

6-2007

## Listening Through

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, "Listening Through" (2007). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 417.  
[https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts/417](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/417)

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).

# *Listening Through*

*Twenty-five Concertos  
for Piano*

by Johannes  
Chrysostomus  
Wolfgangus  
Theophilus

## *Mozart*

*called Amadé*

\*

Robert Kelly

*As composers set poems to music, here I presume to set music to words.*

**(LISTENING THROUGH)**

Listening through, it's gazing into a diamond. It's staring into the fire. It's solitaire. It's staring with your ears, listening with an empty mind, being willing to be shaped or spoken by what one hears. It is irregular. It is illegitimate. It is, in my experience of it, breathlessly hurried, and like most urgent things, it seems dangerous, scary.

I'm trying to describe what I mean by 'listening through Mozart.' Or whoever it might be, the composer whose work I infest, or am infested by. I've listened through twenty five Mozart piano concertos – played by Murray Perahia, a set of CDs I happened to have. And I've listened through Shostakovich quartets, Biber sonatas, Bach partitas. Sometimes the music finds me a story that has to be told, sometimes it instructs me in verbal, grammatical operations that might (in some other world) be the equivalents of the musical gestures. Event for event.

My procedure is simple. Start and stop. I put on earphones to focus the sound source. I start a track on a CD or tape. I begin to write as soon as I begin to hear. I write whatever comes into my head, listening. So listening, like most beautiful

things, is divided: I'm listening to the music and I'm listening to the words roused, rising, in my head. I'm listening through the music to the words in my head, listening through them to the music. The two sounds mingle, interact, intercourse, get in each other's way, sing together, sleep together, sometimes resolve. How do I know what they're doing, I'm too busy writing it all down.

That's what I'm doing, I'm writing it all down. As long as the music keeps sounding, I keep writing. As soon as the music stops (the track ends – I move track by track here, accepting the mechanism that delivers the music to us in these days), as soon as the music stops, I stop.

That's it. There's not a hint of analysis, history, performance commentary, discussion, understanding. It's just standing under the music, listening to what it makes me think.

What it makes me think and what it makes me say. I don't know what I've heard, I scarcely know what it's made me say. I stop writing and look up into silence. Silence is usually in the shape of a window, with light in it, coming in. As it happens, I almost always face east, like a good Sufi.

It's staring into the fire till shapes appear, burning cities and black seas, faces, faces you think are in hell, but then they smile with a peace and clarity you've hardly ever known. It's staring into the keen blue blaze deep inside a hand-cut old diamond until that single point opens out as a road and you follow it.

Of course I write with immense gratitude to J.C.W.T. Mozart, H.I.F. von Biber, D.D. Shostakovich and the other geniuses I have allowed to puff along the frail

craft of my wit. They have said everything to me, and I have perhaps said nothing at all to them, or about them, or about their works that have been so compendious with delight and instruction for humankind.

No analysis here, not even any response to the specifics of the piece. Just the raving gratitude of what I have been all my life, a grateful but talkative listener. Don't talk while you're listening! people used to tell me. In vain.

*First listening: 10 December 2006-3 January 2007, Annandale.*

*Final version completed, 9 June 2007, Cuttyhunk Island*

1. K.37

Scratches on ice  
ice. History  
is something to eat  
with the fingers.

At least it clears the mind  
but what mind?

every child  
is a single question  
it is the teacher's  
business to ask

Three judges sit in a row  
reading what they hear

pricking their papers with ballpoint pen.

Faster the wind  
the examiners  
hunt through the town for us  
streets are for hiding in

lock the house of study  
crows nearby  
on the pear tree by the window

open summer prayer.

II.

The eye goes out  
from the sleepy wordiness of praying  
to sit with the crow a while  
caress the alert iridescent gloss  
a commentary  
of what your lips are saying.

Midrash.

Every word I ever wrote  
is for you

and a man brings  
so many and so many  
to comment on

so sky and so wing and so word  
a brick wall holds  
suspended or enclosed

a house is always in a hurry  
only the street  
knows how to sleep

then the quiet comes,  
the domes of ever.

You think because you wear blue socks  
or scarlet underwear you  
add a worthwhile footnote to  
all the mischief going on

a tree with a headache  
a bird with strange powers

with a little piece of wire bent.

III.

But come now, o soft sweet then,  
you wait for all my maybes

to tumble out of Moses's bed  
and seek my Miriam

time waits for everybody



cruel illusion that it runs

nothing changes

it stands and we drown in it

stagnant time.

A swamp or standing pool

such as at life-end an oarsman

in his iffy gondola skims

so I have turned my back on time

and done when young what men do old

and let all of your hurry your hocks

kiss my whiskerlessly cunning lips

Attention never not pays.

