

5-1992

## mayA1992

Robert Kelly  
*Bard College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "mayA1992" (1992). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 1301.  
[https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts/1301](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/1301)

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](mailto:digitalcommons@bard.edu).

---

So I have hidden in my life  
until the sun came out

there are differences all around me  
the meat the power

of the air to make me live

1 May 1992

NOONDAY

*for Charlotte*

But things keep arriving—  
there is a master  
and a man,

a design that knows its wings  
—how broken the toaster is when it won't work,  
like a clock or a camel  
not like a cracked tub you store carpets in  
or a busted toilet you sit on to put on your socks.

Things are still things, my Lady,  
mattress springs and people caught  
in their ridiculous infatuations  
*to be in love with emptiness—*

how one body  
cringes near her lady love or model,  
by springtime we have changed our shapes.  
I miss you for hours half a mile away.

1 May 1992

---

*for Colette La Canne*

This is what the pencil said  
I found beneath the table  
the sun is green today my bird  
and we are found by fable

1 May 1992

---

Death comes the way you oversleep  
and suddenly wake where you've never been  
midmorning too much light strange cars

2 May 1992

---

Say something. If only this.  
Dream of a dragon, no, a duck.  
Dream of a morning. No, a morning.

The grass wet in cool sunlight  
of the first kind. Charlotte,  
this is to be here for you  
when you wake. All of me I insist.

3 May 1992

## THE METHOD

Looking hard at what isn't there.

3 May 1992

HERE

And what is here?  
Mills Mansion, the clouds.

3 May 1992



ANIMA MUNDI

*for Charlotte*

The measurement of air  
needs a great counterweight  
the size of earth.

All this on one scale and on the other  
you with a silk ribbon in your hair.  
Without you I could not breathe.

4 May 1992

# THE MIRACLE

*for Charlotte*

Things migrate  
to the furthest corners  
of themselves

I come  
hunting your Congo  
some star  
fallen  
in an ox-bow loop

living systems  
in their trillions  
cool  
spring flowers  
the bronze  
beech trees  
by the river  
coal

every  
item is an answer

the romance  
is to care.

4 May 1992

---

Keep it small  
like salt  
even the biggest  
crystal enters

the solution  
impatient  
to be done  
with itself

"I have done  
my work"  
said Milarepa  
"I have opened the dark,"

4 May 1992 / Kingston

---

And they were drifting  
not through the grace of river  
but the tesla currents  
speaking through the earth

the rock indifferent  
to the passage of what-is-meant  
as if an eagle  
broke through the sky

we hear the thing  
that comes to us  
a fate keen with a fresh wind  
reminding us

this is the way  
you have come before  
no one is waiting for you  
and they will be there

before the sun  
presumes to answer me again  
I stop my asking  
like a man letting soup cool.

4 May 1992

*DIE WALKÜRE, ONLY THE FIRST ACT*

*for Charlotte*

*Agitation and storm* and then the linden trees  
start to sigh into morning and there is a way  
again.

Siegmond  
finds the moon again, her all  
too familiar hair.

They say that ashtrees  
are the delicates, can taste  
the acid in the rain and die from it  
faster than all others; I say the lindens  
for all their lichen and glad bees  
dry out and shiver from this  
historic weather,  
our seasons without antidote,  
our chemistry.

What does she do then  
with his child in her web  
and a bad decade coming?  
She dreams of an ash tree bigger than any  
and in its lowest branches two crows sit  
talking like him and her of this and that

and there is nothing to human language except what they say  
and nothing to history but their wings folding and flapping  
and nothing to notice except every now  
and then the tree is empty  
and she still hears their clear unintelligible remarks.

5 May 1992

# þæt wæs god cyning

*for Charlotte*

who spoke to us kindly of the beer in our brass helmets  
and sifted linden flowers into warm ale to cure us  
of wanderlust — this drink stays here —

and whittled spear tips of poplar for the kids  
soft enough to press against their cheeks  
harmless while they learned their runes,

and who taught us letters, the spikes and snakes  
branches shadow on the snow  
the caravans of opinionated geese arrowing over

so we could write our own place in the earth  
and see ourselves tomorrow as we felt today  
and be glad of those strange shadow selves

our yesterdays. That was a good king  
who whispered from the red osiers as we passed  
carrying our little boats down to the river

and told us stories of the great differences,  
those Princesses, who carve the spaces out  
between the night and the day, the girls

who haunt the weather there and light the moon.  
He taught us everything and shook the walnuts  
down from the high branches with his white hand

and watched the wheat grow we planted by and by.

