

2-1994

febB1994

Robert Kelly
Bard College

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

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "febB1994" (1994). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 1209.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/1209

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.

SCORSO

As forage or discourse
and while teeth play on your rice-white neck
some fingertips are entering---

no more the privileged apertures---
dawn over the ominous nineteenth century city
(bridge of Alexander III) we must make now.

Insertion of no root; infolding no seed.
No Vikings, no raid, no colonies,
no yams. We live in the servant quarters

of the naked moon.
Analysis of phoneme frequencies
guarantees the undermessage

the one we need. Precept
of the Fathers-or-the-Mothers,
the not-me in hip-hop,

the lingering Other. The revenant.

7 February 1994

HIMHER

Not me the handcar
give me the quiet have I need
or let my vertu try
the jaws of your vice

—The things we do are not for quiet doing
the jaws we truck are westerly,
you understood us so well you never
heard a word we said

hand mouth back lap
these are the normal imprecisions
the virtues of your meters
priests of your apostasy

O handy heresy to touch you
when all the senses are grieving-weaving
and you know better and all I knew
was to kiss the need I didn't have

and let you go?

— All that
horny hobbling, rough breathing,
rules of your jealous grammar,
how could the mountain be a road.

8 FEBRUARY 1994

RAGE & PAPERWORK & LUST

is this the voices

some wayward Knight?
Blood always remarking
the passageways
of pilgrimage

up the escalator
at the Holborn station

rules of a scutcheon passing round
as pitch or pavilion,

drop of spider veils,
word scanted, like the sheer
mine ensign. Blason:

a billy and a pelican, a cliff,
a dinner at Lundy's, gull?

EXCELLENT SIGNING PENS

your life away

Heraldry is made of this—
a sign and a bearer of a sign,
a naked letterhead
sidling through the city
looking for a reader

Poetry is this
bad news made good.

We make

SIGNS LIKE THIS

in doubt of permanence

written in the letters fine
the body also is a sign
made here
good ink for dip pens
a cowboy not a knight like this
only the soluble reality of dream because

take the whole family into yourself
all she had was the moon for money
the one good thing about anger you know it when you feel it
sets your feet on the Infernal Melody
cowboy lute
Bealable Amyble Skinhappy Pinko
not in a knowing mood

patterned with a history of the tribe
and then the bison came — I can't, Karl may—
testing our meager instinct for the real.

☞ **(What we do for theater on West 2095th Street)** ☞

a collection of sayable things, a history—

not just sweet to taste like one's skin in the morning not yet woke

but actually made wood.

Now hear the sound of footsteps on the stage
the only accurate
voices that the body has

in this strange place.

8 February 1994

The orderly premisses of Nagarjuna dismay pleasure-seekers

But are we capable of arising? Spirits annoy us regularly
with their need for foods we prefer not to share

Since sharing is science, and skilful, and Love,
Yet those who attend us, mouths open to receive
also speak in us, announcing the future clearly
to those who stop chewing long enough to listen

And those who dare to kill will find in the breast
of the bird they dared to
a star with fiery arms will strangle their futures

until they return to the monstrous Ocean
to be healed in the blood of their victims.

And Nagarjuna is certain that none of this arises.
None of it lingers. And none of it ever is gone.

8 February 1994

casablanca

for Charlotte

Getting away was only part of it.
The plane that waited
took them to a newspaper, a school, an argument
away from love. But love

would have taken them to the same places.
It always does. There are sparrows
on every lawn, you don't have to bring them.
Earth spins until it catches up with birds

then settles up and lands them softly.
Ingrid and Paul were like this. Rick
must have had a trick ankle or bad attitude,
for all his kindness. The earth

has trouble catching up with people like him.
We miss him to this day, as if
Africa were not the same. As if Sixth Avenue
even had a problem. Why do we care?

But we care. The dead heroes are people we trust.
Saying their names out loud
solves certain problems. Don't drink so much.
Leave other men's wives alone.

When a man gets dressed in the morning
there is a strange moment when he is alone with his shirt.
Clean or worn, it tells him things about himself.
Things no book or movie ever told.

I am trying to make an exception now.
For you. So you can know the thing
any man knows and never tells. I don't
know how to do it. It has a plane on the tarmac.

