

10-1993

octB1993

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "octB1993" (1993). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. Paper 1293.
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MISS

Miss, or not to know
the simplest words
the stifled banners of the first Army
: your senses taking power in the world

and why the sky is so close
and what that First Place is
that arguers are always saying in

and why the slim and pretty person
carrying them food and drink and smiling
is called by a name that means "to lose."

Warming time or nest of breakfasts
my body stiff and cold from the funeral of sleep
and the cat all liveness
looks to murder
some people who live in the wall

What a thing it is to investigate!
this science of waking after too much broken sleep
and seeing Orion frank and cloudless
—Welcome, hunter!
 broth of a boy
 spilt in the cold of the sky!

stretched on a board and shivering
my body tends too meager a garden
for my thoughts to revel in
and the chill bones keep pulling mind down,
sad, how addict we are to pain
that the least touch of it thrills us
and takes all of us to its small self,

the point of the pin.

I couldn't sit there eating crackers and let the cat yowl
so I fed it its chow, umber
stars and dusky nuggets

and it calmed like a sea in August
suddenly reaching Nantucket. Not to trust,
like a painter's eye around the body's folds.

I am in the monastery kitchen
warming my bones
like any of the old monks I've ever been
island after island.

Prospect & Definition:

Memory is an island
we see a mile or two off shore
and we can't swim.

Boatless treeless land for us,
keen-eyed we stare at what we suppose.

And deem it lost.
And think it somehow ours.

10 October 1993
Thubten Chöling

The suppositions of ordinary language
Make philosophers weep.
The premises of philosophers
Make the angels sleep.

10 October 1993 KTC

CHANGING THE WORLD

Changing the world
by sleeping late and paying no attention

fly on the window pane of

“so much time so little to do”

the exaggerations of uncertain knowledge

fluorescent hum or cold in here

wanting to be wanting.

Seneca. Larousse. Look it up
and down again
to where I am
cold-wristed
thinking about morning
glad we got the house-plants in last night
before the first real frost,
just after dawn now, 25 degrees,

*the unused light
arriving from God*

—expresses the precise blend of sentiment and profit
we mean by Western Europe,

the thing the Slavs will never understand:
Dead men buy no commodities.

O keep them alive if only to
sell them Coke, o keep them living.

I think the fly rode in
asleep on the fuchsia
fetched from the unscreened porch,

and having no purchasing power to sustain my interest,
no narrative skills,

it'll have to trust the Sheherazade in my head,
the ethical, the compassionate—
if life is all we share
o keep them living.

Imagine an enemy.
Imagine the cloudless sky
shocking blue beyond the dark leaves.

11 October 1993

Truck
Going to work.
Wait,
It is not ripe.

11 October 1993

AT THE IGUAZU FALLS

An image of a woman
supposed to be falling
keeping pace with water

o the body stands still
the mind falls

in the pictures she falls
the thought of her
falling towards the final truth of water

panel after panel
without faltering
she falls

the image is rotated then
in 10 degree increments
: a woman
cascading down the rocks

being above them all the time
but some aspect of her tumbling
in strict measure
aspect ratio constantly transforming

so we see her now upright
now tilting clockwise
around until she comes
upright again and still
and still some part of her is falling

and we see her fall—

What part of her do we see?
We see the water.

A woman stands at the top of the Falls

but water has no top

any more than the moon has
or the wind

a woman stands in the wind at the top of the Falls
leaning on the wind with her elbow
talking into the ear of the wind

this time, this time at last
she tells all her secrets, not all of them, not all,
but the ones that burn so hot and nice and heavy in her to tell,
she speaks them into the calm ear of the wind
the wind that is always arriving

the wind that is touching
and down there the wind is stirring the water that falls
stirring into cloud and foam and broken images
shivering in sunlight all colors she remembers

a woman is standing at the top of the Falls
and what she says falls
through the wind
down into the passionate countries below

water is always up to something, touching and seeking,
water makes everything it comes near to
part of its own conspiracy to shine.

