

9-1994

## sepC1994

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### Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "sepC1994" (1994). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 1236.  
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Mere aptitude is agreeable enough.  
Wait for him, the organized  
flow is steady in its disclosure  
of what it has long desired to signify.  
Awkward reaches, rivers  
without a single motorboat  
and you, drooping over an upturned canoe.  
The sequences of dactyls on the skin,  
the interpretation. Signaling  
by campfire a faraway permission,  
Indian smoke calls, come see me,  
I am a game that plays itself out in you.

I am a wind that scatters all your leaves.

That kind of weather. You too  
have been waiting. It is not like chess  
but it has pieces, aggressions, alternate  
permissions to make moves. Move. But no rules,  
only history. (My only history, you said,  
staring down at your naked body  
as if it were somebody else, and you a calm  
intruder in this appalling motel.)

Not like chess, not like Brazil,  
but its jungles are burning all day  
and its tribes are running away  
clutching flowers, pig bristles, logs,  
spider eggs and parrots, blue parrots  
screaming before the forest fires.

So I need to lay my hand on you again.

21 September 1994

## GRACE

Suppose life is just itself after all,  
full of striving, like a Sicilian in Brooklyn growing  
tomatoes on that rich glacial outwash  
plain my mother, the warmth  
of grey weather-beaten wooden fences  
between backyard and backyard, zucchini,  
basil, and the old fig tree wrapped tight  
half the year in burlap to keep it warm  
and then the leaves come in the mild  
sea spring wind and I am home.

Everybody had one, it was grace  
and hidden from the street, a private version,  
like a Milky Way nibbled in the dark at the movies  
or fat Father Dolan making the bigger  
boys—I was the biggest— shovel snow  
all the schoolday till his paths were cleared  
on which he strolled to say his breviary  
under the twin pigeony bell towers  
whose birds scooped and gyred no matter what weather  
and the el train rammed past a block away,

south, sea-wards, where all I meant was  
and waited for me like a thrilling book  
laid aside at breakfast for the work of the day  
but kept reading in your mind all day,  
infinite plots running onward  
guessing the dim-spelled trceries of your desires.

22 September 1994

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It came back from Brazil with her, a suspicion  
that she would never be alone. She had gone  
too many places. Not bizarre ones, just far  
enough to be hard to leave. Places stick to you  
when you try to go home. The way the feel  
of your body is. I'm talking to you

maybe for the first time on the stairs, we can stand  
on different steps and be the same height, we can sit down  
on the carpeted treads (*les marches*) and the risers  
dig into the smalls of our backs. We can talk. It is dark.  
And suddenly we are all the people we used to be

when we weren't talking. We're in another room  
and all the delicate tentative detail was for nought.  
You light a candle we have used before, we sign something  
with a pen you find lying in front of the table  
all by itself. Adequate ink. Call the floor to witness  
we have stood in this place together. Nothing more.

You blow it out and we're back on the stairs. There is nothing  
left in my heart but these details. Ask me. I can tell you  
the color of the carpet. Things make us promises  
we have to keep. I let you go to what you understand.

23 September 1994

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So the numbers turn me round, the sun comes back  
to tell what they have done to me, these *mois*,  
these Muses who are months, a dozen of them now,  
always three more arts to fathom or to exercise.  
I am fifty-nine. The incredible has taken place,

I am alive. The wave is still cresting on the sand at Santa Monica,  
the Ethiopian moon, last sliver of it, balsamic,  
thick with arcane science, still mirroring in the bay where I was born.  
And yesterday I had a taste for fish, I don't eat fish,

fluke or flounder, bottom feeders of the south shore,  
deep fried in great kettles of boiling oil,  
what kind of oil? I caught a taste  
of my original life. And then I thought, This is it,

my wife beside me is my first life, my only, my wave  
unalterably water, poised to fall and never falling.  
A chipmunk is complaining. The crows already  
have finished preening the shady lawn and flown away.

24 September 1994

## ALL QUIET ON THE NORTHERN FRONT

*Bei Männern*, we ancient who  
remember, a Mozart variation,  
Beethoven, Chopin und so weiter  
until the bookstore closes, the radio  
dreary Billie Holiday acedie  
is ended and light with a kind of  
German accent starts to fade out  
over the north half of the sky  
like Erich Maria Remarque looking  
up in Lower Saxony at the hubbub  
of clouds and knowing: War is everywhere.  
There is no end to strife.

Vaguely

a schoolboy memory comes to console the man  
with conviction that what is so  
must be so. Leave it alone.  
A quotation from Heraclitus like a small  
sticky fist clutching two fingers of my hand.

24 September 1994  
Great Barrington

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A goose across the moon  
for you

a sign  
of what has no sign

quick compassion, lucid eye,  
eternal, empty, openness, serene,

and then it calls you,  
loud, incredibly loud, from the sky.

Midnight. You are the pond it heads for.  
You are all the water, mirror, it ever needs.

24 September 1994

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A goose  
nesting on the moon

a silence  
holds you

a wedge of them  
flying,  
an alphabet.

Who am I  
to read these things?

24 September 1994



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They would be waiting for me there, archons of elsewhere,  
standing straight in the middle of what by their  
standing there becomes my path. A man can go  
right through them, and that's the risk, to penetrate  
and pass beyond, as if such passage were a ceremony  
not your home. I immigrate in you. The walls are brick  
and my burden light, I dream of you all night  
just standing before me, enduring my approach  
exhausting all the math I know to get there, not the right  
answer but the method, the method! I woke  
like a window. They were waiting for me  
disguised as my hand, the wall, the washcloth,  
the soap with its faint sweet smell of seaweed. You island  
after all.