5 May 1992

---

**The specifics  
always remember**

**What is general  
is not even a cloud**

**A woman is warm  
under a blue quilt**

**Even this  
isn't enough**

**5 May 1992** [Original at KTC, 15 III 92]

## AFTERNOON

for Charlotte

There is this little piece of time  
this now  
I wonder  
how I can bring it to you

I dont want to listen  
to the messages on my answering  
machine I want every word  
to fall through the window

like an exhausted bird  
happy to sit down  
on the pinna of my ear  
and breathe the truth

of what it takes to be  
itself into my stream  
of attention that  
meandering stream

I want to talk to you  
with all of me my  
faculties they used to say  
those white sheets

chattering on the clothesline  
in the high wind  
of this cold spring day  
where are you

when I need myself  
where are you when the hour  
understands only the clock  
and the lawn is empty

all right I saw a cat  
it had a bib it waited



under a tussock  
its master read a book

we both were hungry  
the sky is far  
further away every day  
there is a committee

meeting in the hall  
pigeons silently the sky  
exhaust like calculus  
guessing an imponderable

zero somewhere else  
where I don't stand  
even a skin's width  
from your calm hands.

6 May 1992

## SALT IN MORNING

*for Charlotte*

And the spill of the man  
watching like a river  
for its vast prey  
the sea

*to introduce myself*  
he might have said  
to her skin  
quoting poetry

*into your story*  
and what would be the good of that  
all that Mallarmé  
and me no better

than to stand there  
all my life  
like a tree  
a tree in the courtyard  
a tree for you

who lives in this house?

6 May 1992

What one thinks about is the new trees new  
sky what one thinks about is where they go  
after they have come and been our summer and have gone  
and all the percepts shamble through the dusk  
like Lorca sauntering in Harlem sixty years ago  
with a big hat on and his eyes on black muscles  
and boys dove into the Ship Canal and the water was wet.  
Everything is *with* us. Nothing came  
and nothing goes, we surf the percepts  
that think us onward. This wrist of mine  
scarred from a tree trunk last week  
is the Middle Ages. The leaves crack their throats with green.  
Time's puberty and we can always close our eyes.

7 May 1992  
*for Charlotte*

## CALVARY

*for my Mother*

Still near the cross the rememberers wind  
sweat-soaked silks around their forearms—  
strange phylacteries of dust and blood

to remember and only to remember.  
The crows know. Margraves from Arabia  
toe nervously the silt  
dried on their chariot footplates,  
the treadles of the Emperor  
clatter in Lucania,  
the Jewish sky is dark.

I never knew what was happening,  
I was a bird alone in the sky  
always,

no mother to counsel me

she said,

so I worked from my earliest days

at a job ill-paid  
left before daylight and walked  
a mile to the first of three buses

where it was always winter  
always going out from the heart of the City

the grey places.  
And now on that stone hill the habit  
of ninety years is to be staying.  
The stones of Saint Sebastian know their own

or know nothing. Nothing but birds  
and the Expressway, gulls and Shea Stadium,  
traffic and rented limos  
carrying people too exhausted to cry any more,

the long misspellings of the heart  
have written their pages into obscurity.  
What did she mean? I have no one to ask,

and that is what she meant, we have no one  
to ask the main questions,  
we choose our destinations  
alone. Where we come to rest  
baffled by the changes  
that always come too fast  
for even the Irishest  
queen, Mairead, there are palm trees  
up the boulevards of Cork  
neither of us has ever seen,

there are weathers where no one goes.

