

6-1995

junA1995

Robert Kelly
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "junA1995" (1995). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 1174.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/1174

This Manuscript is brought to you for free and open access by the Robert Kelly Archive at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Robert Kelly Manuscripts by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

One needs to get the world back to country,
where David, coughing, could watch the braceros
slip off their jeans and plunge into the shallow creek,
their ridiculous hysterical latin antics disturbing the cows
who came by right to drink from the far side —
they didn't need a dozen hooligans from Oaxaca!

Don't disturb a cow's ruminations. Law of nations.
Some wind under these northern trees but none outside,
how odd, in sunshine. David coughed
and watched the amber bodies seal-ing and beaver-ing around.

If the mind worked as neatly as words do, his cough
would dislodge from his dark inside chest
this smooth sunlit not difficult soft-skinned desire
from which he was always coming and coming,
journey after journey, school to factory to school again,
the blur of feeling that makes each new one

the one. Reach out to touch! The Great Blur
reaches out to touch this new one, best one, to caress
the newness of the this one, the thisness of the new one,
and celebrate with this new one the so often
simpering liturgy of fluid exchange, so many new ones
there are, and each one may be the one,
or actually is the one, for a little hour, and then the new
is old already and the squeezed out body falters hard to spit
even the least little juice into the amber sanctum

of the guest who ought to be god and grows old in a second
and leaves, of course he would want him to leave,
there is no staying in a country like this, too shallow,
the cows coughing from the brackish water, the migrant
workers splashing each other and laughing forever.

1 June 1995

WEEDS

1.

There is no way to be sure of what the weeds are thinking,
Those flowers we do not claim as ours. Her dress was sable
With blue flowers strangely pricked with tiny mirrors
So that her closest friends saw themselves unendingly divided
Their faces thrown back by every curve and yield of her,
Because love is a thing that disintegrates the lover
And consolidates all the vagrant moods of one fair personage
Into the Immortal Beloved. Weeds know things like this
Because we walk through them thinking of such things
And never of them, never of where we are or what we tread on
Unless we're scared as usual of snakes or ticks or poison ivy.
Which is itself one of the great municipality of weeds.

2.

Scaramouche, a book
scrama-
sax a knife or swords the Saxons
took their name from,

saxifrage a flower.
There is a little red one also
whose name has
nothing to do with all this

and an even smaller blue.

3.

The instructions
need us

There are policies
to attend
and councils
to people

with our despair.

The monks of that religion wear
a garment the color of the special earth
he touched at the moment when
he knew who everybody was and what to do.

4.

Apprentice talk, whisper in the shadows of the slightly
elevated seat where the blind teacher preaches.
My eyes are deaf he smiles but my ears can see.

Being young, they test him with ingenious silences.
For it is right to test the one you plan to trust—
perhaps that's why young men give young women diamonds

to see if each can withstand the other's powerful presence.
All night they sit and watch him hear them saying nothing.
He smiles as if he thinks everyone is different, then smiles at thinking so.

5.

There is a kind of torpor young men know
when they think about harpstrings and isthmuses
and face unserenely the vees made by women's thighs

spread wide perhaps for them but who can tell,
geometry is the least reliable of witnesses,
and shadows lie by angles against an evening wall.

6.

Or there is an air.
The flower knows it
because its knowing

is a dense solid paltry kind of thing
not worth explaining,

just does it all day long.

The woman told us
to slip ice cubes every day
into the vases of anemones.

Nothing lives forever.

It is a blessing though
if a flower makes it to tomorrow.

7.

Naked before the language they propose to use
gardeners hide in the shade of flowering quinces.

All day long they keep telling their stories
with knives and secateurs and waters

until we believe only what we smell
in the hot part of the early evening

when balsam of white pines comes strongest
and the button bushes (what are they really?)

are white and fragrant and flowered small,
semé the old books would say with tiny flowers.

1 June 1995

Let's hope we left the moon in the right place
the pegmatite intrusions in your blond mood
having the same reactions as other people do
but caring about *them* the people not the feeling

how fond I would be to give you pleasure
expanding the lakeside strolling parks of Montreux
palms and midnight-flowering white-flung jasmines
I hurried up the steep streets of St George to meet the sun

so now everything is in its place the escapement intricate
oiled balanced on the declining schedule of repayments
you forgave me long ago you really do be nice to me
holding me now at arm's length and doubting my earnest

believe me I have stuffed myself in nobler orifices
and come to you from hunting plover eggs with royalty
high on the clifftops of Soho. I am spawned in your stream
misspelled in your letters home, die in the first chapter,

you read me in the subway, I wink at you across the aisle
and you suddenly wonder did you shave? Has your skirt
ridden up? Are your wings showing? That's all you need to know.
Be honest sweet animal, don't you like a lot

this little breath of mine in your soft ear?

