

7-1995

julA1995

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "julA1995" (1995). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 1179.
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I wonder what time it is where the ladder's going,
where the dead men are, will you come to me again.
One stands at the grave confused — was it the mother,
the muse, the maid? Who brought one to the sea,
that very white sand, faded blue waves, so many
wars away? Worlds are full of such questions.
One letter of the alphabet is just for them,
and for women, wolves, wheels, wind.
On the bleached boardwalk strolling musicians,
time-fold, the waves presumably keep coming.
Change, choice, chance — more guesses built of sounds.
Caught between language and the world, the child
stiffened, desperate, and everyone was speaking.

1 July 1995

Intratransvagate the deluded scepter,
the night is long, the king is cold.
Empathy was your last cotillion,
then the dances stopped and you were left at gaze
among sea rocks. A cormorant is looking at you.

As a connoisseur of weather only, such wind-swept wings,
such foam-moussed coastlines are your food.
Seeing is adequate. The old man surveys his well-nigh
infinity of grandchildren, this abrahamic business
never ends. Sands of the syrtes, said the Lord,

using a word I learned in Latin class in high school,
meaning the sandy shoals off Africa
where countless Roman ships fell through the world.
But the other word no one dares to understand.

3 July 1995

AT MIDNIGHT

No such thing as blindness.
Or no such thing as seeing.

In the middle of the wind
a night suddenly comes down,

perfectly clear sky, stars
in droughty weather

yet from somewhere the smell of rain.

3 July 1995

[almost asleep, very late, when in fact the day Cawuk was going out]

As they say in the Church I was able to anticipate
the ritual of Today. Actually I am fast asleep
somewhere else, in another bed, another body,

dreaming something I don't have to talk about.
Experiment any way you please—
Language protects our sincerity while we play.

We wake to what we mean.

4 July 1995

GATE

How many words add up to today.

HA BETH BETH, *ha-Bab*, the gate.

Measurement of her face

when we bent to worship, the way

simultaneously all the women at the party

thought there was nothing better they could do

than worship her, the one

with a smile like a rare bird's egg, the one

with hair. One worships

with ointments. Clothes must be newly pressed

before they're taken off. One worships

with lightbulbs shattered, with darkness,

busy strobes.

This is religion.

It is rubbed into the skin

like that rock in Guatemala

into whose tardy mouth the neighborhood pours milk.

It is freshness, a day after holiday, the Gate,

the going in and coming in, like horseflies at a wedding

glad of the leavings we dreg our way in.

Buzz of the gate, glisten on the sleek

skin of the rock, elastic stretched around it,

sweet sleazy the drip of sheer time.

How many were standing in the gate?

How many words add up to what I want?

Party time, mourning dove vague speckled mauve breast

picks her way among the corpses. Seed. Seed.

A baritone bus goes by because this is the earth.

Gate through which the noises pass to hide from us

inside us, the music lost in our reaction to it,

sign upon sign, she reaches out to the her votaries,

a kiss is calling, a kiss is coming, the broad

streets of Saint Francis teem with the naked poor.

Are you my gate, my babel-beth, my spoke?

Will you gyre me to the center of myself?

— I also worshipped, I was of that glistening band
that liaised your skin with light, you sidle to me,
hie divinity, in arm's reach adequate,
all imaginable light the shadow of that gate.

5 July 1995

[End of Notebook 216]

SUBURBAN WOODS

And in the soft continuation that is evening
the caressive soprano calls across the alleys
winding through our roots our proper houses, near us
a dark investment of trees — we
are sort of listening, it is a sort of music, at midnight

a kettle comes to the boil. Who is minding it,
who can help me? Who is she
whose voice is strongly imagined,
Adriana, Ariadne, the cold princess
who grieved for the fallen by the Peipus Marshes,

and all the pilgrims who walked all day
through a wilderness of common table salt
spread out to fool the sun. We want our saint,
she sings to us in iron spikes, dead railroads,
swamp grass, candlesticks, noserings, stools.

The magic lady came to our wedding
and became the bride. Nothing is simpler
than remembering, nothing tougher than mindfulness.
Hence her candy gifts, her strange blessings,
belonging to some gender, and believing it!

