

11-1994

novB1994

Robert Kelly
Bard College

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

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "novB1994" (1994). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 1241.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/1241

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.

FALLING IN LOVE

Set this time bomb beneath my feet
and hide this sword up my spine.
And rest. I will be ready for the sequences:
Rich painters, good coffee, harsh clean diseases,
the caste system come back roaring,
icon breakers, image peddlers, you.

You more dangerous than any soviet, you boring
fascination, you ski, you play with dog,
your body has a will once was my own.
I am destroyed with wanting you, Irish
say (or would say if they knew how to want),
safe in their incomprehensible
dialect of desire. Now and again
you look up and read me like a magazine.

9 November 1994

Suppose there is one day in the week that all things reckons.
The Audit or *The Granary* we'll call it, when the rats
are chased out and we count the seeds. So many of each
kind. We learn what we have done. We keep in touch
with that phase of our doing called 'it is done.' No one
can change it now, or not much. It rests under your feet
bent out of shape by your weight, as memories distort,
flex, flab, get polished smooth in the long agony of remembering.
Read what you have written. Revise what you can.

9 November 1994

[towards a Christmas poem]

Jesus is born in winter
Buddha was born in spring.
Almost summer, hottest time
before the monsoons. And what
is Israel like in December?

As someone who has been born.
Ask someone who suffered leaf and thorn,
flower and business and school,
who learned to latch his sandals
and go without supper. Jesus is born
in winter and dies in agony.
Buddha was born in spring and died serene.
The differences distract us, the clouds of mind
across the sky of mother-naked knowing,

and nothing to be known and everything
still to be done. Some say he danced with his friends
around the gibbet where his body
seemed to be crucified. Some say he sang.
Each smiled, but no one said that either laughed.

Ask a man with no shoes if he knows the alphabet,
ask a dying man his favorite color—
that is our science and our destiny,
a house on fire and all the water turned to wine.

. . .

[9 November 1994]

TWO-PART INVENTION

Where was I before I began to understand?
In an opera house in Sicily in 1830
a hillside in Bavaria a bath in Odessa
standing in a grey sharkskin suit in Indiana
in Canada across the street waiting for the bus,
I still run by the Roman Calendar
the Greeks have no weather, some devotees
of Russian monks come by in a boat
speaking dark liquids in the back of the mouth,
a mare rubs her flanks against an elm, the airport's
flooded, how can we come home
in time to hold hands chastely in the guest room
trying to read dustmotes in sunbeams
as a score of music? Where was I
before I imagined I was I and you were there
just out of reach at the end of the garden
late winter just a shadow past the pussy willow?

10 November 1994

“Somewhere between a space and a number”
— Ashley Crout

I'm glad I'm not alone here, there is a wind
to keep me company and I heard some crows—
the smartest people I know around here,
loud and shy and scooping through the trees
to guide me in this bleak Republican weather.
I think you're nearby too, just over the hill
inspecting the deserted cabins of the migrant workers,
braceros we used to call them in the central valley.
Kitchen middens, cans of jack mackerel,
universal Bud. Tell me when you find a clue to me,
I hear you humming past the hemlocks,
we see each other now and wave, you know me,
I am wind enough and you are crow, listen
to the faltering enterprise of daylight even now
in early morning dubious about the day.
Sycamores and operas, that's all I know, skin
and sycamores, crows and the strange noises
anybody makes at night, walking along a road
to sense if anybody else is near. Like bats we sound,
testing the environment by word. Tree?
Woman? House, are you still empty? Car,
you never escaped from your wheels.

2.

What I really miss about giving up smoking
is the ashes. All those cigarettes
turned into that fine grey memorial
that sifted over my books and bed and clothes,
a monk I was of such repentances,
all Lent and deep slow breathing—
a kind of dumb yoga. You know where you are
when you have ashes on your hands,
everything seems to flow from that,
the river and its merchandise, burnt

villages in Viet Nam, the smoky croak
of politicians, even the dead tree you hide
behind, the crow that tells me where you are.
Ashes of the night scatter now in the bare
sycamore across my stream, flakes of light
that everything has come and tasted and
taken pleasure and exhaled and gone.

