

9-1994

sepA1994

Robert Kelly
Bard College

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

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "sepA1994" (1994). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 1234.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/1234

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.

VACATIONS

As a measured response to a break in the air
what could be better than a blue bandanna,
the kind that make Frenchmen feel like cowboys
when they snug one round the neck and saunter
south in the official randomings of August

where is my wife now? Who sold my husband?
The public library if there is one in those towns
is never open, no questions can be answered anywhere,
a question is spoiled by answers, what you do with a question
is roll it around in your mouth like a gooseberry

tongue teasing till it gets so sour it hurts. All the way
from the Northern Capital they come in loud troupes
called colonies. They sing, they pretend, they spend.
What is this thing we have made of our lives
such that to be at all is to be elsewhere?

Unslip the loose knot, mop the brow, slip off the rucksack,
sit on the terrace and stare. A few leashed
ornamental dogs. Old persons of this commune
hardly worth watching. A license plate from Canton Vaud. You
are who you are, all right, in a land beyond surprises.

1 September 1994

LANGUAGE

An animal
stands
by his word.

1 September 1994

ashes

Why should he care so much about her beauty?
How much is so much? Do the ashes show it
after she's smoked her cigarette does he
dab them up with his tongue to taste *This*
is what it is to have been all taken up into her,

does he fall forward and measure her shadow, each
shifting contour of it as she moves through the long
afternoon, measure it and keep record and make
church music of his observations? And if he doesn't,
couldn't she turn at eventide and rebuke him rightly,
You who say you love me, could you not watch
a single hour even with my shadow, how can you live with me?

So what is being defined here? Is somebody sitting under a tree
reading a mystery a mystery? I say yes, and I love him.
Dust on a car goes where a car goes, and shows it's been there.
The queen we get to look at avidly one day in our lives
every day. It almost kills me to see how she is so much there.
How much is so much? Can he be where he is better

because of what she? Another mystery? Love wounds us
with each other, some presumably benign cautery
from which the damaged artery is sealed against germ warfare,
the one that goes on all round us every day—
there's that word again, the final mystery.

2 September 1994

You lift your foot
to put it down
further on

there is a word for this
don't let it bother
us, a foot

raises and goes down
and you are forward.
Amazing.

Silence is so.
The articulation
falls.

2 September 1994

Day magic I'm talking here
the Reborn Morning
whose guessful hopes and fear

filled the night cup
with such dreamtimes,
banished dreams!

Such that only the ones
we remember
we call the day?

It comes again
brave stroke
of the newest hour

“turning night
into day” my mother
said but what else

could we do,
trying always
to let go

of what carries us?

2 September 1994

OIL

Maybe it could say this, what, maybe what you remember as the feel of the pants leg on your leg in a dusty gas station, what were you doing there, you couldn't drive, hanging out by the soda 'machine' they called it though it was just a big bin full of coke and others, you liked the others, standing up mostly in a wash of ice cold water thanks to a block of ice-house ice melting into it all afternoon. August and what are you doing there, feeling the rough cloth on your tender inner thigh, a boy is all thighs, holding, waiting, carrying, running, running the knife blade along the weft of the denim as if you could sharpen something with your very self. Maybe you did. Nehi. Yoo-Hoo. Squirt. Mission Orange. The clatter of memory is a comfortable vocabulary that just shows you up for the idiot you are. What are you doing at that station? No more Sinclair. No more Cities Service. Your father lost his shirt on that on. Hence your shirt too, hot under your armpits, waiting for autumn. You are forever where you have ever been. In the window a sexy lady is revealing her thighs on a flat device meant to hang in autos and deodorize them. If you drove and had a car and had one of those hanging from the mirror you could watch her stiff and hopeless revelation out of the corner of your eye for the rest of your life. The drive. She smiles for miles. Imaginary winds cavort her skirt. But you can't drive, you're too young, too everything, to do anything. Between the rough of cloth and soft of skin a something happens. You stand leaning your forehead against the glass like an old man waiting for the world. The smell of oil.

2 September 1994

Coming from the islands as I am
the sluice of weather plays loose with me
and I go amid a flurry of my clothes
'at sixes and sevens' with myself they
used to say in the days when on the
silverplate épergne rested in some
glory among red pears one pineapple.