2 June 1995

Plumb learnings. Yearn for that surceaseful smile
of hers that you were wonderful. The lead on your line
reaches to the bottom of the sea. Prepositions
line up inside our hearts, pointing this way and that.

Presses us. Someone bows over a prayerbook, a latte,
a calculation that will reveal to skeptics like us
the last will and testament of Uranus—
the stone that falls to the Middle of Gravity
and we are still falling to meet it, invincibly
heavy, to the end of our contract with the flesh.

For we were spirit till we listened to the gods
who told us Eat, eat of everything you choose
or find or see or think. Eat everything
except the slick fruit of that tree called Doubt.

The tartness of the pome remembers us.
We were meant to skirt the physical condition,
to be mind-waves warping across geologies—
we were not meant to swallow down and entertain.

2 June 1995

[WEEDS]

8.

Her dress is my mirror.
Black mirror.

The shadow's Prussian blue
she casts. Desire
lasts. It is forty

of her years since first
I said "blue" in that tone
of voice that rejoices
in the distances to overcome
between my hand and her hip

and they were playing Alban
Berg's set of small
pieces for blue clarinet.

Any child has that color
in his water
color set.

It soaks into the paper
and saturates
with green with metal with lust with suddenness
it is everything, there is no
color possible beside it,
the most intense of all

and it stays in mind
indelibly,

no chlorine leaches those yearning suppositions.

2 June 1995

THE GREAT PRIMER

Case studies apart there are no authentic revelations
of what it means to be you when you're doing something
no one of your gender (age, class, religion) ought to be doing.
Maybe Proust. Maybe Mary enduring the angel's pronouncement.
There have been people before you who knew this hour
when everything was worth nothing but this was worth everything,
this forbidden present the mind gives to itself when it thinks.

Now am everywhere. Once I was ashamed when a woman
knew I might desire her. That I desired her. Once there were cups
full of pomegranate juice and newspapers in Russian on my corner,
Golos was one, it meant a Voice, and I wondered what they had to say
worth so much mystery. Everything in my mind was a secret.
I looked at her and she, who in her gift held my felicity entire,
she was the very one to whom I would not speak. Fearing what?
Fearing the Elizabethan consequences of my needs: touch, terror,
love, acceptance, family, rejection, error. I was all made out of heresy.

Golos, a voice. *Golub*, a dove. *Gosudar*, a government. *Bozhe*,
o my God. A wind from the sea fluttered the pages I tried to sense.
If this paper that I hold in my hand keeps talking and talking
and I understand nothing, maybe now and then a bird or a moan,
then what can I learn from the body I can't even touch, a body
that is not even speaking. Or it speaks only a language I might read
but never speak. The lust of bodies is beyond our conversation
as heaven is beyond a broken fence, a laugh, a burnt-out match.

2 June 1995, late

EZRA'S SONGBOOK

by node of custom

palabras of amber

I speak of amber

also, that quiet glass that grows beneath the sea

and touches vision, eyes enlarge

and multiply beholdings,

deep wakings, chur

of a car starting, so much thithering,

not yet have we learned the first syllables of mountain.

The First Steps of Staying.

Discuss me

bark by sepal till

your certainty matches my genesis. Century

by century. Spills

of variance, emitting

freely unrequested doves.

And fell in love with

her name was Timbre

o little woods

that has such changes in it

and we're still not a full mile from Athens after all

these centuries. Hear its owls.

Some say water is the coal or ash of air.

Some say rain is a spasm of return — we seem alone
in being water — wrote roses
round her waist — o I am ache today, a kind of getchu—
walk with her to the summer house
whose gliders slip through dreams of Canada and home,
Christ why did we ever come?

And wherever we go with it our skin is just our skin,
the sour heat of American seasons,
and here the summer walks upon the stage
not wearing many clothes,

nor is fully concealed

the fertile conundrum, Sign of the Trinity,
by which our whole economy is powered,
not gloom, not even sin. The simple *in*.

For there is entering. We read her sign.
We sit down to discuss it. (Discuss me,
daughters of Askelon,

with your immoderate expectations your amber eyes
your weaponed hands, your poetries.)

By the Strand

we came to Paul's and on that hill
convinced of our election stood

catching glimpses of your river traffic,
a kind of music they had in those days
before the sad buildings.

And despite the dewy lawns
I heard the scrape of words
along the lawyer's document, the scrivener's hand
lancing our easy arteries, o lewd law
so to abuse the persons of this world
by owning them, o blasphemy of freehold.

