

5-1994

**mayC1994**

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### Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "mayC1994" (1994). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 1220.  
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To sense the sum plasma  
uncontrolled sequences of stars pain are  
what you prepared for yourself to see scallions  
ground ivy on the lawn a symmetry  
of trees a common root dream  
chives chicory not yet a pendulous  
clump of moss say or ivory cloud  
catercorner we live on justice onions  
organic mistakes the mistakes of the system  
making us a car a cobalt  
opening in the dying to sense habits  
Pieter Saenredam's Great Church in Haarlem  
I have waited in the light for the light weed  
of color spacious palm wait  
for what we are raindrop we are glass.

17 May 1994

## COLTSFOOT

I want to be you  
when you bend to touch  
that flower

and celebrate  
in the sumptuous  
geometry

of your descent  
this yellow eucharist  
stuck out of earth

before any leaves,  
the flower  
that comes first,

celebrate it  
with your body how  
the thousand thousand

parts of you  
cooperate to stoop  
and one fingertip

brushes the bushy  
tip of it gently  
the vast energy

of what the body  
bends to such  
soft destinies

I want to know  
the way it does  
the flesh the flower.

18 May 1994

## **Note 6 to Brian Kim Stefans**

All morning I thought  
about families  
(posted to Victorian  
internet, how  
utopias always begin  
with revising the family—

is the family the root  
of all that's wrong  
in society, or is it just  
the closest simplest sign  
of all that hurts us,

the Mao of me  
used to have ideas about that  
that scare me now

o it is wrong  
to cherish opinions  
like the zen man said  
but where  
would we get a job then,  
you and me I mean,  
here we are working  
in the Opinion Factories  
themselves)

so you have families and Asia  
and time. What's more  
nobody knows,

so when you speak "at least  
you have a home"  
to leave poems in  
you meant to bring to work,

that other place, that over-  
ripe fruit, I wonder

about the home  
the Asia the continent  
I have gone to only once  
and brought back  
everything I could

to sweep out of my house  
anything that is only my own.

18 May 1994

## INSERTIONS

Insertions. Wandering around for hours  
looking for Tab A to slip into Slot B  
effortlessly. Some assembly required.  
As usual, nothing is finished.

We were born incomplete. Only by insertion  
in one direction or another do we expect  
to stumble on felicity. Mostly it's a cat  
stuck in a pine tree, afraid of everything.

And if I enlarge my expectations  
—two eggs, or having the paper delivered—  
I'm just asking for trouble. Down in the furnace  
I carry around, inside the mysterious Device

the doctors know less than I do, my me—  
the machine the insertions are for, the Yes  
and No and all the useful Maybes they tell me  
passing with their unfinished faces in the street.

19 May 1994

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When will the path be? I don't have to know  
where the sentence ends. I smell barley roasting  
in the kitchen. The movement. The movement  
to be man. I chose the beautiful one,  
the leg like Orion, the candlestick.  
Wherever you are I am too.  
That is how we're made, sparrows  
dance for us in a common air. We also  
share the dust that cleans us. Pass.  
Vehicles astonish in their propensity  
to display. A moving body reflecting light,  
giving it off by night, white and red and (in  
France) yellowish. I chose to be mountain  
and cave and personnel. Typewriter and ship.  
Insurance vouchers — against piracy  
and sea-barratry, the ullage of another's wine  
I also drank, being born in the best time  
in the middle queendom in a human form.

19 May 1994

## THE HERETICS

The ones beating on my door  
to be let out. It is a long  
time since they ran  
ragged naked through the piazzas  
of your refined mediaeval city,  
tossing handfuls of straw, spouting  
mouthfuls of water, of wine,  
on the women they trot past  
shouting wise impromptus in bad rhyme.  
A long time. They have ideas  
about heaven and health, about angels  
who work in offices and devils  
who weep and get a second chance  
and are born as flowers for a week and then,  
and then they have ideas about the night  
and how the bed should fit the room  
and what star a sleeping man should  
lay his body down towards, how to sit  
in the dark without boredom or tears,  
how to eat breakfast. They have ideas about you.  
The insights of wanting you are not lost on them.  
They discuss all these matters  
fervently in pamphlets and secret scribbles  
proclaiming such of your qualities as they  
stake their lives and reason on affirming.  
Their feeble identities you in your sleep make strong.  
They know you better than you can be known.  
Nothing more arrogant than devotion!  
They cry your name, and postulate in the street  
guesswork they dreamed up at midnight  
bent over *The Wordless Shadow of Your Book*  
as they call their bible, and mean by that  
all they can remember of your body.

