



The Orchard

Brigit Pegeen Kelly

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Richly allusive, the poems in Brigit Pegeen Kelly's *The Orchard* evoke elements of myth in distinctive aural and rhythmic patterns. Her poetic strength lies in her ability to cast poems as modern myths and allegories. Propelled by patterned repetitions and lush cadences, the poems move the reader through a landscape where waking and dream consciousness fuse.

Brigit Pegeen Kelly teaches creative writing at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her poetry collections are *Song* (BOA Editions), the 1994 Lamont Poetry Selection of The Academy of American Poets and a finalist for the 1995 *Los Angeles Times Book Award*, and *To the Place of Trumpets*, selected by James Merrill for the 1987 Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize.

The Orchard Details

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From Reader Review The Orchard for online ebook

Lindy Loo says

Brigit Pegeen Kelly is amazing. If you've never read any of her stuff, you should definitely check this out. Especially since we just waltzed into fall, and many of the poems are so sensually about nature and transition.

Maddelyn says

A dreamy still life / the imagined lives of statues in a gothic garden.

Interesting use of ellipses as a kind of transition.

Favorites:

"Black Swan"

"The Garden of the Trumpet Tree"

"The Foreskin"

Gerry LaFemina says

The Orchard, with its use of repeating images, repeated language throughout its poems, presents as much as a book-length meditation as it does a book of individual poems. Often gruesome, dreamy, and pastoral, these poems don't flinch from the gruesomeness of the world or the art we make to try to understand it; instead they wrestle with it, using mesmerizing language as a balm.

Helen McClory says

Lush and eerie poems full of imagery like multiple-headed deer staring in the groves that might be figments from sleep deprivation or something like messengers from other worlds, giant yellow carp abandoned in ponds in the woods, statuary missing limbs that birds swing through, very white dogs biting into carcasses, gardens all overgrown and humid and green and black, flowers all sexy and rotting, a snake carried by a twin swarm of bees.

Poems to live inside, shivering and in awe.

Rodney says

These poems are all concerned with overgrown, wild spaces, teeming with flowers and vines and weeds and half-glimpsed fauna, sweet with rot and decay. The lines are likewise swarming with untamed metaphors.

I've read many of Kelly's poems before, but this is my first experience reading one of her books straight

through. Now I need to read them all. This is definitely one of my favorite books ever. A classic.

Rick says

Nearly every poem in this volume has the words garden, gardens, field, fields, woods, or orchard in its body or title. And even those that don't are still clearly not poems of house, office, or town and city. Kelly's poems teem with trees, plants, flowers, animals, ponds, bogs, and lakes, even if in a confined seeming space or one with a mystical or dreamlike aura about it. If this is a garden it is Eden after the fall, not of Man but God.

In the volume's second poem, "Blessed Is the Field" Kelly writes,

"It is good to say first
An invocation. Though the words do not always
Seem to work. Still one must try. Bow your head.
Cross your arms. Say: Blessed is the day. And the one
who destroys the day. Blessed is the ring of fire
In which we live..."

In this garden are decrepit monuments: headless statues, bodiless stone heads, mythic sculptured lions. There are characters out of Greek or Shakespearean tragedies, a madwoman, diseased dogs as ravenous as wolves, ghosts. Yet, personal touches: a mother with her boy for whom she made up her own creation story.

"I told the boy I found him under a bush
What was the harm? I told him he was sleeping
And that a black swan slept beside him
The bush was in a strange garden, a place
So old it seemed to exist outside of time..."

She continues her story,

"So that I would not wake the sleeping bird,
I picked the boy up and slipped him into my belly."

Older boys bully the boy and he wants to return to the bush. Is that the harm? The safe, magical world of early childhood, innocence lost to reality as we enter the wider world?

Another poem might have had as its own origin as a found poem, built from imaginative observations "the boy said":

"The sheep has nipples, the boy said
And fur all around. The sheep
has blacklegs, his name is Blacklegs."

And:

"The bee has a suffering softness,
The boy said, a ring of fur,
Like a ring of fire. He burns
The flowers he enters. The way

the rain burns the grass.”

The poem concludes:

“And the boys said this. I am a boy
And a man. My legs are two,
And they shine black as arrows
That drop down on my throat
And my chest to draw out the blood
The bright animals feed on
Those with wings, those without
The ghosts of the heart—whose
Hunger is a dress for my song.”