Thus he spake. Down the highway of his faint coherence
one detects a limping traveler straggle
with some obsessive thought to bore us with.
Sweaty and too much hair, untrained in self-analysis,
this personage squats beside a roadsign and explains:

Owning things is wrong but I own nothing, and I grieve.

Ownership's iniquity, and in emptiness I grieve.

I am a song of liberty & joy, & do naught but grieve.

This is the old Envy we have met before, snake-tongued
desperado, the sack of Rome. Havership is excellence!

Bethink you of some quiet place where no second language is required
and where you've been so long you think you understand the crows.
If you think long enough you may be born here
again, of patience, earth and observation,
you may be born from sheer listening,

o my country
how I long to love you, be love-worthy, be factual,
be a face
of liberty
and let love in,
this is all the Reason you require,
and the Bill of Rights.

For logic is the poetry of empty men.
Of course I'm trying to make you love me,
what on earth else did you think talking's for?

Now some slender
singing?
Singspell,
the wind
came down round Claverack
(be skeptical of news)
the force is rarefied
the face is rose
but still plucks trees,
rends rooves, tosses
vehicles, kills.

There is no purpose to this conversation.
The line hangs up.
Wolves pad around the telephone.

What voice have we brought into our house?
Or at the door
so well-hung on brass sockets
what late-night talk
is whispering?

Two wolves guard a cauldron. What is in it?
Soup of wisdom she set simmering. Seethe.
Seiðr. Inside, my childhood simmers.
Old magic. Sign of the Jesuit order,
set thieves to guard the treasure and all's well.
They cooked me well.

And not so big a thing
to be born again.
It happens every day.

We have come to the region where at twilight
marmots grace adorable lawns. Two swans
on the bay and on the little stream by your home
two white ducks have been vacationing. Much
of the day they tread against the stream
for all the placid seeming of their surface.
In the sun. Deep in the undercroft of waters
they keep dipping for their dinner,
down where some food mysterious and green
keeps us alive. We have come to the region

where our lives are made. It is here.
The birds make free of it with their quick shadows.

Not far away on Massachusetts roads
the sour aftertaste of small catastrophes.

Leap by legion
over barbarian fields.

Your own winter island where the muses come
to renew the grey-green of their eyes
with healing sea-fogs.

And all the birds there
sing insolent madrigals.

Because an island's not a people place
and we are tolerated even here
our loud impermanence a feature of the season
the earth puts up with.

O they are green-grey those eyes
and truth looks out of them and doesn't speak.

You have to answer all that glaucopsy
with tomfool singsong and
curvettes of dancers in unprincipled ballrooms
will be ballet enough for me.

3 June 1995

Having absolutely nothing to say
the old man with a green head
took his hoe and marked patterns in the earth,
the cleared earth of his front yard.

Having absolutely nothing to do
the old woman with a green head
sat on her steps and read the marks he made
in the cleared earth of her front yard.

Having absolutely nothing in their minds
the old couple with a green head and a green head
sat and understood the things they read
in the cleared earth of their front yard,

they understood the earth of their front yard!

4 June 1995

PLAY STREET CLOSED

The museum of the body is closed
to visitors, only the arrogant curator
can finger the paltry yet somehow glorious
exhibits, like trophies from some trivial society
made noteworthy by being massacred.
Only the curator can touch this skin.
And then invasion comes, a voice
answers a glance and before he knows it
the great bronze doorway is in ruins
and other wills besides his own
can move more or less as they choose
up and down them —it turns out—
cluttered, even dangerous, corridors.
There's never much light in a place like this.

5 June 1995

THE HEAT OF THE SUN

So much amazement
and he is stifled by the simplest thing
as if remembering were the same always

and every recollection an actual ax.
A battle for his only skin.
What does he have but a sense of passage?

What does he have but weather?
Cows have weather too, summer hours
on the Moselle, a Latin

calm in his German land. All birds
maybe speak it. *The ceaseless worry*
ate my heart. When is there never

an accurate today?

6 June 1995

OBERON

Horn far diesel way
a hard crow caws
calls inside
back of some head
used to be mind
I cawed it so caw
in my time train
under valley easy
tremor in heard
those far nights.
All the trees are
green gecking an
analysis deceived
idle road stops.
Am all I heard.

6 June 1995

How beautiful now
and who'll be later?
Return a horn and a hawk
heavy quick greeding
on Mongol prairies.
Things like leather
never end. Turn round
I love you for that nape
of the neck you'll never
see, the bravery of being
to someone else
what you by simple never
can to yourself, you understand
only my understanding.

6 June 1995