20 May 1994



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I think I died last night.  
Or this dream with sunlight in it  
I say now  
Is captivating in its simplicity.

But there was muscle then  
Tight and oil and dark  
And everything closer than it can be.  
My mind fitted the contours of things

With no specious one-ness, just  
A tight oily meaty kissy closeness  
And then full dark.  
Who am I talking to you now?

20 May 1994

## THE ONEONTA ONTOLOGY

1.

Once I started I wouldn't stop  
and then the market meant me.  
Trading in the town. Too many  
to be smooth. I have heard  
none of the familiar bells.  
Cold smell of churches  
and expired flame. The smell  
of water. In Amsterdam  
on the Singelgracht. At the house  
of Savoy a surrender—  
music is cheerless when it shares.  
There is a place I see where blue cars graze the hill.

2.

Accidental watermarks make  
my walnut old. Her hands  
on invisible weekdays polished this,  
the feel of old woman quieting the house.  
“The smell of water” she would banish first,  
for water once it's washed  
would poison us. Things do change and  
the old woman who cleans this house  
has seen them all. Miracle after miracle  
the same old same came back again.  
Sunlight on the lawn. Toaster crumbs.  
Woodchuck burrow. Saturday.

3.

Collect old calendars. Sell walls.  
I did begin, and I was afraid. Travel  
calmed me, with its specious sense  
at the end of being able to come home. As if

this whole earth were not ballistic  
and our deepest fantasy is to stay.  
*Staying is nowhere*, he said, hardly  
understanding it himself, a man  
with no house and a hundred wives.  
Sometimes I think money makes us,  
we are born of the exchange. All I am's  
an intersection of intersections.  
But I found you.

21 May 1994, Oneonta

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Wasn't that another little boy  
with another mother another hand?

22 May 1994, Oneonta

## INJERA

It is the day we eat what is found  
struggling in the thorn bush  
caught by its horns. It is the day  
the sacrifice pays off,  
another life let loose into the blue  
permissions beyond the named places  
(Rigel, the foot. Algol, the corpse-eater.  
Fomalhaut, the belly of the fish)

and we eat bread. It is the broad sweet fermented  
strangeness of our lives that holds us  
together. Bread is history. Bread is space  
sopping up time and swelling.  
Even toothless old men walk on the earth,  
accumulate stories. An old man  
trying to be weary of fatherhood.  
Trying to forget all his dreams of a vertical nation  
growing from his body out into the stars.

Your brothers and your sisters, Mohammed,  
they are so many. Some held the goat,  
some raised the knife over  
and over. Someone has to be Abraham  
always. Someone has to smile.

Some cut the beets and cucumbers, some  
ground the spices. The golden heat between the hills,  
the one day of sixty five each year  
when not one cloud walked in the sky

and we still have history. Mohammed, you smiled  
and eased us into the celebration, a great feast,  
on that same day so many died at the three pillars  
outside the Holy City, the feast  
lifted us, for a little while we were your brothers,  
your sisters, we ate the delicate seethed lamb breast,  
the rich fermented bread unfurled beneath the hot dark  
goat meat stewed, all that ardent pepper food  
is just excuse for bread, the meal is bread,  
all bread is how we know each other, I asked  
what is the name of bread, you said the bread  
is *injera*, you will come and eat it with us,  
there is no difference.

Because of what we say, of all we say,  
the mind is seethed in music,  
we stare into the sunlight stiff arched over the little city,  
stare and remember, the mind is burdened with listening,  
the weight of music, even that soft  
far away changefulness we say that is birds or that  
is distant traffic that is the wind,  
all that weighs us down

until we come to the silent bread  
and are safe in hearing. And we too  
burned the thornbush once, tossing  
crackling twigs into the pale flames  
we could hardly see in the bright afternnon,  
our fire burned longer than anyone ever thought,  
thought is hard to put out, hummingbirds  
zoom in and out of the azaleas, red  
convertibles hustled down Center Street packed with graduates

and we are Isaac. We are Ishmael.  
We struggle with ourselves, a man  
has two eyes, one for truth and one for lies,  
a man has one mouth  
only and must guard it well,  
stars rise and fall but there is only one sun,  
one sun and what does it tell,  
guard it well, the hot golden afternoon,  
my hands greasy with lamb fat  
as if I lived in the world.