7 May 1992

SONNET

*for Charlotte*

Now so much of it is lost inside me,  
the ruby ring and wine-stained mezzotint,  
the ivory god with the bananas and a republic  
filled with middle-class somnambulists  
carrying white beeswax candles never lit  
except at noontime — these are  
my livestock and my poetry, my pure  
white river ducks come home to sleep.  
So much of it is found in an empty hand.  
There the river is still waiting for its bird,  
something large and dark with never-ending  
plumage and a mind full of all lost things  
it knows by tune and by color and by smell.  
And that's the wood I use to build my trees for you.

7 May 1992

## ERIDANOS

One of the few places Franz Kafka travelled, at least in his human two-foot suit-wearing form, was (as Guy Davenport beautifully remembered for us a few years ago in "The Airplanes at Brescia") northern Italy. So far from Prague as the Po seems and the Swissy lakes of the Como region, we are made to recall that the whole region was part, as Kafka's blackbird chattering Bohemia also was, of the great Austro-Hungarian Empire---whose subjects could, well into my own father's lifetime, travel unimpeded from Lake Constance to the Black Sea, and from Venice to the borders of Russia.

Will it come again.

Name of the river Po. A constellation.

Riots today in Dushanbe, capital of independent Tajikistan.

The Tibetans call the Persians tadhziks.

Will it ever come again, the time when we can walk with Kafka across the boundaries of human experience into the cold cleanness of the night sky?

Ironic that he, poet of bureaucratic intrigue and unexpected restraints, poet of withheld permissions, should travel unconcerned and unexamined over territory we would now need three or four passport exhibitions to traverse.

Bosnia. Croatia. Slovenia. Tajikistan. Armenia. Uzbekistan. Ukraine. Lithuania. Moldava. Belarus. Kirghizstan. Turkmenistan. Latvia. Georgia. Estonia. Russia.

There is a song, a complex spiderweb of anthems to be sung. *How can you sing the light?* poets since Pindar have been asking.

Answering. Dutch girls with raw winds up white skirts, red knees, red cheeses.

Chestnut trees by the canal. Austria, my Austria.

Her cheekbones reflected in the lake.

Go back to love, where the snipers lie awake on rooftops.  
Watch the dusty road to Kalimpong, wait for the monsoon  
when lovers gasp in the first wet, in hammocks, silvery rain, in  
June.

...7 May 1992

[Originally begun in July 1989 as a review of Eridanos Press  
books.]

When I began to write this piece three years ago, none of those  
countries existed as such.

Even now I don't know their flags. Except:  
Armenia - tricolor, orange red and blue, what order?  
Croatia - does it have the red checkerboard it once had?  
Latvia - dark blue white dark blue tricolor  
Lithuania - tricolor yellow red and green  
Ukraine - blue over gold.

So many things to remember.

The agitprop of memory dangling me along.

Save me from Mexico, the geologist's hammer, Trotsky's death  
we grieve for still, the carrying away of the man of mind, his  
replacement by the man of will. The bitter history of *to want*.

Answering: Mauve flowers heaped up cones on the linden  
trees.

She waits for her lover at the turn of a phrase,  
by the corner of the argument she fingers her hair,  
lightly, lightly, the streetlamps in front of the Staatsoper.

The shift of stress is delicate, like streets in the Sixth. So much  
to remember. The church and who prayed there, the man and  
what he saw.



I saw the heavenly host crying out with their throats full of gold and I couldn't understand a word, and a voice spoke:

A word is not to understand. A word is to endure.

And I passed into the spaces between empires, and I was time.

... 7 May 1992 ...

It was in Bregenz  
in the little square  
tilted up the street  
between drunkards  
swaggering  
to their cars

a restaurant of brown veal  
at evening  
when the blue tile  
of the church oven  
was cool for June

Ascension Day tomorrow!  
Christ's Heavenferry  
up to glory  
out of the fact  
of all this town

I stared for my part  
down at the cobblestones  
lost in the discovery  
of something new to remember.

7 May 1992

They move towards us  
and they possess  
the skills of nothingness

they wait in malls  
and they scarify the hour  
with invisible tattoos

they choose  
from windows the exact  
summer hue of emptiness

they have signed a contract  
with a humble power  
they can forestall

after sixteen short lifetimes  
they are born as sticks  
in a purple kingdom

without the least excess.

7 May 1992