3.

And there is a place you know repentance never bothered,
a sinless sinuous place, all sensation and desireless,
a place between spaces, a fine steely sheen to its air
like an old Dutch engraving of a rivermouth
with skeletons of fishing smacks across the sea,
close, close it feels, like fine grit between your palms
from the ash left when all the numbers burned away.
No one counts now. Stuck with colors a little while
longer, we wander down the overwhelming light.

10 November 1994

THE DEFICIENCIES OF SUSANNAH'S BATH

1.

Will they even be willing to help me,
these elders empty by their wishing-well
where the Queen —just some pretty girl
from some silly little country— stopped
close to evening, September, very hot.
She went down into the pool, cooled off,
stepped out into the hushed
bewilderment of their tired lust.
Is seeing believing?
Her brightness! Help me, old men,
old nestors of mixed counsel,
how could I see her without
believing this urgent memo from the world—
someone new is here for you, is her for you?
Is looking at her loveliness
in itself enough to keep you old?

2.

Can a road go at all without a man
to walk it? *Mutuality* is all.
A woman walks down to a glacial
basin, swims, frolics, climbs out
with all of us watching. But I
(said an old man) know how to scan
our sad contract with actuality—
I know my rights, and look away.
And still I'm old. It isn't looking
or not looking that kills us. It is a lurch
of light through all of us, moons astonish
us in towns. Dozing at a fountain still
roads swallow us down.

3.

He came towards me,

hands tucked deep up cotton sleeves
the way sages are shown
on Hong Kong calendars.

What can an old man hold
cached under cotton, under flesh?
“You found her lovely, sleek
Susannah? You wanted

and you wanted? Maybe just her name
you wanted to repeat, roll on your tongue,
say over and over, one small name
alone was ask and answer, offer and refusal,

was a sound that would console you
hours later, when even the moon
was ended and the woman gone.
Ah, where do they go, they go?”

Oh pompous elder, who asked you
for the sarcasms of theology,
your sour autumn reverences,
your all-too-eager goodbyes?

[Two sections to follow]
11 November 1994

4.

Haunch flank back nape—
the single curve enthralls the eye,

the elders were unmanned by masculinity
—lusting what is seen—
desire feeding itself by fire—

and all they ever did see is trapped
in glittering pupils, the elders' eyes
still just as virgin as any child's
when seen nearby, nearby
the lucency of practiced wanting,
an eye sees and never
relents its agency of desire—

till all the talking heads in senates and tribunals,
withered witnesses that they are, have seen
her and her inveigling curve
and pretended they were still living
and bent the shape they saw
in weird interminable rubrics in new laws

until she was everywhere
and every sentence repeated her shape.

5.

And that was the origin of legislation
science politics and religion.
One glimpse was all they needed,

words trying to repeat something someone saw—
o terrible grammar where the world was made!

.....

[12 November 1994]

As if I tried to catch their names
from the non-stop murmuring

and make a fugue by Fux
out of their barely realized despairs

griefs indifferences betrayals—
four voices, mother mary, what a risk

of mess, of entrances that looks like goodbyes.
And at the end have nothing but music

and no one listens to that, how can you attend
to what is always present?

Look to yourself, keep your own name
firmly in mind, but hope you forget it

until you are known only to other people
who can make some use of you and all your

all too grammatical counterpoint
while you, drowsy, suppose yourself one of them

till forgetting is a melody all its own.

13 November 1994

M A K E R S

A permanent underclass the ensouled
who from the bracken and beside the tracks
dream upwards compassionate changes

into the public air. We are. And you,
elect, are of this number. Dream,
baby, dream. It is of consequence,

it is creative. It is the (finally) story told.

13 November 1994
New York

W A K I N G

Outside even the meekest window hear
bird-Welsh, a landscape dithered by dream.

13 November 1994
New York

SONG

And then the wilful creatures came
nibbling round my heels and wanted corn.
I gave them the color YELLOW and told them:

Make it yourselves — you have sheathes
and shoes and shiny eyes, you have furrows
and nasty pockets. Be quick, put this in that

or these in those and
close your eyes
(your shiny eyes)
and wait a mountain.