It is raining. A peculiarly benign policeman
finally is on the side of
well, whatever it is that you represent.
Or I do, sometimes. Something they usually never forgive.

8 February 1994

Have we been watching
or is it just snowing?

Exaggerated instances —reaching
up to take a deadly serpent from a tree—
things are lost in us

—as if a melody by accident arose in all the busy telling
and we followed it to Egypt

where the rocks first learned to speak.
You can see what I mean in any subway.

9 February 1994

S O S

there is a or what I
need is another
you have it or do
you can't remember

Spartacus worked
his skin off in a
sulfur mine I
remember exactly

the movie showed it
to me you took
your shirt off
to explain

the pain
hurts less than not
knowing is a monster
it eats me

the passing
of things
blurred as something you
say why

won't you ever answer me?

9 February 1994

I SLIP ON MY PLAID SHAWL AND STARE AT THE SKY.

The nude day. The amateur geology
of snowflakes, I suppose not even winter
lasts. By the British Museum I have seen
the archives of the weather. Char. Black

streaks run down stone. Cathay
bronzes. Celebrated loot.
Pale ivory luster of the wall socket
promises infinite access. "Only connect!"

It is a day to sit in the snow and think about
carpenters. People build but what
do they build, they don't know till they live
twenty years in its then it's too late.

The *feng shui*. The Mayan deities. The day
in the calendar. The Moon. You can know
so little of what keeps the count
keeps you in place. Call it a house,

that isn't altogether wrong, the thing
or shape you are silent in. A house
doesn't have to be spoken to. A house
speaks you and sometimes you come home.

11 February 1994

IN ANCIENT LATIUM

Strange settlements at the mouth of the river.
Sediments. Hovels built on stilts
the tide flats frozen. Carcass of a crab.
We move by torches

then the scroll is done.
Walking is reading this blank page.
Oak leaves grow on alder,
the dog is quiet. They know I'm coming

and come armed, with strong companions.
But the dog hurls himself through their legs
determined to get me, all try to stop him,
they drag him off me, my leg hurts,

how could he have known I am the one,
among all my soldiers? His shadow
slipping through the legs of all my men.
My leech attends my wound. Moon.

It doesn't seem to matter how much help
a man has, his life finds him. They chop
at the rickety ladders, they are searching
all the houses, why have I bothered to come

into this festering dawn and a dog to see?
Now they have him, I knew they would,
this young man with my father's eyes,
like me he knew enough not to resist,

no sense in making death more painful still.
Just hide and hope. It runs
in the family. They bring him towards me
but I didn't come here to talk.

12 FEBRUARY 1994

PINDAR'S SEVENTEENTH OLYMPIAN

The band who plays along the bridge—
flower hammer, the *Vetter*
coming out of the ground, the dædal earth,
Olympia? All in colors
come, the primaries and green,
and white you absences and black,

black dazzling claptrap of a script to pour
upon this upwelling earth, these waves of them
to come out of earth and look around,
and wriggle your hips out of the snow?
O athletes are splendid till you hear them talk.
Even the king sounds like language is a stranger.

Be silent as those earthlords are,
ye Osirises in snow, entombed
in sheer speed, luge-slippery
descenders, be silent skaters,
skiers, let the heel of your habit
make noise enough on the granular
fussiness of weather, the beautiful

winter of Norway! The hard scrape!
So many colors to be silent in!

The furry children tumble blurringly
into perfect circles, the magic
of distance works again, the special
blue of television! Just
don't let them speak, smarmy
Paul Wylie and sobby Kerrigan,
let me never hear them again,
and the slack BudLite downhill voices,

shy banality of these famous forms
who smooth so silently in the grace of

what *is* this animal they do?
Interrupt your interviews — the word of you
is what Pindar's for,
to chant your foolish personal histories
in vast arches of telling that almost make sense.

13 February 1994

THE OLD CLOCK

It might be a matter of sparrows or a hope
dogs won't come across the traces of it.
City. Where you had to begin again
because the trains had a mind of their own
and your time was theirs. No one understands
except a city does how no one has time
to be themselves. It is always a street or a skirt
or a straitjacket or a dog. It is always a dog.
Cold in here, as if the sparrows weren't enough,
chickadees, bluejays, juncos, titmice, crows.
Mostly crows. *Where was it buried?*
We laid it in the sun. Who came to wake it?
A horn with a man in its sound.
Who did he say? He said tomorrow
but the dog was listening. Where was the sun?
It hid in the sky like an old woman shivering in her house.
In a city. Where the landlord won't put on the heat.
Where the old shawl smells of mice and the wood
had to be put on the fire and by the time
Maggie got to the bedroom her mother was dead.
Influenza, Spanish, when everybody did.
Maggie was my mother. The doctor
had passed her in the street with a smile.

