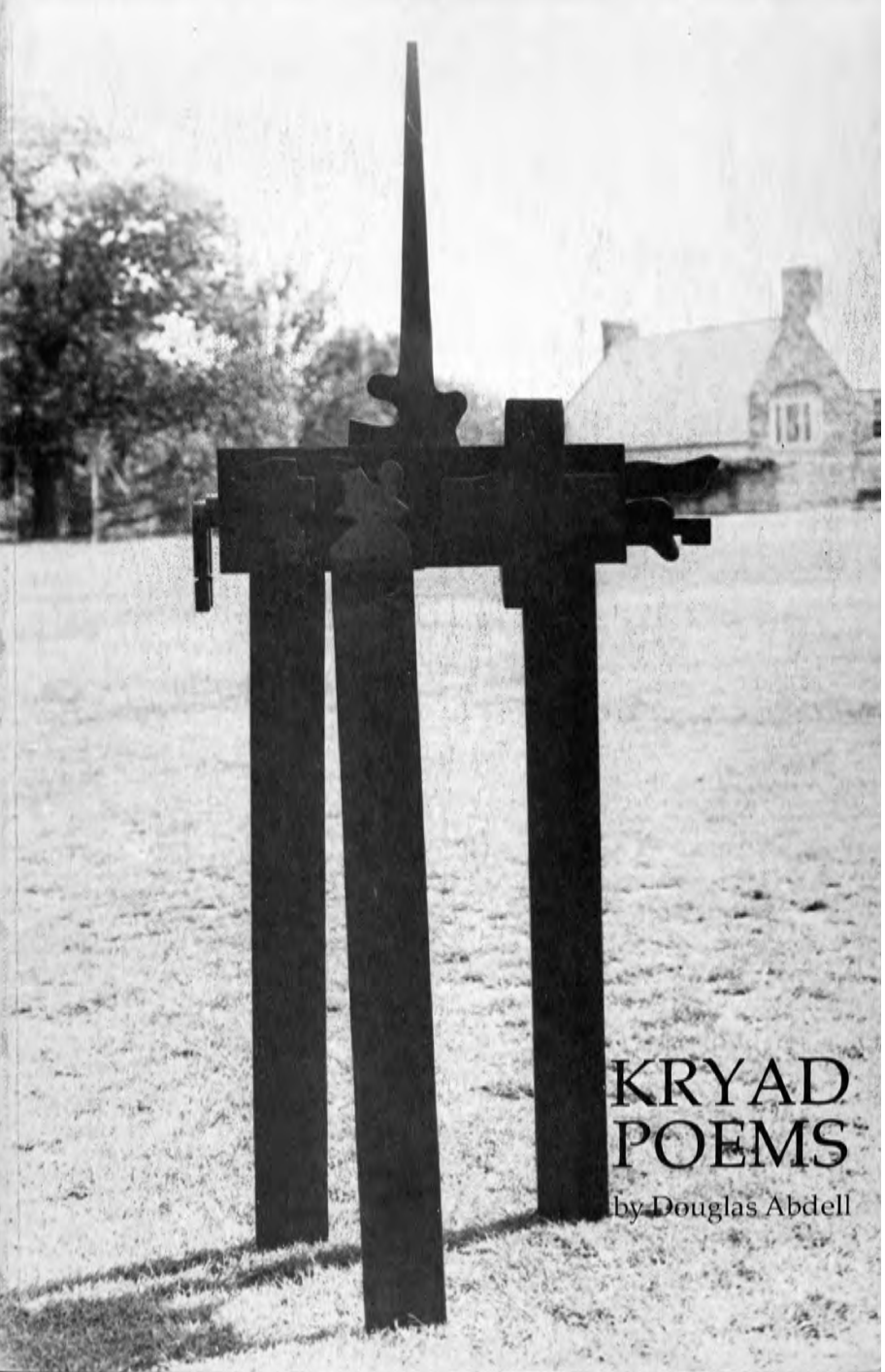


Kryad Poems

by Douglas Abdell

Introduction by Victor Manfredi

Chelsea Press Incorporated

1978

Pleas'd with his idol, he commends, admires,

Adores; and last, the thing adored desires.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (A. Golding)

THE GRAMMAR OF KRYAD-LYRIC AS ABDELL's SCULPTURAL ONTOLOGY

Poetry is a speaking picture and painting, silent poetry.
Simonides

Conventional discussions on the relative qualities of various art forms assume each medium of expression to possess a given nature which is, beyond the content of particular works, itself the essential activity of the artist to reveal. Structuralist esthetics promotes this problematic of essential form to a deductive certainty; *vide* Murařovský:

> The material by which particular arts differ from one another is not a merely passive basis of artistic activity but it is an almost active factor that directs the activity and constantly intervenes in it.

