a character in life, like Lust
or Santa Claus, just one more actor.

Not an opposite, not an answer
and least of all a curtain falling.
He bustles you brutally or tenderly
out of the room. You change
into another costume, you hang out
in another room, smoking, reading,
biding your time.

But poor Death
never gets to leave the stage. Maybe
after all he is the hero of our play.

8 July 2000

PHOENIXES

Walk on the high desert
two of us alone on the mesa
staring out at the yellow emptiness
that is so full, that lives so long
there, always just out of reach

and nobody around but us
or not even us, we're holding hands
as if we were people, ordinary
people, as if we had bodies

I think of you beside me
I think: she is a bird
of another kind, sometimes water
sometimes fire, you think of me too
but I'll never know how

what kind of tracks do I leave in your sky
wake in your water

sometimes I think I am the ash
left when you look at me
the unreliable evidence

you leave a furrow in me
at least I have the sense to follow
how we lead to each other

I look out at the document spread
in front of us: a desert
sunset and colors, I think
this is a snapshot of you.
The world is what is standing beside us.
The world is what holds us by the hand.

9 July 2000

PHOENIXES, 2

And then the fire comes and we
persist in flying
trying deep into the core of it
you because you're young I because I'm old
you are refined like gold being feirced into purity
I am renewed like old pennies
fused again to living copper
(it takes a lot of copper to approach
even a little bit of gold)

and now in the core of the burning
which is not different from sunset
released from the sun, released from the earth,

a pure burning is set free, a bird of fire
we are pleased to call it,
this upward writhing in us, of us,
not unlike lovers in their occasions

but this is fire
and asks so much of us
we hardly remember our names,

just trying to stay with its tune

and it leaves us in the sky
and there's not much to say about the sky

we have to do it, make it,
beat it with the whips of our wings

we have to churn the sky
using the insolent milk of poetry

(fantasy) all
we imagine to be true

to be true.

9 July 2000

Tell the truth you
Stretch out on the bed
Because the sky
Is too far away

You listen to the clock
Because of all the works
Of humankind it
Alone can tell the truth.

10 July 2000

Can you admit how every word you read
Happens first inside you? You write it there
Then pour the words that shape the thought
Down onto the enchanted page. Everything
Is mystery. A poet lies asleep in Mexique sun.

10 July 2000

POSTCARD OF A DAHLIA FROM VENEZIA

Being tired or attempting or
Way's man sails the blue departure
Canvasless in narrow water
Such nutriment the flower has
Be decorous and true, alarm me so
With neophrastic gazetteers, my life
For you, enchanted one, blue silver
Murano pebbles in Rialto windows
To woo deutschmarks from hot pockets.
Going under that bridge is better than living.

10 July 2000