2. K.39

One time I found the man asleep *J.C.*  
his mind studying the score or the screen  
his sunburned neck  
the tower beside the sea

Silence also is allowed.

Silence is a solemn ceremony

so there's room to dance around,  
I hear my hand around her waist

I hear her to me,  
it is the old fashioned thing the two  
half afraid to smile the two  
saying close things to each other  
in Bickford's at dawn, New Bedford,

a cheek on someone's shoulder's  
the eleventh commandment  
and all the other ten dissolve in wine

he said, so what is two

it takes so many to say?

so many marks on paper

to say what you already know.

II.

Maybe too many

mistakes the priests

are coming,

with all their frivolous

white dresses over fusty black

what do they want with

all of me?

They also peddle

a kind of beauty

though the will to rule

turns the sky to marble

our beautiful religion

all stone in the sky

but they rule like marble

in the sky's name

1. All Power to the People means All power to me.
2. Capital and labor both deride the mind
3. Money means to rescue you from what things really mean,

*tha-mal gyi shes-pa*, the ordinary mind,  
the mind before you were you,  
before you you thought you were there to think with it.

Mind always here and always close, embarrassingly close  
no government and priest drowns it out entirely

what I hear now, the real mind,  
the tongue inside your mouth.

III.

Too many people listening  
to get anything said

anything right.

Who hears, gets hurt.

Music freighted with such joy  
as envenoms social forms,  
quick run on the right hand  
detoxifies the heart.

Wait. I've gotten beyond myself

or there is no self to get beyond.

There it is again, quickness saves,  
the sperm is speed, accelerate  
the happen, happiness,

a quick march for the King of Redonda *M.P.S.*  
who said in his long slow books  
the best of all things is speed,  
speed in the star the lights the eugenic night.

### 3. K.40

They're ready for me now  
I want to be pretty in their sight

mew mew

eye eye  
look at who

I'm me,  
eye eye from

me at thee

at them the pretty  
ones in smelly

taffeta how long  
we've worn

these costumes  
just to be born!

Eel pie on the long tables  
marzipan and croque monsieur  
pissaladière from Cavaillon  
where sweetest melons grow

I have traveled all this world  
to find myself in you

with you I mean your snuffy waistcoats  
your powdery satin  
can this be love, this mysterious  
*glance* chains you to me?

And I feel nothing but being being  
pure rippling being

spilling out of the shadows you try  
to wake up with so few candles

where something you fear  
and I can't guess

is waiting you think  
for you to undress

and crawl into bed  
while I keep talking.

II.

It still means thinking.

That's the word.

My schoolmaster squabble:

is it thinking, is it singing?

I can't help any

body choose

I'm only for the ride

along in the weird

word car

I know another

way of talking

the fingers tell

wake

beside me many mornings

and I'll disclose

*the shimmering smile of far-off cities S.G.*

but won't be sad—

sorrow's taste



and will not swallow  
I will swim in that dark river *G.H.*  
but seldom drown  
down into this bright life—

that is my secret,  
tears dry sooner than the night—  
my song says I'm not sure what it means.

### III.

Hurry there with me,  
church is over  
the people all flood out

Jews and Gypsies in the marketplace  
keep stalls open for the Christians—  
be grateful for black plums for crisp rolls  
their iffy chicken salad, chocolates  
smuggled over national frontiers.

These people love us with things!  
While we were loving god with second-hand words.

Where have I been  
the rain so here

sheet of glass  
I break it with

eye fingers  
break by seeing

through: then the tallest woman comes  
to answer me and she  
also has a weather she brings  
from all the cat-infested prairies  
where such leaves fall

Look – the egg has fallen from the tree  
look – the shell was blue  
look – the rain is on my hand  
and spots my pale blue shirt dark where it falls  
look – water that dissolves all things  
gives stone its true color  
look – we are fish down there  
look – men still have to carry our genitals outside

look – we carry each other inside one another—

is that worth singing home about?

II.

I see your signal on the hillside  
you're waving at me I am guided

Where does going go?

A melody, then an amber person comes  
and varies it a little  
then we're almost done.

The rest is leaves  
seafoam I mean  
restless in wind  
chittering the changes out  
and all the while you wave to me  
come across the lawn  
eager as used to

but there is no am  
no lawn only woods  
no wood only hill  
and the hill is far away by foot

I think it's you  
it may be crow  
or break a branch

spent so many years  
traveling towards a broken tree

that speaks to me

not just at night, I wake  
to see it at the edge or end  
of seeing, a small dark gesture

beyond cheap commerce of affect signifiers.