At the same time, form's hypostasis in this manner as the essential mover of artistic production (comparable to the corporate personification of capital in the economy of com-

modity production) takes content as a natural, hence universal object of expression (akin to exchange value, the abstract translation between heterogeneous use goods).

This reifying critical practice exemplifies Barthes' category of mythology, in which

> everything happens as if the image *naturally* conjured up the concept, as if the signifier *gave a foundation* to the signified.

But what is the nature of the artistic artifact if it is not a formal entity? The methodological priority of the artistic signifier, a doctrine entrenched in humanistic discourse, presents the difficulty of rendering the artistic concept an evoked abstraction, separate from the features which are specific to the formal work. This opens the door in practice to purported translations between artforms via the universal repertory of meanings, such as is performed matter-of-factly by the ten-line imagistic blurbs on record sleeves. Structuralist esthetics avoids devaluing artistic specificity in this way, although unhelpfully by positing a novel, non-communicative mode of signification:

> From mere means of expression devoid of their own meaning, all individual components of a painting become independent meanings codetermining the meaning of the painting as a whole.

This cannot rescue the meaning of the whole from remaining the abstract and evidently universal

> capability of directly evoking in the perceiver a certain attitude applicable to every reality with which he will come in contact.

Art is reduced to the means

> by which the perceiver who has really experienced it thereafter views reality and behaves toward it. (3 citations from Mukařovský).

Exposed, like political economy, as a theory of instrumental relations, formal essentialsim poses the classical problem of an ideology: the closure of analysis to the exclusion of other legitimate dimensions. The structure of an artwork is not limited to its formal signalling capacity. The work's relation to the universe is not so insubstantial as an attitude. Lotman breaks with formalist discourse in a syllogism:

> The idea-content of a work is its structure. An idea in art is always a model. Consequently, an artistic idea is inconceivable outside a structure. The language of a work of art is certainly not 'form' if we perceive form as something external with respect to content as the carrier of the informational load. The most important information therefore arises when a type of artistic language is selected, a constant struggle between modeling the subject by the choice between possible communicative systems, and modeling the object with the notion that there is only one language.

The dualism of this conception still allows the artwork to fall on the side of concretion, as the text is the empirical, counterpart of the language, leaving the 'utterly essential' paradox that the communicative system functions as a modeling system (why then is it organised like a language?). Lotman tenaciously idealises an essence of expression as separate from its mode of being. The alternative is Heidegger's thesis that communication is in itself a modeling system: 'Being speaks through every language, everywhere and always'. His follower Derrida proposes a metaphysics of non-presence (or deferred-presence, called for short 'differance') by which meaning is prior to being in the human world. This postulate is directly comparable to Marx's denial of any immediate relation between man and nature in the absence of tools: everywhere he works, man finds a universe that is already oriented to use; everywhere he finds, he first speaks.

Meaning is never both present and complete such that the information-carrying substance could be abstracted away from. This phenomenological doctrine resolves the paradox of an artistic language as a model of the universe, but how then does meaning become intelligible? Derrida recognises three properties in the linguistic medium which reside as meaning's imprint, its tracks left behind in the highway linking hearer to speaker:

> representation *(Vorstellung),*
> reproducibility (identical value) across
> different contexts *(Vergegenwartung),* and
> commutability *(Reprasentation,* substitution for another
> signifier with different semantic value).

These are together the exponents of the unity of activity and material through which speech takes objective being as its instrument: by standing-for itself, speech is able to encompass a value for each distinct verbal expression.

Derrida reformulates the elements of linguistic structure as properties of literary texts, just as Lotman critiques and refounds the existence of artworks in general on the basis of language function. Abdell crosses the same reconstructive terrain, in pointing out with his lyrics the diagnostically linguistic relations holding within and between his Kryads, as beings-in-the-world.

> By singling out syntagmatic and paradigmatic bonds . . . we can discern *semiotic objects* in the arts, systems constructed on the model of languages. Inasmuch as man's consciousness is linguistic, all models erected on it are a sort of secondary language, and the work of art is a text in that language (J. Lotman).

