

2-2004

## febF2004

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### Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "febF2004" (2004). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 837.  
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You read me shallowly these days  
the sun said to the wading pool.  
Once you were eloquent and deep.

What can I do, the rays of you and  
others like you have diminished me,  
sky is the most dangerous text

and the more I read the less I knew,  
the less I was, grew lean and turbid  
—but still the children understand me

they know my feeble perils too  
how I can drown a man but not  
set fire to a single piece of paper

some vagrant lover sent his love.

25 February 2004

=====

Does the garment fit the morning  
does the morning fit the music  
does the highway fit the city  
does the mind finally wake up  
ten a.m. busy, desperate for a friend?

25 February 2004

=====

This grammar of a disused language  
this fling. Pressing in.  
How far in will the word go

before it sticks, jammed in the hearing,  
before it meets an obstacle  
it will die defining, analyzing?

And then the next word shoves in.

25 February 2004

## Letter #6

“words betray us”

Betray us by speaking  
what we are made  
separate to keep silent

a mine of perilous jewels  
deep below the river,  
hessonite, brown  
as a bear, as the eyes  
of a fox, o forget

bears and foxes,  
                    forgetting  
is a variation on a letter,  
Don Quixote's, written  
with such love and left  
in the writer's pocket

only the habit remains

I send you a bear  
to be instructed,  
I send you a number  
to tell you are  
the one who never,

but the unsent

letter is the easiest  
to answer, here,  
I tell you everything I need

safe as silence  
this mechanical rose.

25 February 2004

=====

Have all things changed their meanings  
in the night? Is that what the sun said,  
Revise, revise?  
circumstances of medium disaster  
as usual.  
This hand can't write. Who?

Not just the words. The things themselves  
fit different in their places,  
the woods, the snow, the hill  
are ungrammatical.

So I come to you, Rabbi, to ask  
what is the meaning  
when things lose their meaning?

But she was no rabbi  
and I had no mouth to ask.

26 February 2004

=====  
Write bigger maybe  
slower like a rock  
across an era  
or like a mind  
managing to forget  
an obsession, obsessions  
are always lucid,  
are avalanches  
white out, ruin,  
to be buried  
meters deep  
in soft cold  
unbreathable crystals.

26 February 2004



## **POETRY**

Poetry is also a little like being paid  
for going to the analyst.

And poetry doesn't smoke.  
And poetry always answers the phone itself.

26 February 2004

=====  
If I left my picture  
on the windowsill in sunlight  
how long would it be  
before my face was gone?

Do identities fade  
faster than houses fall?

And all things would be busy  
fading with it, with me,  
we'd never notice,

only when an earthquake or divorce  
came along like a shadow over the window  
so you would look down and say  
there, that's what I was.

26 February 2004

## THE MAIN SEQUENCE

Of course the sequence  
ends at a number  
that's what it means  
to be one

where the long count  
starts again  
and not just one

I was a pioneer of war  
a sly hussar  
crept up your mansard  
and gazed in upon you sleeping

I was like the moon  
my mustaches bristled with light  
I saw you stir  
as the inside of your body  
began to hear my light

you woke and said *I am two*  
and that was cognac  
for me, the dark elixir  
buried in the number system,

touch me, you cried  
half awake now  
and I tried

but what I was  
like light touched every inch of you  
and therefore nothing in particular

so did I really touch  
if all my touch  
just felt like the space around you?

you said *Yes, you are my No,*  
*my zero that makes me infinite* you said

so entering your bedroom  
I began and you joined in  
the litany of everything.

27 February 2004

## ALL KINDS OF INTERESTING VACANCIES

Salt improvers  
highways on the moon  
already laid out by rival governments  
take the L4 to the capital  
where London Up There waits  
moist-centered on her imported river  
or still down here on Eastern Time  
a new variety of fish.

The faces of dead murderers  
peaceful with homecoming  
I've seen them in the Weegee light of old papers  
I grew up with those blissed-out corpses  
dozing on bathhouse floors

but this is not the hour to reveal  
the iconography of my scared childhood  
the world is not ready for my icons  
especially the cowgirl grilling steak  
or the tennis player on the El train platform  
I say no more and move on to green  
the newborn plastic of my latest Bic.

Which fish? *Captatio fulva*,  
unknown till yesterday  
I call her Melusina in her tank at home  
(quoting Hendrix quoting Peret quoting Paz  
who lifted her gentle name from Paracelsus)

because this fish is eelish, womanish and quick,  
you find them if you find them  
swimming in the bottom waters of your local mind  
down with the staved-in rowboats and the brass  
buttons from your father's uniform  
the satin dress your aunt wore when she skipped town.

27 February 2004

## **THE IMPOSTORS**

Squirrels are Christians who learned Yiddish to deceive,  
secret Papishes who speak nice Vilna  
a little on the fussy side, they use even sweet  
commodities like fur and language to lull our wills,

they climb up everything, open our doors, denounce us  
from our own branches. But when they sleep  
they dream in Latin, and they scheme  
endless empires of need and seed and trees and greed.

27 February 2004

## **THE PASSION**

He died once.

I have no need

to see him die again.

He rises every day

and speaks to me

and certainly to you—

he is an old Jew now

and speaks so many languages.

27 February 2004



=====

But a bird is singing  
so it sounds for all the cold  
suddenly spring

the differences the discernment  
all the words we reckon  
birds don't know

this robin knows.

27 February 2004

=====

Starlings not yet. Cardinal mornings.  
And she says a Carolina wren  
actual voice of birds

flicking the switch in me called music.  
Wren. King of winter  
he was, hunted  
on new year's day, victim  
of folklore, remember me

when I am born again  
be there for me  
green stockings and bare breast  
a bird singing on your wrist.

27 February 2004

## ALWAYS ABSOLUTION

waiting, wet hands  
handling sunset

you think this ocean

and her beach have you  
you belong  
to stuff like this

like a book you read  
too early in your life  
not to believe

darling in the mangroves  
you can hold on  
till rescue comes

we breathe together  
like childbirth

husbands and wives are  
supposed to do it

strokes, laps,  
tide coming in.

27 February 2004

## IN GENTILE LIGHT

*in memory of Jean Améry*

In gentile light a sword  
forgotten leans behind the door

in Deseret an utter flower  
small after snow melt February

white things all round a man  
a different color inside him

a politician of caresses  
measuring the flighty audience

in the Spring & Autumn Annals  
no kingdom was dependable

the White Huns came the Black  
Huns came the natives were corrupt

or were coopted, animals  
roamed in from the wastes and bit us

and always more kings came.  
Only the Annals themselves

were dependable, the sad focused mind  
keeping track of its despairs.

28 February 2004

=====

Look close the words  
have to tell us something

mirador to stand on looking  
parador to rub your haunches on

when no one's there  
just you and sunshine

and the remembering flesh.

28 February 2004