In the shrill overtures of gasoline we have to go,
no way we can just sit still. Let us praise
the ancient god who lets it be. Among the pagans
night is a satisfying answer to the day.
Led by rust and roses, I reached in and touched your clock.

5 July 1995

Sort of dark of night in day.
Sort of stay.
So many thinks
before a thought,
that's well,
gives a chance to drown
or flee across the Rhine
ere thinking's done.

Neither wet nor dry,
a river spanned.
A bridge at Karlsruhe also
to what end
in such hard sun.
Which way some wind?
The Greek answer
was a garden with a stork in it
that ate a frog.
To look at such things
and never blink.
But still think.

5 July 1995

WHAT I WOULDN'T LET MYSELF THINK

Hours later meet what missed.
By thought discarded, some rain
at the back of the cow pasture
where garbage suddenly glistens.

I'm staring at myself
as if I were over there watching
this me here. Spring salt,
webs of blue chicory under day lilies,

tight lilies, colors are forgotten questions.
I repeat it clearly: every
color is a forgotten question. Pace
that hallway to its strange end,

where walls wipe away and the sky is there
and stars allude by their collocations
to stories we heard as children. New
constellations, The Little Match Girl,

The Angel by the Lake of Milk,
The Soldier in the Well — and far off,
at the edge of the last galaxy,
The Blue Light He Thought He Saw.

It is only the smoke of his tobacco pipe,
the blue policeman in a huge cartoon
sprawled over the universe and trying to mean
Justice is Finally Conspicuous.

Come in and go to bed — but the bed
is briar patch, the sheets are waves,
your dreams are text books and the dawn is now.
It is always the morning of your examination.

Centaur's pathway. Ballpark of the conspirators.
A nurse on wedgies wobbling through the OR door

is the last thing you ever saw. The book
keeps moving, right to left the animal of language goes.

It needs me only to keep the pages turning.

6 July 1995

BY THIS LEAN START

An American looks into the air—
there is an anger to displace
not the fathers but their fatcat sons,
beamers and brokers — an honest man
has smudgy lenses — and the dark
clay path beneath the hemlocks
leads there, surely as a drunkard's stertor
the bird fact at dawn we prize as 'song' —
open that barn door, the whiffletree
is stuck in the hinge — a chipmunk
noses down quick into the ground,
chip chip or deeper churk, a vision
vanishing. The American loam.
I come to give you *mandara* duly,
weak flabby flower but it giveth peace.

7 July 1995

A CHAIN FROM THE DRAWER TO THE HAND.

for Charlotte

One guess by scent: intermission of the diary,
the lie told mother, the tell-tale
anything-at-all that our love spilled,
every love gives milk, right
in the core of the carpet.
Cove. Shell. Shelter. Dray a load or more,
burro-vectored up your canyon wall,
it's always shining when you carry —
this is the chain of human consequences
which ordinary people look up and see as the sun.

Men come home drunk though and fall into that torpor
where all the eyes turn inward, see everything
but see it slow, react to nothing. Night lair.
What is in that drawer? In old mahogany
the last rights of man. Or gilded lowboy in old turquoise,
reason enough for revolution, a blade
whetted keen with envy. A book.

It's just a book. And what's in it?
A true confession of the live-long day,
all the amorous folderol a body guesses from its neighbor space.
That's all? And all the doubt
a devil strews desirers with, turns them to deniers.
They rend their silks
and sob in gaping raiment sore
through the crawlspace of heaven this
little town.

And nothing actual
gets written in that book of yours? I know
nobody's name to write, or every
woman is named heather and every man is rock
and what's the good of that,

how can I dote on any when every's here?

Do you write down the numbers, distances,
formulas, dimensions, the ordinals
of your meek chemistry? Not so. For I have touched
the grand Sophie in that part of her
no man mere may mingle with,
I kissed her absolute, and nameless slept.
Was there no sense in all that nonsense?
Was there anyone who simply answered you,
brim of a hat to keep the sun from your eyes?