The Kryad-lyrics are first of all not translations of sculptures into language, because the resulting texts are not linguistically intelligible in any straightforward sense. They are the artist's statement of the autonomy of the Kryads'

mode of being, his warning that they not be experienced as comparable to objects in other, nonsculptural modes. Then, the lyrics grow affectionately out of the Kryad-names; Naeo-Kryad lyric builds up to naming its own name in the last line, like an oral genaeology of a founder-hero, and the names of the Kryad-bronzes presuppose the metaphysics of Derrida's differance: the Kryad family is a phonemic commutation of its congener Yad, Aeyad and Aekyad lineages, just as Aekrae-Kryad is of its elder Aene-Kryad sibling. In generative grammatical terms, each nominal is a self-embedding noun; semantically, each is interpreted as an individually determinative compound of the form.

modifier (genus) + head (species)
e.g. 'gazelle-eye (d one)'.

While the existence of the names was sufficient to point out the structure of *Repräsentation* in the sculptures, the possibilities of near-repetition in the lyrics elicited a flowering of substitutions: instances such as Sphae-Sfaexa freely move from the phonic to the purely graphic:

<ph~f> as a consequence of /zero~xa/.

Mediterranean orthographies and morphemes surface in the sound-substance and its graphic image, again fulfilling the ideational nature of the expressive medium:

suffixal <aux> pronounced [o], <q~k>, /dio(s)/ etc.

identify the author *and the sculptor* as a 'high-culture' worker of Continental-Levantine descent, just as regional and class speech styles supply self-identification without filtering intelligibility. Most significantly, the repetitions which permit these plays of differance are, in the context of the lyrics, valid for a *single* sculpture. When Kryad texts were limited to naming, differance was an inchoate distinguishing mark only; differance became a *positive* characteristic of a sculpture only when the syntagm 'Sae fienxa, saux phaenxae, Fauxnnce-saenxaes' could be addressed, with the polyphony of a praise-singer's variable epithets,

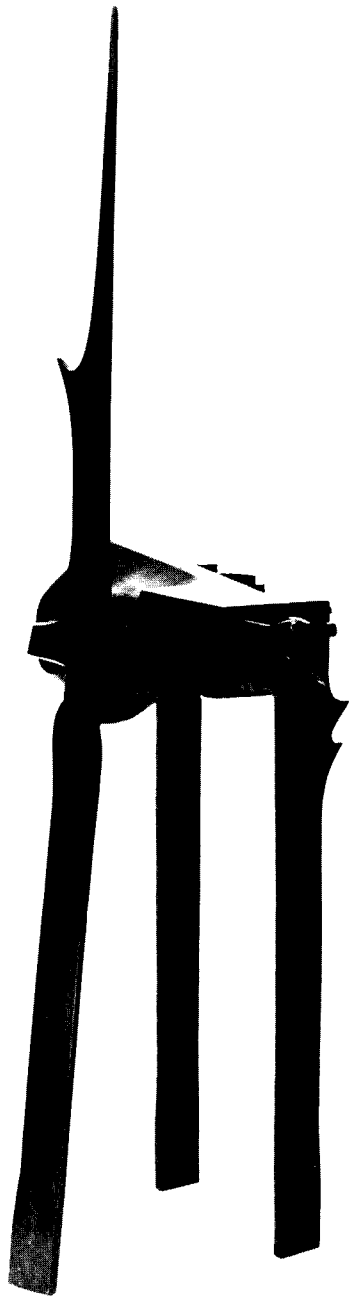
to a being named Sphae-Kryad. The Sphae-lyric's particular strength is the recognition of this variability, followed by its reduction in spatial homology to the departure from the sculpture's active central formations to its bi-and-tripolar base of 'Kaenq-Yaenq-Kaenq'.

The relation of an artist and his works is not exhausted upon their completion: so also the lyrics symbolise. Their