Kelly’s work is beautiful, evocative, mysterious, true to some understanding that we recognize as we read, the lost garden that is still our home.

Regina says

THE DRAGON

The bees came out of the junipers, two small swarms
The size of melons; and golden, too, like melons,
They hung next to each other, at the height of a deer’s breast,
Above the wet black compost. And because
The light was very bright it was hard to see them,
And harder still to see what hung between them.
A snake hung between them. The bees held up a snake,
Lifting each side of his narrow neck, just below
The pointed head, and in this way, very slowly
They carried the snake through the garden,
The snake’s long body hanging down, its tail dragging
The ground, as if the creature were a criminal
Being escorted to execution or a child king
To the throne. I kept thinking the snake
Might be a hose, held by two ghostly hands,
But the snake was a snake, his body green as the grass
His tail divided, his skin oiled, the way the male member
Is oiled by the female’s juices, the greenness overbright,
The bees gold, the winged serpent moving silently
Through the air. There was something deadly in it,
Or already dead. Something beyond the report
Of beauty. I laid my face against my arm, and there
It stayed for the length of time it takes two swarms
Of bees to carry a snake through a wide garden,

Past a sleeping swan, past the dead roses nailed
To the wall, past the small pond. And when
I looked up the bees and the snake were gone,
But the garden smelled of broken fruit, and across
The grass a shadow lay for which there was no source,
A narrow plinth dividing the garden, and the air
Was like the air after a fire, or the air before a storm,
Ungodly still, but full of dark shapes turning.

Kent says

I've read this book a few times before this. And always, I read that first poem, and I made it the location for every subsequent poem. I suppose it should be. This garden, these statues, are a locale. However, none of the poems have that life, and movement that "Black Swan" does. Granted, the poem is possibly one of my favorite poems, period. But on this read, I noticed that many of the images are dense, but not dynamic. They don't seem to live through the page, they suffice for well wrought objects.

Mackenzie says

This book is a little stiff for my personal taste, like the poems act as containers for a desire far surpassing the limits of the words. I suppose that's part of the charm, though, but to me it's over-crafted in parts. I love "The Garden of the Trumpet Tree". Kelly lets loose a bit here with amazing results.

Elizabeth says

Wow and wow again. How have I wated this long to come to Kelly's work? What I love most, I think, is how she makes vast music from simple things. She lives in a simple, domestic (although outdoor domestic) world. And yet. How does she manage to move into dream, myth, fear without seeming overwrought? There's a quiet description that seems very characteristic and that aids in this, I think, and that grounds the work.

Deer, orchards, lying on the ground, birds... and the fears that come out of even the manicured-lawn dark. She's a Freudian poet, in a way. Or Jungian. But writing toward essence. Toward a sense of things that signify. What a strange, wonderful mind.

Elaine says

I only keep this book because it is the fastest way for me to determine if someone I've just met is my friend or my enemy.

Grape Blazeit says

Mythological fantasy acid trip. 8/10 would trip again.

Magda says

Stunning.

Tristan says

I loved *The Orchard*. I don't think I was quite as awed by it as I was by *Song*, but I did love it. Kelly's poetry was, as always, fluid and musical and lovely. This collection also had a number of poems that were astonishing encounters with the sacred (although not, I think, with the religious, but rather with the sacred in the mundane) and with the magical and the impossible.

While I liked every poem, I found "The South Gate", "Windfall", "Pale Rider", "The Orchard", "The Dance", "The Rain's Consort", and "The Sparrow's Gate" to be particularly wonderful. Those poems tended towards the surreal, towards the mystical and towards themes of connection, hope, movement, and passage (of various kinds) in ways that I found especially compelling.

I think my very favorite poem might have been the final poem of the book, "The Sparrow's Gate":

the bird shot through--

and the absence we had forgotten
came back;

and it was not, as one might expect, an insult, nor a disfigurement
nor a lack;

nor the deflowered sun-stricken bush swamping the broken
fountain, a stone flower thrusting out a long-dead pipe below
the woman's feet

This poem reaches into the world of the impossibly magical while still being a story of the magic that comes in the perfectly everyday and it is glorious. Brigit Pegeen Kelly is, for me, one of the closest things poetry gets to an oracle, and I am both sad and happy to have finished with those poems that she managed to get published in books before her death.

Melody says

It's not a fault of the book, but the prose poems are really not my thing, and the themes seem to be quite repetitive throughout.