Is this abstraction
this fall of woman
(her shadow
zooming down the chute
of water, her shadow
on the form of moving,

her shadow stretched
by the noon sun to show
a woman stretching down the falls,

her shadow hands touch bottom,
she touches bottom)

is this abstraction

the clear light falling
through the shadow of a standing woman
falling, the shadow
falling down the serene
motionless of sheen upon
the plunging surging water?

aspect in strict measure
tumbling

how the light falls
when we let it

when she lets go
and the water falls

Hold it hold it
they want to cry to her
recognizing her power, a woman
holding water

a woman standing in the sky stretching down the water

Let the light go
they cry to her
Let the water know
where everything goes

(her shadow is there
before it
her shadow takes it
safe in her form

the water lingers
in the dark
beneath all the turbulence
the crazy city
into which all falling water falls

the streets of it
the crescent moon
rising at the end of each

the people drunken and full of briefest joy
tumbling headlong
in the streetlights

crystal-sheer of water glinting
bead on bead it hits
the going down

a city lasts no longer than we can taste
the fresh nibble of the spray upon our lips
watching her fall.

12 October 1993

IMPERMANENCE

The meek publications of Persepolis
—crabgrass and lizard skin and sand—
report in their dry old clubman manner
the froward hopings of the heart

still humping forward age by age
to let (O Lord!) another morning come
and the folding card-tables we put away last night
let them not clutter our new day with old wagers

and this time let the car be young,
clean glassware fill with yummy ferments
and all our symphonies be surprises
and eyes go back to being semaphores again

o let us anticipate the night
panting with sacred unions, as paws
happening along the sacred pelt of being!
But we have read all this stuff before.

13 October 1993

THE MILL

Organization
of things
and a mill

two stones to grind
between them
the kinds of stones
that grasses grow

grinding the futures of wheat,
I don't know, Antigone,
there are too many rules.

Don't feed the cat.
The blue cup is mine
you can tell because it's the color
of the sea, and I don't know,
Antigone, stand
at attention by the kettle
counting laws on my fingers

your strong white fingers
always moving,
the cat is restless
la chasse is fruitless
the water boils
oh yeah? well what else does it know how to do?

it's not Mozart you know
a lot of kitchen for so few
a towel is always ready

and Druids, are there druids there
waiting in fleabane and autumn asters
are there, and talking to you
in the old tongues,
secret taradiddle of the miracles
a beautiful woman comes in carrying the cat
blends in with her sweater

small sacred beauty of alive

haze on the river with Ulster
lights needling through, dawn soon.

14 October 1993
KTC

Upon whose skin
does this writing suddenly show?
The kid in the Afghan hat pours
salt methodically from the shaker
to fill up his paper plate,
the goofy buzzed out look in his weak eyes.
Whose skin am I writing on
now? You give me these words.
The alchemist de dix-sept ans
sits in the college coffee shop
sifting the crystal evidence:
He will be a merchant someday,
will go to China,
wear clean clothes. They are bored now,
the light is going.

And a sentence begins I would like. . .

And what is that liking?
Blue miracles, bláth, a flower
caol (pronounce it *queal*)—

is there also here a narrow flower?
And then one has written:
You don't know someone until you live with him.
Ni aitheantas go h-aontios — could this
mean that?

And in general
you don't know,
you just don't know.

*A script written with the whole actual words
of another language*

14 October 1993

FLEEING FROM THIS PLACE

Fleeing from this place
the way a pen writes
the name of somewhere else
Moscow or Svalbard or Tibet
and one is there
at ease on a quiet street in Luxemburg
admiring your host's Lada
because no one (for a moment)
is in control. The results
can be neural and disastrous,
or a cat walk in sycamore leaves
and you hear its shuffling from across the stream.