intimate continuity in his development is visible from the crowding of their names on his studio-calendar; the same interspacing is quoted by the exchange of 'Aene kryas' in the Naeo-lyric with 'Naen-Kryane' at the end of Aene-lyric. The recognition of artworks' historicity which motivates such horizontal interlinks needs no justification except as antithesis of an idealist reading, but it suggests strongly an awareness of the metaphysical value of labor-processes such as equally animates a bronze regalium from the 9th century sacred kingship of Ìgbò-Ukwu, Nigeria. The office presupposed by the leopard-and-snailshell, if comparable to the present Ezè of Nrì-Ọka, is legitimated by the conjunction of natural and social worlds. 'Leopard' is the hypocharistic of kingly power/temperament, but the regent's symbol is subordinated, in the casting in question, by an astonishing scale factor to the forest-dwelling snail. Not so astonishingly, if the land snail is a pre-neolithic protein-source, and if it is the dynastic founder who is credited with introducing (from the sky) domesticated foodcrops before the iron age. The archaic sculpture ignores wilfully, in their conjunction, the physical relation of the two opposing forms-in-the-world, and the prerogative of the sculptural structure over either essence or substance is asserted by the playful 'patina' of body-painting decorations which covers both forms with a virtuso texture of embroidery (a respect in which Ìgbò-Ukwu casting is unequalled). The viewer perceives, by the mediation of the metaphysical embroidery of that 'patina', or of the Kryad-lyrics, the equivalent of the birth of the symbolised objects, which could not have pre-existed separately.

Victor Bartolo. Manfredi
Somerville-Bronx, October-November

Kryad poems are looking back romantically trying to remember what was happening when I made these particular sculptures and speaking about it in a language and rhythm that wants to approach their nature.



Naeo-Kryad

Naeraqae - neao , neas
Pree yad Parmonsey naeas
Stey endd dio dios
Parmonsey naes naaeqae
Nreacc nreaq aene
Aene kryas - traux kryos
Na faxa danaes
Na faxa kryaes
Naes - Kryas , Naes - Kryos
Naeo - Krykrae.

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Aene-Kryad

Phaen - faenas
Naeqa - naeas nae uuse

Asa - da faxae
Asa - da faxae

Naeos - ka trauxos
Preea - yad , kaelas - yad

Kros - kraekaph
Kroos - kraekaf

Naxa - oo nasa
Aenes - kryaes , Aene - kryae
Naen - Kryane

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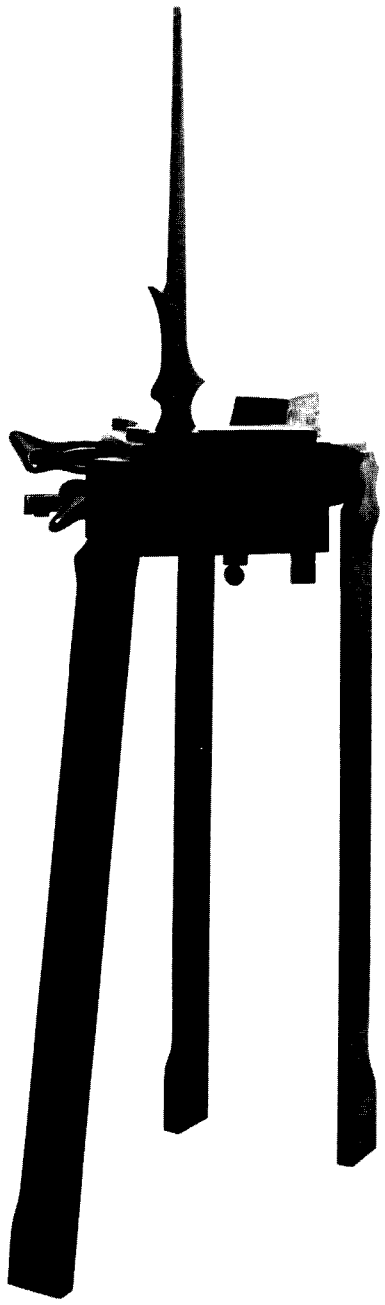

Sphae-Kryad

Sae fienxa , saux phaenxae
Fauxnnce - saenxaes
Twauxnce thae cae
Nnklasa nnklaesa
Proema baaq
Thlienqa - Kaenq
Kaenq - Yaenq - Kaenq