2 September 1994

A SEPTEMBER SERIES

for Charlotte

1.

Though there are roses there are no
supposers. The rational mind,
that cranky child, has not yet
isolated itself from sensation

in the name of sense evidence alone. Wrong
language, this wranglage. Who
will watch the watchmen, though,
and the delicate stitches of Dominican women

dedicate this muslin handkerchief to God
with tiny crosses, sign of our marriage,
Calvary our wedding day, when it
finally sank in. As I say, there are roses.

3 September 1994

(A S E P T E M B E R S E R I E S)

2.

Glad and plump and fluffed up against new chill
these finches find seed, cluster on the iron feeder,
Glagolitic letters on a Slavic manuscript
or icon worshipping this single morning, you.

The universal calendar of all the saints. The worship
each one pays each one and all pay to mind,
that namable ungraspable Priority
this meager script is lowly handwork of,

this evidence. Jargon and winter willing,
cavorting of our appetites, laughter
in the palm of your hand you stroke me with
later, when the birds are gone.

3 September 1994

Every item a projection of her body.
The fecund air makes
society of her passage.

Outrigger canoe ice floes breakfasts and repentance,
will I ever be a man she didn't emanate?

For she is some primary, or luminary, and I am ash
of her fuego, on sails of lycra her craft move

and the resonance of all her that is this.
This ordinary place it seems.

4 September 1994

NARROWSBURGH

As if I could understand a steel bridge
the year after the big flood and no one
watched under the few street lamps the *blue*
insinuations of the fog I was born in that blue world,
little by little the mountains rose up from me
to understand the local pain. Express
some self and call it yours. Rasmussen
Furniture and Coffins. Next door in the post office
the sad sandy faggot smoking Kools tried
to make me, don't bother, it would be years
before I was ready to be made, years of subways
and delicate tunnel work, blue safety lights,
dawn coming like a kennel suddenly yelping,
years of vegetable markets, lettuce leaves
crushed under leather heels. And then the joy
of language found me, suddenly able to make sense,
that prelude to all possible women, sense,
no one wants you till you learn how to mean.

4 September 1994

That what they want is separate, a devious
solution they inject, thinking about something else,
a meadow with themselves coming across it
naked, unfettered by attitudes, morning.
A meadow maybe, and they sleep. How long
to wake up into who you think you are. What
you remember of the night. A sculptor,
a carpenter and no repose. Suppose a landscape
and I didn't want to tell you, suppose a garden
and you in it all alone with the lavender.
We run out of painkiller. A leaf falls off the lime tree
still green. In an autumn of no explanations
the blind man threads his needle in us.

5 September 1994

Something cooking. Liberty Island they call it now and all
I can call this is nakedness. But not an island.
The whole archipelago of the five senses
in that dark sea you think is feeling nothing
but is mind. Liberty, as in doing what you are.

5 September 1994

THE SCHOLIAST

Rent a footnote. Stuff it in
anywhere there's room
between a word and an idea.
Doesn't matter if it means.

The point is saying something
so the book knows you've been there.
An answer to no question.
Love poem to a dead queen.

Monday, 5 September 1994

Sheep range a mountain coughing. A spiral
of good weather until the night
stands firmly clear above our habits,

Andromeda in glittering chains.
Soon the earth itself will move.
The tracts of loveliness



will yield
you a king who can see
right through a woman,
a king who doesn't have to see at all.

This is the actual practice.
Carrying a tray of fire
like an idea in the mind, all the way
over to a little old house that needs a mother,

chill wind in wanton leaves. Be specific
and give your kindness
("grows by division")
into the sleekest villains
so they grow rough with love. Love stops,
love won't let pass, love is friction,
love is the real blood spilt in some dumb game,
the sleeping woman suddenly wakes up
and where is the train now?
She learns all she needs
by arranging her skirts
decorously over the unforgiving.

6 September 1994

FURNITURE

Examining furniture we intuit a distant
ownership, a Deity perplexed by prayer,
all our confidences whispered to It
in a night better spent in listening.

Say nothing. Say nothing.
Hear the wood talk.

