

9-2003

sepE2003

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "sepE2003" (2003). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 912.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/912

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MANNERS

Not always easy to find granite
when you want it. Sometimes Latin
comes to you instead, follicles
fluttering, stands at your bedside
like a stern vague mother but then
takes off her robe and feeds you.

Sometimes you haven't reached
the table yet, when you are *tall*
enough you will be *able*, they tell
you all sorts of things like that,
they help you to remember
and this is a spoon, you use it
to *sip* the *moon* from a bowl of water
on the porch, the dog drinks from it,

you don't really think it's just a dog
but you will try to remember. The heart
is the hard part, the ship sails away
out of the modest harbor and what
have you then? *Port* you say,
but they say *Starboard little man*
and you look into the sky for help

the bright place where no one waits.
Not even the moon. You're too weary
to ask why. How did it get there,
floating so many of it in the water?
No one remembers how weary it is
to be you, everything all around you
and nothing close. And clothing

is so strange, why do they teach you
to put it on if then you have to take them off?
Why do they tell you things and then forget
they told you but you go on remembering?
Are words what people use to forget things,
say it and it goes away? You ponder
lumber in its yard, there is no grass,
you think about timber and a tree falls down.
It only makes sense when nobody says it.

17 September 2003

WICCA PERPENDS

Somehow the calling of the day
or close. The witch dream ends
leaving only a smell of recognition:
so this is malevolence. No image.

Hell has no images in this story.

“When the spell has been cast
there are no more images. The victim
cannot name the simplest thing,
looks at a lemon or a mango
and sees only some region
inside his head, no color, no name,
nothing seen, the he is trapped
in pure reaction. A causeless agony
with no glimpse of the stimulus.
He can grasp no explanation,”
the angel said, “but there is hope.
If any image dawns, then pray to it.
It doesn’t matter what it shows,
an image will lead you everywhere,
restore the lost network of connections,
the hidden kingdom. See this thing?
It leads you out of hell, the famous
Golden Bough is any thing, it stands
out from its environment, it lets
you find it among all the nameless
circumstance of tree and folk,

this thing that lets you grasp it,
the thing itself, solid, alone
on the other side of your anxieties.”

When the found wand
is brandished
the spell breaks

as long as the victim
recovering pours out
love and forgiveness

on the sorcerer,
which is all the poor
witch wanted in the first place:

Entity. Connection. Care.

18 September 2003

A PALM

Opportune exegesis reveals
not the one on Megan Fishman's
lawn she puts her arms around
at my behest and prays along
hoping to help me to the sky
where I would make my peace
with the Footstep of Orion there
in blue-diamond distances
that tell the truth,

the other one

you wrap your hand around at night
and close upon the lines
change month by month
to tell truth changes with us.
You squeeze your cool skin
around that scrutiny.
And feel warm. You accept,
Roman, the oracle of yourself.

18 September 2003

NAXOS

Naxos is a large island.
The broad fields full of wheat
lead nowhere.

Temples deceive. They feel
like needless reminders
of what is everywhere—

something made
in honor of something found
a deity, a sense of place.

Nameless till you
name it, and let the thing
you found fall from your hand.

18 September 2003

ISABEL

Some men have thick fingers
some have hairy toes
we are specified
from long ago.

Who will deliver us
from this body of being born
and dying? Is there a country
inside us of fine bones

where teeth do not decay?
Is there a gleaming place
the mind sometimes knows?

I was in your arms last night —
did it feel to you I knew the way?

19 September 2003

VELLEITY

If I begin to do the thing I do
is it open a window
or is it lick a door?

Lecher. La porte. The door
tastes like itself, no hint
of what might be beyond it.

Is anything there? Am I using
the right language?
I kept my eyes shut and hoped

like a child squeezing a dime
to turn it into a quarter
in his soft hot hand

by wanting alone. Is that
how to do it? Is appetite
so coupled with fulfillment

somehow that you can't
really want what you really
can't have? If I do

what I have begun to do
will the door remember
to open, will I remember

to go in, singing
the way I did when I was Latin
or it was, or somebody

said something
that nobody remembers
but everybody is?

19 September 2003

MUTABILITE

Already the sun is out and nobody understands.

As if summer came back in the night

and we still didn't get it, all that green

familiar but strange. I haven't seen a Frisbee

in a year I think but dogs still bark.

Changes, but not big changes. Just enough to kill.