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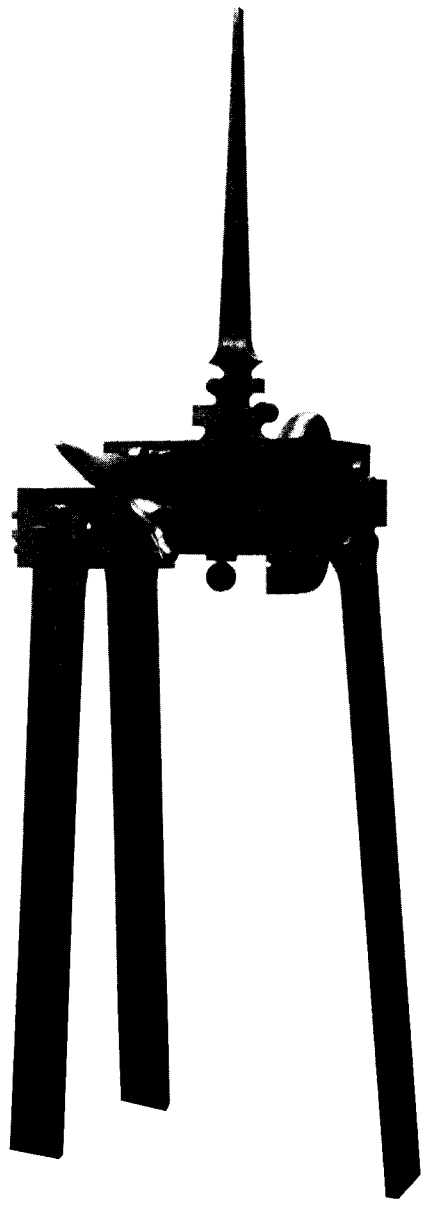

Aepheau-Kryad

Saen traal aee aux
Naux - kaenos knaux - kae
Kneau - caeno neau - cae
Diaaph - Aeae
Braakaa kraekaph
Kraekafa - braennq - aa
Majaaka - amajaeka
Aaekraenq - Kraenqaux - Kraenq

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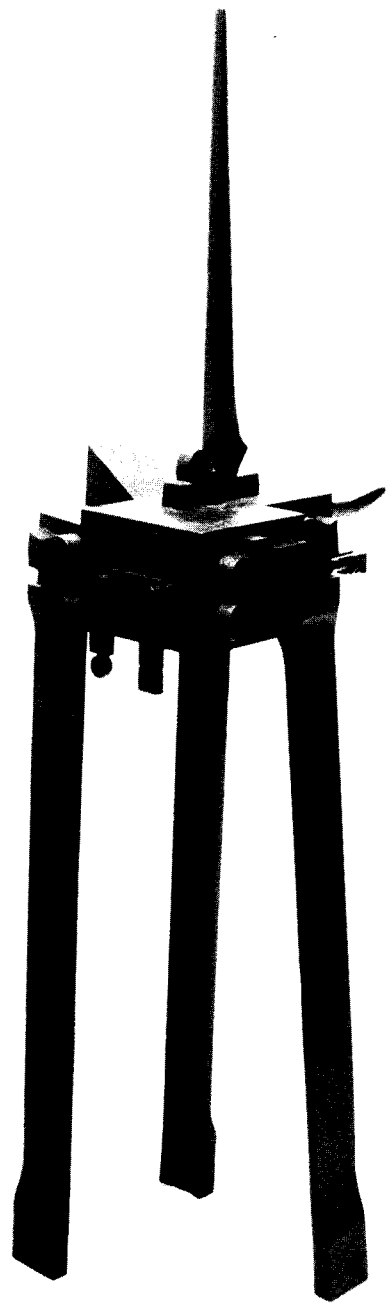


Baqae-Kryad

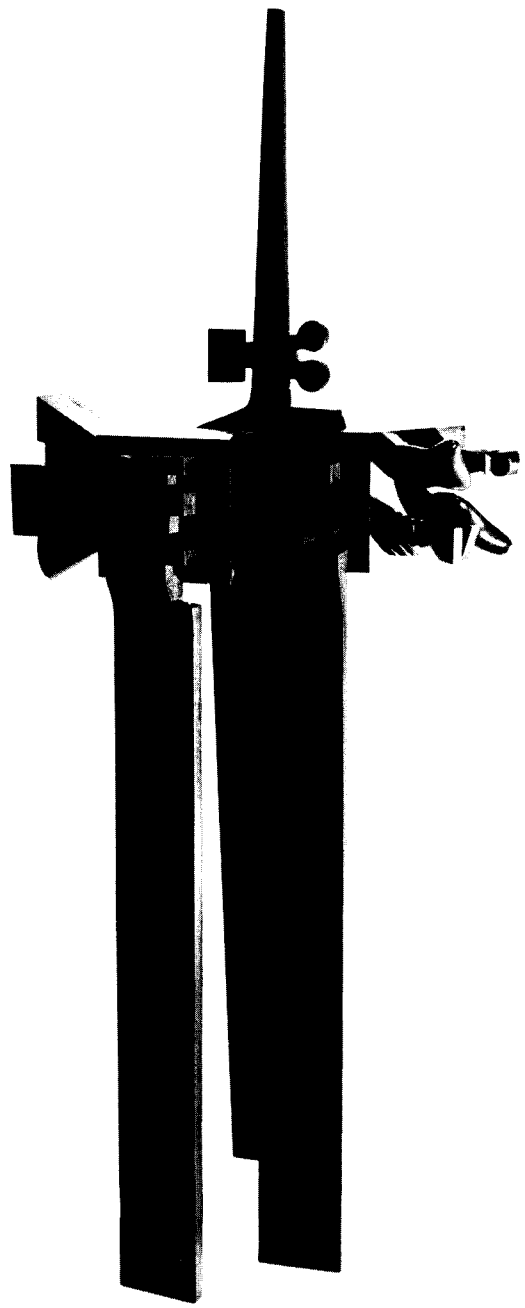
Aa sae pha na saenqae,
Nae fa saenqae aeqae.