6 September 1994

EVERYTHING UNDERSTANDS

As if an opportunity meant something blue — a famous flower or a tiger hunter or a man with godowns filled with rice in a year-long famine. People are the ones who die. This means pornography. The haves are horrible. So glossy, so mean. Mean blue. Scavenge in the actual, the ulterior provinces of mind, where lace is made in Flemish cottages by women going slowly blind — art is a kind of firelight — my grandmother came from such persuasions — and find a woods no army ever fought through. Impossible. No such leaf has ever fallen. Am a dry enough to be? “A soul longs to be wet,” some Greek observed (what was he looking at?), requiring two millennia of commentaries including apres-ski tunics and the Battle of Austerlitz. Everything understands. Alles versteht. No other language can make this statement. Farm machinery rolls by with a harvest sound. Does this mean living?

7 September 1994

All's forthcoming. By night
you walk into measure
this iron thing this dance

metal is sacred
to the Changers

(we are the Changers,
the oxygen,
by strict measure our little machines put out)

at dawn in mist some tinkers moving
shabby past muddy hedges
home into nowhere.

8 September 1994

By night what bird or any? Why?
Does it give pleasure?
Do you know a reach without a hand,
a fish or two without a sea
yet capable
of more directions than I will?

Do you know a cry
from no mouth and an arrow slung?
Causeless we dream.

You soar past me,
am I finished with this measure?
A crowd stands
with its breath alone,
its shouts are a kind of sleep,

will you listen to my hands on your arm?
All I ever meant was saying you.

9 September 1994

Rapt as any ever, be a wheel
current on an easy prairie, be a girl
looking out the window,
 be a hook
latched on to the sunset ruddock bottom of a cloud.
Be these and be me, be enough.

There is a parity of suppositions,
we deserve each other
by perceiving. This wish and this ability,
this jewel-like world of what we mean.

Spoon by spoon release or void the sea.
Are you infinite? It is a weary business
to digest all we have been given. Stay awake.
Nothing is closer now than forgetting.

10 September 1994 KTC

Being sure about the soap. These things
permit changes in your city — the old dome
of a Greek church holds a mosque now,
the subway shakes some sphinx's toes. The forms

are busy with their changes. This is stupid,
nothing changes, time just gushes past,
no sculpture of a woman lifting slim arms
bare into the mild autumn wind with her

mind full of waterfowl ever lasts. Plausible departures.

10 September 1994 KTC

What mattered was the identity of them
pushing each other till it was a dream

busy beginning. Snowstorm the city
through floods and Italian imprecations

the car. Night deepening. Two hundred miles
from the airport and the flight in an hour.

The street is always busy and too late.
No control of dream, the secret

motives of contiguity. Not answering the phone.

11 September 1994

AN IDENTITY

If it weren't weather it would be skin.
If it weren't time it would be music,
always something bothering the serene
apartness of her actual mind, this glance
of mine, to be of woman and be man.
How motherly the meek, monster!
From deep wood. Drumbeats of some
desperate pretense. I am. Or some sleazier
persuasion, I am a man, I am who feels
this wind racket through my hollow room.

11 September 1994 KTC

“we love our ... myth”

— Pierre Joris

Before the middle ages come back,
the billowing white robes of the saints
fluttering again in sight
leper-kissing and suspending the sun
on the steepletops of Saxon churches

the North Sea ferries chug
along the foggy shelf
past the coats of philosophy,
kiesel and sediment, Helgoland strata
stacked up like God's own
little library of sacred texts
red on red the shallow sea,

and nobody reads but him.
Everybody publishes and no one reads.
The characteristic disease
of the last dynasty was called
Consumption. When I look
at my cold fingers now
I remember the sea.
But what does the water remember?

11 September 1994
Tivoli

Not so much as a coin slipped into the cup.
Always to give someone a taste of your muscle,
the skin of charity. Touch by touch.
Believe the slenderest evidence — there are cars
flushing through Queens Boulevard, diners
recur every mile or so as indexes of an America
the city claims to infest, to exist as a function
of population density and Greek bishops
chant the Godwork Sunday mornings. Stand
in this golden building remembering heaven.
Or don't even bother to remember. This bridge,
that posse of rollerbladers, this sleeping man.
No one will ever find anything different from this.

11 September 1994
Tivoli