Where they're covering something with a blue tarpaulin
—the little river goes but something stays—
Ophelia is always reading in our heads
barefoot and pretty with a glaze of dying,
chancy, in love with riddles,
insufficiently moored to what asks her,
pale whimsied her, to answer omens with kisses,
how easy it is to smile and be quiet and to drown.
I mean: be there for my need. Attend me
as I have attended all my days
the shifting fancies of my best enemies.

Who has slain himself now
locked out of love?
Or for love-lack chilled
wrapped the river round her
to be warm in its
perpetual departure?

The men are gone now with their tarp,
it was a lawn thing, a practicum
of grass, no murder, straw and no suicide

except one more lover trapped
by the quick high tide of the mind's habit
and lost in reverie, but lost indeed.
A sad tale's best for winter — a story
quietly waiting inside us
patient as ash inside its wood.

15 October 1993

THE GAME

Hootenanny. Impartial gibbering
of the happy. Trumpet squawk
till sound becomes a sort of weather
mall-rats meander through
soaked to their undies. The king
is dead is dead, we live forever
in Mortal Kombat in the gleam of number.
The music has to tell you if he's alive or dead,
this enemy you are, face in no mirror.

Potato skins cabbage stem soup seems
three worlds away, before you learned to smoke.
There is another dialect that silence speaks.
Not muffled or wool, though you hear it around sheep.
Before helicopters screw down through the clouds
go home and take a shower. Here's a towel.

16 October 1993

Trying to be quiet enough
only the sound of the bread in my mouth
and a car far away.
Call it song. An adequate
atunement of the day.
Something for a mind to feast on
for a second, then get to work. To play.

17 October 1993

CASTLES ON HELLESPONT

I suppose we'll be travelling again soon.
That means swimming for you in mysterious
clarities —what language does *this* water speak?—
and for me long walks along sun-fevered lakesides
through municipal bougainvilleas
color of Christ's blood. Meek pensioners
shuffle invisible debris into copper dustpans.
Ducks yabber. Everything grows. Colors and names
are enough for me, and the skewered lamb I sneak
a stick of while you shower, you come back
to find me glistening with guilt. Being teetotallers
cuts us off from the ordinary rhythms of the world,
drinkies and afters and the long crooning of cigars.
Too early for a serenade and these people
think coffee is only for breakfast, like Wheatabix.
Being rich is travelling without carrying—
to go empty-handed to Andaluz, ah that
is nightingale and sanity! We sit together
watching one more oily strait engulf the sun.
All round us, travellers and other invalids sit still
holding hands, trying to love their way in silence
through one more spectacular catastrophe of night.

17 October 1993

ASIA

Asia
comes to measure is
it is a delicate curving line
inlaid in gold
it could be gold
written deep in what is black

—the Japanese understand black—
or what might only be the night

words spread all over the bed
and everyone hears,

everyone hears what this one
thin sinewy line is saying.

Asia is the answer.
Asia is the answer we fear.
All our barbarian honesty
our candid lutes our itchy ears
our sophomores our saints.

Everything can be retooled

*New tools make new men
(or new women, the word's the same
in Anyese)*

*A mountain easily fits in a window
but never through a door.*

*Tea waits on the hillside to be gathered
—why are the stars waiting?*

*Everything can be made small.
Everything can touch.*

18 October 1993

for G.L.

I knew I was in for trouble when I started having problems with esses. The curves kept flattening till I was left with a scant wiggle slanted vaguely northeast, a tragic loss. Circles will be next, a loss of wholeness is it or a quickening of line? I know a man who as he grew older wrote e, i and o all alike — it's like reading Arabic to get a postcard from him.

18 October 1993

“Was it significant that Skinner shared his dwelling with one who earned her living at the archaic intersection of information and geography?”

—William Gibson, *Virtual Light*, 93.

Even at the unforeseeable point, fabulously remote in the future, when this library book (in which I read that useful sentence) is due back, even that date is almost a month before I have to travel to Germany. I will still be here, alive if I am. It is wonderful and daunting that even the future has a present tense, and that a time will come when I will still seem to be able to say I am.

18 October 1993