

9-1995

sepC1995

Robert Kelly
Bard College

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

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "sepC1995" (1995). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 1190.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/1190

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.

Once was a priest wanted to be crushed
against the rough brick of other people.
Skin to skin. Ordinary to ordinary.
As if to *feel* were what made us, and made us

different. What could he say
when the world went away? Come back
he said to their backs, listen
he said to their ears, ponder this

he said to their hands, linger
he said to the smell of them, but think
of me he said to their skin,
their skin was always calling him

and his body was just a big desperate
wonderful wrong answer
— who could have imagined it? —
to the question nobody was asking him,

not even their skin. Want
is an animal that breeds its opposite,
Desire and Revulsion by each other
kindled, who could have thought it?

he thought, not for the first time.
And alone with his endless body, he wondered
and studied the brick with his skin,
like and unlike. He could feel after all

nothing. Feeling is the gift of the detected,
its answer or whisper of permission or wound
it gives you. The wall did not wound him.
He blessed the silences of things and fell asleep.

22 September 1995

SATURDAY

And perhaps a thing after all is cold,
has no soul, won't warm your knees.
But on the contrary, the deft silences of wool
spread across your lap, a loony afghan
you inherit from your aunt, with too much blue,
this also is a thing, a draft of sunlight
long ago revised by a succession
of sentient beings: sheep, shearer, fuller, weaver,
aunt — such a comforter will bring
consolation to my frozen shanks, the meager
ankles that put up with all our scurry.
There, that is philosophical, that is a bowl
full of late brown pears, or a page of Proust.
And you didn't even have to read Hegel.
All people's names in fact can drop away
into the warmth that walls you from the day
outside, all brisk and meaningless the sun.
It's clear some music's on its way to being played.

23 September 1995

A NUMBER DIVISIBLE BY 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 15, 20 AND 30

Robert is sixty, it's Sunday
and who am I?
The weather is brilliant, a breath
of clouds over Marlborough
still pink from dawn and all
the sky's blue lucency,

a fine pale stone. Looks back at me.
I bend to kiss her just waking lips
and she smiles Happy Birthday
and suddenly I must be me
thanks to her love that fills
the little room we are.

Sleeping bag. Crows. Sumac
branches tossing in the wind.
Autumn's healing cold.
I am all round myself,
I am the things that see me into
being, now I know
why I am not a philosopher,
I am all answer and no question.

24 September 1995
KTC

Is anything coming here
a mouth or a tree
a book neglected and a man unseen

who almost fainted — how? — from the touch
of that cloth, as if he'd brushed
against the Veil of the Temple

Holy of Holies, the hiddenmost
Midpoint of the real,
purple, fanged with untarnishing silver,

sown with meteorites, pearls, the coarse
shards of long-ago broken terra cotta,
the cup from which the world was poured,

and it was Isis's after all, Her veil,
queen of every city and its green neighbors,
the shimmer of most delicate desire.

Shiver. New Years Day among the Jews.
The long suspension of their liturgy
to bow again instead before a Book.

Who will tell my name?
What kind of answer can the moving pen
fix to the stillmost world?

There is a cloth that touches us. There is bracken
at the edges of the road where it goes
down to the river and I am afraid.

Cold morning and be fearful, that's all it is,
some measure falling, tree talk, some ancient

secret society of love. Tell me all you are. You can,

I know it, I have heard the autumn wind
gossip with your memories and mine
no better than a pack of lies,

can the wind tell lies?

25 September 1995

THINKING AND TOUCHING

At last the cloud cover had come. The detail of things was once more merciful. The gaze is passionless now, and I have forgotten most of those I thought I needed, needed to be me. This I need, and this. No mirror. He thought and thought, because that's the right work of mornings, before they came and wanted him.

But there was nothing to say now, for all that thinking. He was looking close at the back of his hand, that unfaded but ever-withering flower he always had with him. At the very end of his reach. At the exact place that the world begins. Pores and hairs and lines and recessions, meek sumptuous salients and colors, and blood behind it all, carrying along the oxygen that fueled — dumb as kerosene in space — this curious and unspeakable journey. This hand he thought was staying.

A tool lasts on in its consequence. The table once made sort of stands. Old books talked about a 'table,' a compositum, a thing made by mind of other things, and the new thing so made inherits from its form or function a new name, like 'table,' and thereby a new is specious thingliness. Nothing but the wood, and so forth. The wood and a will plus a word, that's a table. Nothing but the wood. Nothing but the tree. Nothing but oxygen. Nothing but me.

And so he thought until he stopped thinking about his hand and just saw it there, moon-pale in rainlight, a tract of shadow, great crests of veins, glaciers of morning. No end to it. Look close, see more. No

edge to what you see. No end but close my eyes. It is not safe to see. Skin is not meant for looking at, it's meant to feel.

Rapture. The thing utterly seen. Used up in its own perceivedness, the hand clenches, withdraws from the eyes' inspection, just as someone nearby is beginning to think: the sheen or glaze on this skin, dry now but remembering oil. Love oils. The *scîn*, sheen, of a man, what shimmers round him, his skin.

There's always some word ready to take your hand away. Have you touched the word in some quick, too intimate way? Or is it too casually you laid your hand on it, without the tedious and civil pour-parlers of asking all the may-I's. Or is it the part of the word to chose to touch, laying your hand right on the tender fissure between sound and meaning, soft as dawn? Only the truest word will let you touch it there.