19 September 2003

THE MIRACLE

I'd like to do something with you
like walk on water, take the sunshine
and braid it round your ankle
like a girl friend, like something gold
of some value, with a Hebrew
letter on it, *sheen* for sun or *high*
for being alive, already I'm reading
your legs and forgetting everything
we came out to do, together,

water has no other side, they tell me
water is the ash of air, I tell you
come with me but won't say where
or you come downstairs and tell
me it's time but not for what, we meet
at the chapel but the priest is sick
the hermit has no prophecy for us

or the museum is empty today
we wander past everything we ever wanted
here painted accurately on piece of cloth
stretched hard to the wall so we won't
miss a square inch of what we intended.
whatever it was, cows in trees or odalisques,
crucifixions or great waves of pure
color laid on white by a modern hand,

I think I want to be everything I've seen,
we'd make good cows and oaks or dying
gods or harem queens or Gorki's
final nightmare but all of that distracts
me from you, and it was to be with one
another we set out, wasn't it, with me
bent down to kiss the skin below your neck
behind your ear as if I had something to say,

the sun comes out straining through the wind
and they all know what they're doing
and we just know we walk on water
forever, one doubt and we're done for,
but if we hold loosely to what we almost know,
the way will find us. Isn't that what water means?

19 September 2003

AFTER

Knowing about this,
a sleep and what it tells,
stinking rubble of a human city
whole when I fell asleep
and ruin now. And now
the aspiration of a sleeping man
to solve the square root of Sennacherib.

19 September 2003

DEAD MOTHS AMBERING IN MOLTEN CANDLE WAX

We don't know what they're doing.
We don't have the equipment
to understand the little flies
who crawl in from outside to lodge
and die between the screen and window glass,
the fat moths who sail into the flame,

we don't know enough about death
to understand what they're up to,
moves in a game maybe, stations
on a strange metro to the north,
is it a voyage, is it a lover's mistake?

Not understanding our own condition
we can't grasp theirs, for us
dying is just a synonym for getting dead
and we don't know what death is.
Not knowing that, we don't know anything.
They know. They do their knowing lightly.

20 September 2003

LOCATING THE CONCLUSION IN THE BEGINNING

the green leaf rake
again,
against the red
shed and the old
iris leaves in tatters,
cactuses
nearby and the wind
is cold today
autumnal

and for all I know
the Measurers
have allotted the season
already and poured
the blue wine of distance
into what I thought
was my parish sky

and suddenly
everything is far
I have to drink
where you are.

21 September 2003

BEFORE THE LEARNED CONFERENCE

maybe just this one

word say

divided

in nine parts

or ten

depending

whether one

is part of what

one says or is

the sayer of it

whoever that

could be

morning

a confusion

lightens

into a mistaken

certainty

22 September 2003

[Leaving the house for the First Pan-American Congress of Tibetan Buddhist Centers, Garrison NY.]

TO BE READY FOR IT WHEN IT DOESN'T COME

An ape of shadow
by the man of grace
stumbles rearward
as he reaches for the sun

guessing with his back where freedom is,
the back's the scout who always knows a wall

freedom drags his animal along

2.

the Reader, that god to whom all poems pray
begging the Shir ha-Shirim, the latch
lifted by the lover's tongue, the word slips in
and grace answers, all those Sufi songs,

\rych ryc

the act of reading is itself a culmination
out of time and space a lover prays
and a lover simultaneously becomes
asked and asker and the little text
song sex letter tell and told and all is done —

3.

for where else could the prayer belong
but in such ears as can parse the words of it?
Don't ask the gods to learn new dialects
—greedy as they are for human novelty—

ask the simplest words you know
for the complexest pleasures

“at the stroke of midnight” God will understand
and isn’t understanding all you ask,
to be under someone and standing in their light
while word follows word through the softest door?

23 September 2003

SCRIBE

All I'm good for is writing things down

Saint Thérèse's shopping list

Buddha's list of Things To Do.

23 September 2003

VERSARY

This is the week that does not turn
the gas that has no chaos in it, no seeds,
the green wine that grows no grapes

and foxes do not come to haggle with the night
and if you do find a bird it looks at you
one eye at a time until you feel yourself
a monster of duplicity and cunning,
Nimrod in underwear, sticky with sun sweat
you are ridiculous with poetry

all seeing things and feeling them and don't you know
the father comes long after the sun and the mother
hasn't been born yet and still you think

that stuff around your brain is thinking!
God is the thing that happens to your head
when you yearn for all the denizens of light,
yearn for dark and make them love you too.

24 September 2003

Aria: AMOR TI VIETA

Love won't let me not love you
though I'm mad at you today.
At every slight I move my heart around
to keep it from your clutches
but it won't hold its phony posture.
Love makes me love you no matter
what I think or what you do

or how much stormy weather
you pour around my head.
It's hard to punish the sky but I try
I try but crumple up with shame
and go on loving you, with the purest
kind of love, the cold candle
whose flame has gone away.

24 September 2003