

8-1993

augB1993

Robert Kelly  
*Bard College*

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "augB1993" (1993). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 1281.  
[http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts/1281](http://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/1281)

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).

---

In stoic dread  
he read  
the paper they called news  
and found the old  
catastrophes instead

stale miracles  
of other people's death.

7 August 1993

---

As much as such people are able to tolerate,  
that much is language (the angel said).  
Otherwise anywhere, they are random in  
affect. They strew. A word's a kind glue  
holds them (so briefly be it) to what is theirs.

Tonus oracularis, a veil  
abrupted, a cincture  
sliced. Harp-horns splay  
to hold the strings (tones) taut—  
I am an interval, he said.

That's all. Between valleys a mountain,  
between mountains a valley—  
it seems forever without variety, yet the dialects!  
*Barrancas* of New Spain, every cleft  
its own language, every tongue  
its own city. And they speak,  
a city is all speaking.

Steel watchband tells your time,  
the hands of the watch are irrelevant—  
you belong to the hour, that's what counts.  
Not number. Heart beats.  
Not a river, the tide.

7 August 1993

---

It was always unclear how close  
you could get to the center of the world  
the thing they used to call the heart

but we went, pilgrims, jorsalfaras,  
scholars of penguins and crevasses  
until the sun was gone and the night

itself rolled up like a scroll  
then there was only, skyless, the moon.  
In compassion we tried to travel

but the city and our Viking ways  
kept getting the worse of us,  
we were successful instead of accurate

we survived, we paid taxes,  
we shopped. And all the while  
the heart (what else can we call it?)

was close to us, the doctors even tried  
to persuade us it lived inside, in us,  
but we knew their desires betrayed them

the heart is always outside, blue  
like the backside of the moon, hung  
always above us and before us

glowing, coming towards us with its light  
until we seem to move towards it  
until there is no difference between

to be and to go. And then we know.

8 August 1993

## GALATIA

The approach  
is arrogant,

the why  
whines.

Yet the man is blue  
like the Baltic

and wide  
like the Euxine Sea we saw

north of Trebizond  
then underneath us

till that last Celtic port  
the call

where in the vowels  
of the argument

itself you hear  
the god

speaking,  
little rosary of the breath.

9 August 1993

## AMARANTH

I thought of you, a friend at court  
easy with princesses. And me,  
a cracked cup and a saucer  
stained with berries, yellow  
from turmeric too, an age to go.  
I am reporting my defects—  
willing you to know them,  
tired from the beginning. Ready,  
but with a crack. And a handle  
glued back on. And the wrong symbol  
anyhow, a male is not a cup,  
a man is not a name.  
I am a kind of shadow  
of where you go.

9 August 1993

## FIRST INTENSITY

In? Intense a city, in tense a sense  
tensed in tending. Tent city  
in tentative times, then tense  
attempts to spend a terror.  
Send. Intense intensity, first  
in, then on. An inmost errant  
entering event. In times  
a timed attempt. *Attentat*  
he said, trying to time a crime  
to tend to time by tying  
lifetimes off, intensity of murder  
manifold. A time. But which is first?  
A time or taken, a token tamed,  
a tense reminder that remains  
when the time itself has turned away?  
The first intensity you meant is him  
again and him back in your bed.  
Time is where we belong and still.  
Until.

9 August 1993

---

She spoke, using  
the word blandly  
not even smiling  
the way a devotee kindles  
a votive candle after confession  
just making sure the waxy spill  
gets the wick flaming

and not bothering  
with the meaning  
yet until it's gleaming in the ruby glass  
or blue for the heart of a mother  
frowning gently  
with concentration  
to get it done. The communication.  
Then we ask questions, smile, open  
dictionaries, write checks, check the weather.  
Then we stop the madness and stand still  
and listen hard to the empty sky.

10 August 1993

## BUILDING WITH STONE

Like two horses  
a hill with a cave high up it

cave to find in,  
a dark permission in a hopeless wall

bright chunks of dolomite:  
polishing marble with marble.

He grinds the two together in his hands.

11 August 1993

(in the *renga* series)

spotted, the mind  
is spotted

salmon-brock or Port of Spain  
speckled, the sea  
resolved to flicker

(Whorf's frequentative aspectuals,  
in Hopi, Moqui they used to say,

squash-blossom hairdos, and the sidelong  
glances of the intellectuals  
tempests without rain

thunder without sound,

fleered like Hamlet at anybody  
graceless enough to be alive,

o Carib isle.

24 October, 2016

## THE WAY OF MEANING

Things mean by months.

A woman's face  
painted on a small gilt casket  
I think a bird  
perches on the sun

her cry can wake me  
I think a face  
looks at me out of the dark

long grillwork of moons  
truth tables, you are me,  
a number by exhaustion  
achieves identity with itself

things mean by moons  
by waiting  
by coming to the end of your strength  
and it still goes on

things mean by endlessness, the rote  
raptures of springtimes, dawns,  
thunderstorms

some people like music I like the world  
condemned to this opera I breathe

things mean by never letting  
and always being  
things mean by exhaustion  
by no measure, by a wall

things mean by circles and by hands  
the little casket opens  
things mean by being empty

it is a code  
made of weather

an encyclopedia of leaves  
alphabet of clouds

no answer  
things mean by stars by absence  
streams of meteors from Perseus tonight  
I will not watch them

strive at this season  
to reach the earth

we stand on our rooftops in drizzle  
saying Somewhere someone is saying something to us.