Mutus Liber. The book is mute. Its pictures
(oaks, glaives, gloves, gyroscopes, fires, fish)
ruffle in a wind they feel, I can't.
Now she reaches back and touches me. *Samite*,
what does *samite* mean? Dunno, but it is red,
I ween, and silken fine, and served you well,
my lady for your pavilion once, your tapestry,
your gown. And then we slept
between the skin of a book. The man in the moon
kept writing all night at his pale table,
the shadows of his words improved our sleep
with phantoms masterful, quick veiled
understandings stripped —ghosts of us
who chatted smartly in the colors of our sleep.

7 July 1995

THE SPIKE

1.

On the Quai, a sob-story. Cross
in a window. What then?
It is the kind of Christ
with arms nailed high and close together
so that the corpse hangs down
saving no one but the few.
A Jansenist crucifix
they used to call it. Why here,
on a human river? All
must be saved, or no one.
The storms come for us
and good weather stays. Us,
just us. Who do we imaginbe
us to be? An image
passed in the hands of an image.

2.

A street is circumstance.
It is what is true
as far as it goes. Old pottery
of the place, something made —
the potter's hand, the wheel
inferred— the Sacred History.
Am I just a place you came to?

3.

I think of how much I have been transacted,
I pronounce their names.
And the weary litany
of the streets in me they found.
I am inhabited.
We are houses full of ghosts.
Even the bamboo flute

the tofu-seller's playing
outside the window,
for all its ordinariness,
is just a phantom daylight.
The pigeons at my feet
are mostly memory.

4.

The old dirt path the vagrants use
behind the river comes out at the hospital.
The old and wounded sit around in the sun—
it's where you go if you act out your desires
— a hero is a man below the ground.

Watching my step to avoid the morning's droppings
I come out into the parking lot, mostly empty,
the doctors keep their shiny little cars up in the street,

a dead afternoon in what would be heaven.
The young man with no job and his broken mother.
I think of Dr. Destouches, that torched and self-tortured
megalomaniac compassionating genius,
a villain with a furry old tomcat, a man escaped
to Denmark but his shadow followed, the man
Celine. On the strand, in Baltic lightness, watching
summer storms on that scant horizon. Anger
got the best of him. And brought it out, a self
to be disgusted with, and burn that personality
and every other. And only his hate he shared
...quick ... the gap he found between
one outcry and the next. His famous gapping
of the text. The gap that is me.

5.

I am a yawn for you
a fabled certainty
whose lust you never

need to doubt.
Lived me? Let the wet
responses

(do, don't, will, woo)
bounce off the water,
sleep in the little,

a park is all,
it all is surfaces,
sunfaces,

skin. No wonder
of all our loves
the last is light.

6.
Once found
an old fable
a rusty iron spike
lay on the table

it had held
a railway down
now held paper
the adequate

will do us in.
In the dark
you told me a woman
her face

the color of iron,
I knew her,
iron, we write
our love songs

with what pierces

us, iron head
and iron bread
and go to sleep

this rusty pillow.
Then I woke
and it was almost
you, the dawn

rose around me
a whirl of hours
swept like a patient
into surgery

an ordinary day.
What kingdom
is so anxious
as to be? Bird cry

and good guess,
what can we do
but rest in doing.
Keep a diary,

a mark of all my days
this is it, a mark
I give you, my x
to declare.

7.
My horoscope
a motorboat
drifts across the moon

I am this lake
the numbers keep,
an ancient scratch

in older marble,
some man was here,
this Jew I am,

this milk-fearing foreigner.

8 July 1995

PARDES

Possible subdues actual, a newspaper
already printed for the day I die
featuring news of the Pope the
congressmen the thieves the weather,

all the virtuous otherness
that lies in wait and no me
to see it, to feel its weight
or seize its lust or menace.

It will be as it is
and there will be pigeons in it
for their ten thousandth consecutive season
praising their mother Venus,

cooing seductive nonsense soft under the benches.

9 July 1995

The voices have moved one house south
but still are voices, still bear
the terrible silence we call words.

Spoken in daylight, between men
who do not know themselves
penetrate like bird calls but with a bad

else to them, a sheen of shallowness.
They are apportioning the works of the day
as if there were no beauty

left to discern by their careful labor.
And there probably isn't, and I blame myself
for hating their voices, I convict myself

of a loud blandness their voices bring to mind
leaving me to shudder with reaction
while their actual human feet are busy

clambering up interesting aluminum ladders.

10 July 1995