13 February 1994

THE OLD CLOCK, 2

The old clock
tells old time
we have waited
till the lords
come out of the ground
and the ladies with them
blue as green
can be and the old
hours stalk
at their sides
it all returns
to know us
we dared
to leave our places
in the sequence
the stars of us
continuous exhaust
meager molecular
but we mean.

13 February 1994

AND MEMORY, WORST SPECIES OF ALL SNOW, CONCEALS THE WORLD

No one knew it, the spill
filled up the feathers of what we meant,
could get from one side to the
other of the strait never.
Sticky time.

Only the rhythm
like the smell of thyme in an old garden
or a whale tooth upright on a desk.
Suck the life of things
the history the America of it
the passageway through Basque.

Neolithic us. Dæmons are in it
from the first fissures.
Crevices in me.
Put the old song together
with a picture of snow on the trainyard at Jamaica
where the Long Island is closed down

holocene weather, all
we talk about is weather, the words
are glints of sunlight breaking
through, the light
is actual, remote,
inconceivable. But usable. "Where
is it buried? Under
the chair, with the melon rind
and the fallen spearmint candy,
with the life of Napoleon and the broke-back book
that tells a mystery story with no end."

Faceted crystal mint dish. Green fauteuil.
Green ottoman. My feet blurry in myopia
a book and a belly and a room away
where black leopards prowled the bedroom shadows
and only sunlight soothed me.

But I hated the feel.
The feel of you on me.

Only with a book did I not feel lonely,
o what an admiral I was
and every island Eden!

13 February 1994

FOR CHARLOTTE ON ST VALENTINE'S DAY

For on this day they mate
the birds do, and for life,
learning with precision
the interdigitation of the wings
in however small the space

they mate for life, the birds,
and when the Romans studied this
(mindful as they were
of consequences) said
This is love's day for sure

for love is really being with
silent and out loud for keeps,
they build a road
across the air and find
their beloved at the end of it
everywhere, they mate
for life (the birds do),

we see them understand the sky
and learn to do
that too and the way
we do is being
every day with you.
It has something to do with
the Sun going into Pisces.
It has something to do with
simple observation
of when things happen to happen.
It has something to do with love

and somehow roses are the animals
that rise from the ground to tell us

it's just like any other day, look
the sky is over us.

13-14 February 1994

Why would water change its way in the ground
just because winter? Why should it worry
down there beneath the weather and more coming?

14 February 1994

ANNALS OF THE ICE QUEEN: 1

Colony of English explorers
cluttering the arctic
wintering in a wooden ship
solided in ice
 a book
they left me

the principles are Need
Forthcomingness & Speed,
hard crackers and salt
the song of Lack

the gums ache
and a shallow senseless wit
infests my fear,
I will laugh
at what I become
it is as if my head were
milkweed's shivering seedcapsule sprung
of zillionfolded wimpy seeds
wifiting downwind

towards the drowned
archipelago the bears
—white, famous, odd
in all their mannerisms
—for winter is a land of habits—

swim towards us through the air.

It does not do to dream about returning,
her hair's already wrapped around us,
fine and soft and strong, tightening gold.
Yet breath would make me think we're moving.

15 February 1994

Well of course it's as simple as being too nervous to write anything down, I need a down to reach for that getting, ich zittre, ich bebe, like the tenor I suppose it must be says in the Opera, it must be love, what is it two days after Valentine's and the sun shines. Why do I always talk about the weather (the critic must be supposed to be asking) as if it justified that scrutiny of feelings poetry used to be supposed to be about? Whereas it all is telling. Telling what wasn't till you told. Telling what isn't till you zig. Or zag. Out loud, and the dictionary is waiting in its seraglio wearing dusty fustanellas and bombazines, anxious for the slightest hint of Fresh goddam it Air to blurt right out from here the sacred history that the word is always telling.

16 February 1994