



L A P I S

P O E M S B Y

R O B E R T K E L L Y



A BLACK SPARROW BOOK
DAVID R. GODINE · *Publisher* · Boston

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THREE EXPLANATIONS

ESSENCES

The essences are here.

Matisse traces a dove
with charcoal on big paper
and suddenly it's white,

traces St Dominic, traces
an archangel looking curiously
down the south of France,
Matisse walks in sandals

over the classified ads of papers
neatly spread out on the floor,
his feet on paper move, his hand
holds the long drawing wand

and traces through the air some
plain and fancy holy people
and a dove to carry the earth to us
as it did in the days of Noah

in its vastly strong and fragile beak.

SNOW ON THE SANGRE DE CRISTOS

How could I know I would never
be in 1954 again,
eat Camembert in the Luxembourg?
How could I know

even the war would leave me?
I was a broken bridge,
a burning vineyard, a rock
beneath a waterfall,

an empty bottle, a hold-up man
dead outside a convenience store.
We were not born
for gondolas,

the church never forgives us,
the mail never comes.
We went one morning
to the sanctuary of Chumayó

where sick people eat holy mud.
We thought of eating it,
and the thought was enough to cure
since our malady was mind.

THE ANNALIST

Sometimes I wish I were Pepys or John Evelyn
or Gilbert White, nothing to do but write down
the weather of the world and men's opinions.

And maybe that is all I do, here
in this transparent cipher of my verse.
Tell how deep the snow fell,

the lawn how wet, then dream of seed.
Or go to town and dine with busy men
who tell their dreams

masquerading as politics and fact.
We all are dreamers on a deedless earth.

FOUR PORTRAITS

JOHN DILLINGER

In the shallow night of summer
lakes we are fugitives
from no man's justice
hiding from the women in red

until at length
we weary of concealment
and go back to Mickey Mouse
and welcome the bullet

(it has my name on it).
To die in a glamorous alley
in the rain (it was not
raining) is an exquisite

poetry, isolate
from doctors and attorneys;
to die alone with love,
with the beautiful enemy

watching scared policemen dance.

EMILY DICKINSON

Are we allowed to think she masturbated,
that some of her poems trace
sure as spiderwebs the spread
of who she was and what she wanted

and what it felt like to be her,
grace or grudge, in a world
by love infected but in a place
all too rescued from the scarlet plague,

the hilltop forts of conscience and the Mind
stretching like Mount Tom above a snowy
landscape shot through with evening sun
turning everything red but her skin pale?