Then let the color out.

14 November 1994

THE DAY THE CLOUDS FORMED THEMSELVES INTO A PICTURE OF GOD

was as you know perfectly well a day like any other.
Yeats did not die, Billie Holliday felt as well as could be expected,
and the afternoon was warmer than the morning. No one
had any right to complain, the peas were soggy and gritty
but gravy hid most of the problem. The newspapers
made free with an ice skater's name. And then the window
chanced to look up at the sky and everybody saw it,
sudden, saturated colors, fluffy extravaganzas, beards and flames
and saturnian eyebrows, ass's ears, mackerel fins,
monkeys and macaws and trees built out of soapbubbles
and there He was, in all sincerity, kind and vague, just
as we all remember Him in dream, ready to come clean.
And then the wind moved, gently, just enough to riffle
the pages of the book you had just stopped reading,
you breathed too, your breath shimmered the image a little
and He began to fade. But you had seen, and what you saw
made you feel better about the human eye forever
after. The eye and the city. The eye and your breath.

14 November 1994

THAMESPLAINT

I love you London and that's the trouble with both of us,
easy love and undeserving each of each, I love your black
puddings and your shabby trees, the scope of trees and lay
of that lazy slattern of a river who is kinder to my heart
than most Pierian upward gushing crystal yet in all this
after-Wren preposterous non-architecture struggle
vast populations of once generous liberal mystic lovers spoiled
now by alterations by the clutch of malevolent spendthrifts late
sent down from University & scorning all the talented armatures
embedded in this rough Clay—o pray the Danes don't scurry
beastmode from boat to drawbridge which they burn—
there are vicious men in England and the women have no other
friends to serve except those galivanting cadalots their Boys
: suppose: it was a Saxon and his broad (High German *braut*,
Low English *bride*) who came with murder in the heart,
dullness in the mind, and stuffed with plausible chromosomes
to make you into Englishmen so bitter and so sad, I never
saw a sadder bunch of criminals than those, the Tory swindlers
and the angry councilhoused pedestrians, truly from the top
of my head I wanted to love them, wouldn't you, to do
something for all that misery. And the city glorious with grisaille,
obelisks and cenotaphs and one huge red concerthall
full of workmen's hammers like transcendent symphonies
and a park outside full of coots and Pakistanis as if the world
were trying to forgive this place and bring a gentler
avenue— sunlit, in beech groves, a sounder of swine.

15 November 1994

Deadly poison a phrase to vex
world mind semaphors of space

to irritate the critics is not wise.
Victorian manners, mean-spirited islanders

deploring other people's grace.
There is a talent
in being talentless, a smirk
goes further in this business
than insight does,
mockery
serves all purposes "but beauty alone."

15 November 1994

WEST OF HERE

1.

A gull courses through aquamarine zone beneath dove-grey soft
continent of cloud like a

a) (speaking of the coursing) Bodhisattva coursing
through the absence of an idea.

b) (speaking of the gull) a briefly interesting idea.

g) (speaking of me) flannel coverlet that hides all of me
but my eyes from the world and makes me happy.

2.

Two persons of varied age and sex discuss television. They
identify days of the week, nights of the week, by what is seen on their
screens then.

“Thursday is pretty good,” one says.

“I don’t have cable,” says the other, explaining why Thursday
is not so good for her.

“No, the regular stations,” he says, and with some hesitations
remembers three prime-time attractions that night.

She says of one of them, “I never watched that.”

He assures her though, “That’s pretty funny.”

Later I see that in each of his breast pockets he has an open
pack of Merit cigarettes, one light, one ultralight.

16 November 1994,

Brockport

THE SKY

By close measure, a man was singing.
Looser, it was a rock. Or light
make scree of it, we slid
heel-prowed down the gully wall
hoping for poetry. But always
the city was waiting. "All of these airs!

You gave yourselves feathers, destinies,
masks of angry animals. Streets

made you, and you know nothing of this place."
It said in our head. So we took refuge in the crow
who always has somewhere else to go.

17 November 1994