12 August 1993

---

You stayed away too long.  
There is a hope built into morning  
that doesn't always last.

I wanted the one of you naked  
with your right hand touching a star,

drunk as a cup, blue as a sparrow  
hurrying away from the ground.

I wanted to think about you as things  
different from yourself, I wanted you

to be other people other sexes other species  
until you were owl and peartree and jade.

I wanted you to be jade and thunderstorm  
and rain. Mostly I wanted you to be rain.

12 August 1993

## THE APPARATUS

All my dubious operations  
are pictured here:

solution of elemental Mercury  
in a bath of copper sulfate  
in the presence of catalytic Optimism

sending pure vapor of conscious joyance  
through the gas delivery tube  
into the patient cobalt flask  
marked with a syllable  
I found in my heart.

Your heart.  
You know the symbols for all this,  
alphabets you find in the grain of wood.

Of distilled anxiety  
three drams  
rinsed over nightmare  
creates one more morning.

12 August 1993

MY SIXTY WORD AD IN THE HOLISTIC  
CLASSIFIED DIRECTORY

That some imagined  
intricate birdsong ambassador  
one or two  
quiet egg released  
thunder too often  
road to Rome  
sauntering meek Alps  
Savoy counting pilgrims  
Abundance species persons  
we cow to  
each other breeding  
promising spiral cathedrals  
"oak over" Iroquois  
therapy middle river  
compact formation chemistry  
ovoid manners opening  
fort barbarian sundress  
pepper estrangements field  
continuous emulsion singeing  
ravaging studios petroleum.

12 August 1993  
Rhinebeck

## HOW IT BEGAN

Trying to fix it  
if not in mind then  
where?

A woman in Denver  
watches a horse  
leap through the air

goes home, can't sit, runs  
to the public library and writes  
surrounded by civil statutes and magazines

and what she creates is Greek Mythology.  
These dreams are what anxious reason finds  
locked in language screaming to get out.  
The gods. The glad prevarications  
of the poets. She is one. She rises  
at sunset and goes into the street.  
Mildly observed, she dines upon meat.

13 August 1993

# MIDSUMMER PETUNIAS COLOR OF LENT

*for Charlotte*

As much of passion as the white wall  
permits a sunshine to renew  
the handiwork of time, bleach this, blur that  
and the house stands new  
pink as Browning in his prime  
with whiskers and a map of Italy.  
Here comes the world. A book  
spread open to the riddle  
one hopes to die before solving.  
Since what is life without a mystery,  
and so on. It is a rebus, a word  
spoken only by pictures  
pronounce out loud to understand.  
Maybe. Blue waistcoat, black satin  
lapels, snuff brown the coat and green  
the clocks in his socks, a man alive.  
I do not talk about his nether limbs,  
safe from impudicity and remark.  
Lawn glider in the shade, a statue  
of the Madonna holding no child,  
only a slim book, as if of poems or prayers,  
though prayer is always wordier  
than simple knowing is, isn't it. A lot  
of water for just one fish. His eyes  
move slowly side to side  
in search of telling comparisons.  
He finds the forest pressing all around  
and knows it is America he's found,  
no complicated ancient place  
and all the sacred languages are dead.  
Means lost. I speak Mohican  
with my feet, he thinks, using a word  
he would eschew in poetry.  
How silly Shelley was, a case in point.  
But he's right, a spirit walks us  
and our walk is talking in this place,

we understand by moving  
along the contours of the, not the  
given, but the taken land.  
The Indian's revenge is only this,  
we have to stay here in this stolen yard  
counting maple leaves and remembering  
all the worldly differences back there.  
Where the language came from  
that even now slips out of his book.  
Her book. Who is this saint, this virgin  
of the pamphlet, this slim recidivist  
of simple feelings, mother of whom?  
One does not know. One samples  
and supposes, mostly by color,  
still amazed by the amplitude of flow.  
The waters here below, our vanity.

13 August 1993

---

Here is a poem  
unlikely  
as a gazelle  
resting on my shoulder

her long soft jaw  
while she watches  
what isn't raining.

13 August 1993

## WHERE WE THINK WE ARE

This is where the rest of the apples went after Eden,  
a valley intricate with peace, yet moneyful music  
besets the civil mind. Unthwarted, married waterfowl  
disclose wing by wing the pleasures of monogamy.  
Nothing lasts but this intention, and that is all we need.  
Has form, these vows we say, this word we stand by  
when we do, has form. And having form, is matter.  
And if we don't stand by it, that has some substance too,  
a terrible pale fluid that stains the rug and smells of dog,  
smears the chipped rims of our favorite cups.  
Since even folk on their way to hell stop in for tea.

13 August 1993