And that's all I wanted, a phrase  
to say it straight. But they wanted more, I heard them  
all round my house, secret as stones, whisper  
my name at midnight. That was all.  
Or maybe I heard one of them say even softer I have come.  
Or was it my voice saying that to tell them  
(for I have always tried to tell the truth when I remember)  
that I have gotten here at last, this house under maples.  
Just here. But I hid from the doors. And I was glad  
all the windows were curtained and closed.

I think this was a rebel midnight. A deaf ear  
turned to the lady in the woods. Meant me no good.  
Or only the good it takes a death to analyze.

25 September 1994

## ALIEN WITNESS

So much happening at this weather. I kept  
pulling her leaves off and she kept talking of a friend  
who kept the strangest daybook. Finally she read it  
out loud while Monday traffic roared — in rain all sounds  
are close, world under water. What's her name?  
In stone chapels on her knees, but in her fantasies  
a different sanctity stretched her to extremes.

I have never understood some things are private. What is,  
is all there is. It belongs to us by being.  
Or by being seen. Thinking also  
is not so different from remembering. I am an  
alien witness, to me all things equally are strange.

So who is it who was doing this -ing they call dreaming?  
I wasn't doing anything at all, it passed before me  
helpless, like that Nazi parade down our street  
in 1940, fluttering its flags, its unimaginable desires and reproaches.  
How many times can you lose the same war?

So I woke enamored of my distances again. Someone  
reading someone else's diary to someone sleeping.  
That is our gospel and our science. It passes our houses  
and leaves small sores on the flesh, and if we're lucky  
some mist in the trees for the rising sun, now,  
to pickle briefly into a golden shimmer  
before the weary clarity of day takes hold.

26 September 1994

## BEFORE THE COMMITTEE

The distance I kept insisting was mostly air,  
we could inhale it and it would be gone.  
Are you trying to be funny, they demanded,  
no, I was serious, I have stood on my feet in Arabia,

I must come from a Crusader family, have a yen  
into Orient and a large capacity for good intentions,  
bad actions, captured cities, hurrying home  
to find the rain-swept morning. They thought it unlikely,

they were like any scientists merely shallowly suspicious.  
Deeper down, the thick marl of credulity began  
that made them fall for every revolution. It was silly  
as they did to doubt my motive, my motives

were the only part of me that welcomes scrutiny.  
With benevolence prepense and poor performance  
I made my way almost to the gates of China —  
I saw it over the hill, bewilderingly ordinary,

Cathay. Don't you think that changed me? Maybe  
not in this lifetime, but that rock I sat on  
will form a city in a future life, this rain  
will be my planet's ocean come millennium.

Which comes and comes, like weather, and touches me.  
Are you satisfied, my senators? Have I explained  
how little of a man is living now, yet all there is?  
Then let me get on with it, these miles of final saying.

27 September 1994

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sun or some  
thing makes  
after all my rain  
a cobweb sparkle

over all the woods  
a girl again  
I understand  
this place

where spilled  
ink never  
reaches, milk  
out of rock.

28 September 1994

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Determined to measure  
something he bought a boat.  
He figured where it went  
was water, and where it wouldn't

was something else. A start.  
Then he saw a bird  
stop flying and had another  
angle. Then something was dead

on the road and he had all  
he needed to decide.  
Not going and not staying,  
there was something else.

Again and again he said it  
till the tree above him  
started to believe.  
The fulcrum: not becoming,

not dying. Was there anything  
in that something he could use  
for all of them? Not the wood  
and not the leaves

and how far does a flower go?  
Wait for it never to come.

28 September 1994



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As if this itself were the sparrow  
naked to the wind, driven  
by all the precautions (“feathers”)  
it’s taken against the cold,

the stretch of color  
into the lift of day. Believe me,  
socialists, it is a raptor’s grace  
we need to bend the sky

down onto this nourishment,  
this earth. And here you are.  
And it is not the sparrow  
spoken of before. It is a water

or a city or a bread. Or you  
are fragmentary and need me.  
Or I am not even present  
to your thought, you are sky

without a bird at all in it,  
a bird at all! And so we dream  
nightly for each other,  
turning the big pages of the paper

whose fascist lies turn out to be life.

29 September 1994

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Caught in the gridwork of it, parables of Lent  
(I don't think that word is right, is lent, I think the fast  
is in the middle of us, and evades the suppleness  
—no oil, no meat, no cheese— of our comprehension—

strong black Greek lent, green leaf and coarse bread  
and salt, just salt. And still I'm not sure if that's  
the word I mean. But the suppleness is gone  
that slimed one though gleaming to another—

the slick of stick. Association. Wait a minute —  
I hear some geese cry in my private sky. Now  
pick up the dictionary: *tam*, 'talk, discourse,'  
and then *tam durwa*, 'to compare

eof  
eof-dNÔ^c-d-

different versions told, to put on trial,  
to cross-examine. These things that are barely told  
suddenly leap into the air, blue stories, winds,  
rebellions. I walk there with them

sustained by *dâkinis* at last. Soft stones, lawyers in fleece.

30 September 1994



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What did my parable invent?

A person locking up a cloud.

A dog biting the north wind.

30 September 1994