26 September 1995

The wood of the stable floor
and all its silvers, the sweats
of metal swallowed
in the sweat of wood,
and more than metals,
the dark of all that salt, the lather
and the care, the curious
compassion of horses, the touch,
wood, wall, stall, gate, hoof,
under the weather of the ostler's
hands, the rump and withers,
flank and chest come
calmed into long standing still,

staying. A stable is a house
that stands. And then time happens
and the empty stable
dries. The wood dries, darks,
pales, dusts
into dust and no one goes there, or a car does,
or kids play in the oil
of the car and the spill of horses,
salt and oil and spill,
negatives in the house of the positive
yearning for learning, the kind
only skin can, wets, dries, roughs,

darks, danks, sleeks, oils the tacky
resins of a million years you weren't here—
that's what a kid learns,
splinters and a bent rusty nail
our pain our grail,
he curls up on the floor in a dream of horses.

27 September 1995

Sometimes when sun comes after rain
I even like it, if the day be cold, if the light
be cold in the green and gold of autumn and
the little mist of difference smoke
off the drying leaf. Subjunctive.
Contrary to fact. Yet it is now,
and in the new sunlight even I take pleasure
with my week cave Cro-Magnon greeny eyes.
Our faces look back at us from the world, I guess.

27 September 1995

ARS SCRIBENDI

Make it appear here
magic as a cloud
writes its sanskrit
across the stone
we live inside
translucency

and everything connects
of course a horse
hauling an old stump
out of my ground

no way to get new ones
a joke on me
the sunlight tells.

28 September 1995

THE WINDOW

They had always lived in that apartment. When little by little his parents died, and his brothers and sisters mostly moved away, he had a chance to get to know the apartment and walk around the rooms. No matter how small a house is, there is always some corner you never spend enough time in to know it really.

In one room that was pretty empty now he used to like to look out the single window. The apartment was on the fifth floor and the window showed the whole street and the intersecting avenue, and you could look up all the directions, all the stores, all the sidewalks crowded with shoppers and loiterers and children and lovers, like anywhere else. He realized you could see a lot from that window, and used to spend all day there sometimes, morning to night, studying the stuff that happened outside, below him. Pretty much anything that happened anywhere in the world would happen right down there too.

He started to bring friends up to look out the window with him. He would explain to them what they were seeing, and tell them what to watch for, and how to interpret the movements of the little bodies they could see moving around down there, touching each other, hitting, playing, walking dogs. He explained what the sounds meant that, loud but unclear, came drifting up out of the growl of traffic. Late at night it would be pretty quiet, but still lots to hear — ambulances, drunkards singing, the buzzing of the stoplights at the corner.

People liked it, and a time came when he felt it was not inappropriate for him to charge visitors a certain fee to look through his window and understand the city from that vantage. Word spread, and people he had never met before, some of them from foreign countries, would start ringing the doorbell, waiting for the buzzer that opened the street door, climbing the stairs, panting from the climb, catching their breath, sniffing the varnish smells of woodwork and linoleum, ringing the buzzer on the apartment door, coming in, looking out, listening. It wasn't long before newspaper people came by, and a few of them published articles praising all that could be seen from his window.

He would tell people: the greatness of this window comes from the reality and complexity of the vista it commands. All those streets. All those houses and people and signs. I'm just the man with a window. That's real out there, complex and real. Real.

It happened soon enough that people would come right in and pay their fee and stand looking out the window and talking to one another, and pay not much attention to him and what he was saying. The reality that the window revealed seemed to be enough for them, and they would go their way, still talking. He would hear their voices receding down the staircase. Sometimes the articles in the papers would just talk about the streets they had seen, and houses, and people, the men and women loving and killing each other, the cars, the jobs, the dogs. They wouldn't say a word about him. They wouldn't even mention the wind. And when that happened, he felt a feeling like a bruise in the region of his heart, as if he had stumbled while carrying a box of books, and fallen, and crushed it with his chest.

29 September 1995
[composed 1 October 1995]

CEDAR HILL

When the cars come over the hill
you can see beneath each
and see between body and road
quick the green and amber of fall trees

for a moment the car's a light thing,
in the air, just one more deft going,
and then it beetles down the hill to me
dark and heavy and dangerous and fast.

29 September 1995

The natural kind of resistance that dogs
bend to their leashes is not such a dull
response to feather-ankled Time, this
tempest going nowhere. How to balk the years
except by drink and indiscretion? Walls
are full of pictures already, painters,
relax in undeclaring. Another lunch
on the grass, another Sardanapulus in trouble.
I think about this, watching the French professor's wife
walking a dog so small it wouldn't be worth eating,
yet she's struggling with the mischief of it,
peeing and treeing and as Kafka says investigating
though that's a fancy word for any kind of dog.
They get into trouble and then they die. Learn
from this, though I'm not sure what. Giving up vices
may be a prelude to virtuous living, I hope so,
or to the other thing, the brute inveterate evil
of those who smile and don't lift a paw to help.
I mean a hand of course, where would we be
without them, just some snakes in Barbary
with dogs growling at us in the hedges. Doesn't
bear thinking about. We've got to help, we've got
to do something about the world. When you fall
down drunk, at least you know some error has been made,
you have a clue to what to do, to the other rapture,
the sane, neighborly, the co-op, articulate, the fierce
translation, backpack, candy-bar —Baby Ruth or Snickers?—
in a pale brown paper bag color of the left
cheek of Luini's virgin, maple trees, soft answers,
letters of recommendation, leaf burning, well-digging.
Give up your conspiracy theories, they're all true.
Anxiety doesn't taste so bad, compared to cornflakes.
I'd rather sit and worry than go out and walk the dog.

30 September 1995