Roella roolae raala,
Raala aqaea cicci,
Raela ciccae nkaeph.

Nn kaepha phaeas saeqa.

Saeqaes fa sa khonaes,
Baqaes phoe - nnklae.

10/21/77



Aekrae-Kryad

Kaeaus caenq kaenq,
Aekaux - naenqaes auxnz.

Caenquax aekaes laefa.

Aekyaed kuut phoekp,
Kuutt nkaeph - baas.

Nkaephas aaltaas oosz,
Aelaas baeqaas.

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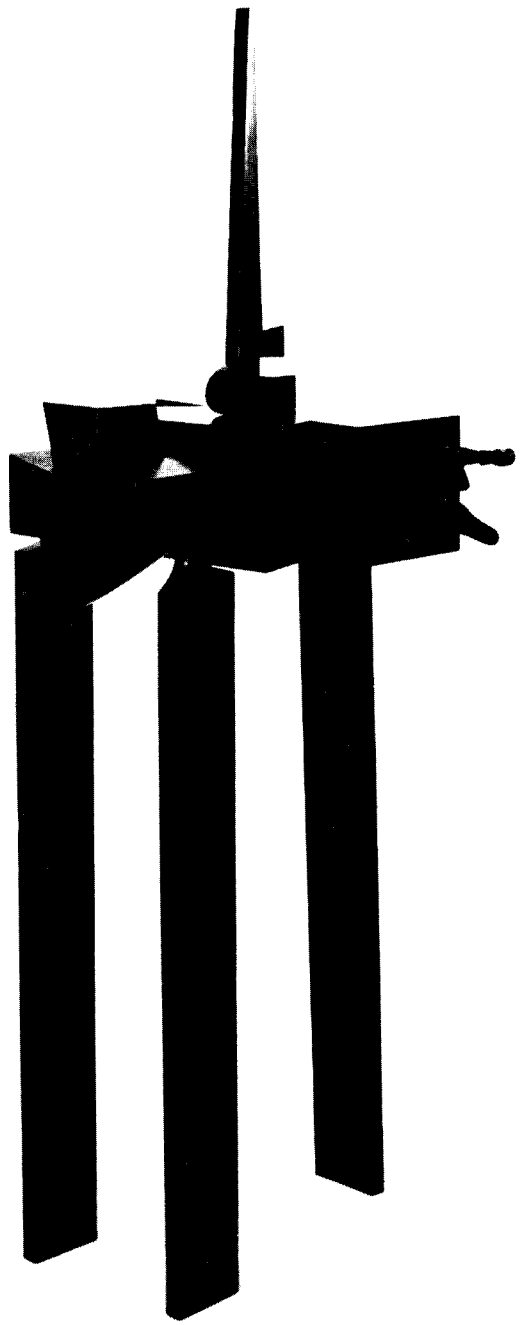

Sfaexa-Kryad

Sphae - Kryad kaasfa bypsa
Kaas kloosa sa faxa dacs.
Sooo phae sa baankae.

Baankae pleepka - plea basphi,
baankae pleepla - plea basphi.

Kryas , kryoos , kryaed,
Nassa , nassoo , naaskyae.

Alsie , alsia , alssioos,
Aekyad , aekyados , aekyaeza.

Zae Zaeas , Zae Zaeas,
Aekyadas Aekyadis
Sraefaex sraenx - aenk.

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The Kryads are cast bronzes ranging in height from 62 to
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