It is simple. When we met, you said  
Come, we will give you a dinner.  
I didn't know your brothers and your sisters,  
I didn't know the holy day Eid al-Adha,  
it was a day, Ishmael, Isaac, the divisions  
are arterial, the veins

busy with out past, it is simple,  
we came into your garden.  
And all of this spilled out of some words,  
we speak it into place, the holy  
day is holiday is cars careening on the street  
is waiting in the shade, a plate balanced  
on our knees, the lamb, the rich soft absorbent bread  
that takes everything we let fall.

You know your brothers and your sisters  
the way we know our hands. The way I know  
there is nothing I know  
the way you know them,  
are known by them,  
silent as bread, sustained, a gappy texture  
welcoming. Isaac is the self  
in the hands of the family, the self  
contained. Isaac is language, but  
Ishmael is the self gone out,  
safe in the current of the mother, to go, for  
everywhere she is, is center. Ishmael  
is eloquence. The woman is to go.  
We are here with you, lost in the desert,  
all of us, tracking a south-yielding sudden fountain  
that blossoms from our need.



22-26 May 1994

*for Mohammed in Oneonta*

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Stuck with who likes me  
the child said, I will touch  
windows till I find a door  
touch myself until I find my wife

Snow on the ground  
a friend's wife suddenly dead

mourning also is grass  
the doves on it  
still sequencing in the woods,  
always sound  
as if they're making sense

one word after another,  
never an end  
for the need to lament

Wasn't it another  
little boy another season  
twins, tempest?  
Doesn't the excitement  
last the ripples  
circling out forever  
or have we reached the far side of the pond?

22 May 1994, Oneonta

## ORACLE

What would there be but a bottle  
talking? Everything is able to remember.  
Listen to all their selling words—  
is there anything I can just *give* you?

Have dark eyes. There are books  
behind heads — I writ back home: “Masie,  
I have collected a buckram  
De Quincey and a calf Browne. The clock

cares for me still. I saw one  
in the street who moved like you, the tock  
tick of your hips kneeling  
but not at church. Praying

without theological suspense. The waterfowl  
of Amsterdam come to mind.  
What will we do for each other?  
The false isolations of music

the false community of media—  
these are to be noted: how a man listening  
at midnight on earphones in his lonely pad  
to Weissenberg playing Rachmaninoff

is more taking part in the shaping  
of things, the Business of World,  
than some idlers shouting slogans  
at rallies in the purely colloquial rain.

23 May 1994, Oneonta

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And who's this coming down the road  
Arm swinging, looking for spring?  
*Sun on the one side shade on the other.*

Whoever it is looks like some city,  
Money-flowered, full of hope,  
*Sun on the one side shade on the other.*

The hair is full of sunshine leather,  
Neatly shod, and stepping fast the country road,  
*Sun on the one side shade on the other.*

Whoever it was, the finches still discuss it,  
The quince tree shivers — pale leaves, dark bracts—  
*Sun on the one side shade on the other.*

Wish I knew who walked right through me  
Making so free as if they owned my mind,  
*Sun on the one side shade on the other.*

23 May 1994

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There is heavy air clearing now towards  
honest midnight the moon  
clearing towards full and

the heavy scent of the lilies of the valley  
hidden in the angle with house  
pervades the south end of the porch

things have times and places  
and I have the notice of them  
waiting to open or standing ripe

or past that and heading for sleep.

23 May 1994

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Mowers aubade the bidden  
birds start up their shadows  
desert the grass. What falls  
is yellow soon. They hide  
up there somewhere in brightness  
where the Story's always coming from  
the noise that wakes me far.

Their shadows desert them.  
The snarl of machinery  
is what we live with. It eats  
our weeds. It elects  
the president. It is Machine  
old now but still powerful  
like a father who detests his son.

We inherit silence. Birds back  
cardinal crow dove. Sometimes  
we too are lost in light.

24 May 1994