III.

Hurry sometimes is the only answer.  
"Fear turns into desire" says Dante  
speaking of the battalion of the newly dead  
idling upon Acheron. Hurry over.  
Hurry through your dread, your tired  
endlessly repeated deed,

you can get through anything  
Paschendaele or Plain of Jars  
hurry with chains around your ankles  
Siberian cathedrals beech groves of Mecklenburg maybe  
a wild bull charging through the trees

he knows how to get there but stops and looks around  
looks at you you look at him  
the birds are singing and finally everything doesn't listen.

5. K.175

An army of it.

Army does it.

Day soldiers  
filter through  
pictures of trees  
pines to me

and only me

My shadow is my fortress

up the ravelin

it all is war.

Polemos that extremity

the gods' amusement

when love gets out of hand

a steel band round the brows

filleting bluefish on the pier

an army is a navy though

a ship is just another knife

antlers. Horns

of the trees. Italies

full of them, tall

hurrying to sea.

But this is the strangest war

without bleeding

it's trying to teach something,

war is explanation

greed bleed

where's money

what does green

mean to a tree

*give me more mother*

the soldier cries, give me

the little box every shadow carries

snug in the heart of its absence—

is murder the only way to come home?

Busy trees today

making tomorrow

scattered corporals

chivvying recruits

excuse me, be bleeding

now after all it all

sorefooted limping from

mysterious battle—

that's just a guess reading

peculiar evidence in dead leaves.

II.

A fountain.

Grace.

Shadow

bends to drink.

My shadow.

What can we do

with those who

do not want to learn?

What can we do with those who do not want to want?

Today hunters

stalking trees

baroque embellishments

of camouflage

outbursts of gun

at outbursts of geese

the sky's plain fact

will never wake us up

my shadow's thirsty

it is dry work being

dry sleeping so long



dry trying to remember

in sleep all the songs,  
graceful shadow bend

low to remember  
then step with me beside

the fountain when you bend  
is shadows or reflections too

as if you drank  
miracles of structure alone

evidence of you were  
when you first heard the song.

III.

a bird though  
cries above it all  
and the war changes

war wax  
general rubble  
ambulances on parade

pomegranates toppling

from a market stall  
Chinese apples

we called them in that war  
the only fruit where you  
could taste the color itself

is that what I was following  
through the woods around my house  
color alone, animalless,

as if there were a place  
to have come from  
or a place to be here inside

and there never is,  
morning is full of suppositions  
a girl putting into her lips

a chunk of doughnut  
stale before yesterday even  
knows how to taste it new.

6. K.238

Nothing out there relaxes  
so we have to.

The squirrel is tense, the crow  
a-twitch with vigilance.

Idleness is ours  
alone to explicate,

propagate. It is our job.

Or vigilante. We call it air  
and all our young lives are spent  
in fruits of idleness all round,  
images ideas rhymes tunes tones

the apples of Sodom  
stones. It's hard work to be easy,  
we are building all day long  
the structures of heaven,  
bamboo scaffolding, girders welded

eyebeams overhead, lost sky,  
painting a woman's breast to fit  
inside a dome that's not there yet,  
so hard to be easy, all about running,  
running away and working peace,

running away from each other, dogs,  
squirrels, so many variations  
and no center, no medicine,  
until someone makes a blue picture

persuades you to lie down and be still,

be touched.

Lie there, darling,

let morning lull.

This is the day

religion begins again

in a drowsy world

so hard to make sleep

so many gods used up

on the busy little road to now.

In the last age of the world

at last a science of touch.

II.

O shepherd lend me one of your sheep

and one of your little Welsh dogs to guard her

shepherd lend me your flute so I can call

the valley from the hill and have them send

some maiden up to bring me lunch

a little cheese a little bread an apple

shepherd lend me your shaggy cloak

made out of last year's ram o shepherd  
lend me your ears and tell me the time  
how to make the flute make sense the tune  
I warble never makes them dance shepherd  
good shepherd lend me your soul so I can see  
down the flowering hillside and teach myself  
the names of what I see your map shepherd  
lend me your map and let me go with dog and  
flute and sheep and stumble, shepherd  
lend me your staff so I don't fall down the rock  
so I can have a measure of control over all  
the animal potencies I have borrowed from you  
shepherd lend me everything I need I will go  
to the country they lead me to where everybody  
knows everything and I can finally speak.

### III.

Blue flutter. Pages  
of no book. Rhapsode  
dithering with Homer's  
heroes. Hollyhocks  
speak Greek:  
the king

is with his admirers  
listening, they're strolling  
in his garden far from the sea.

They scheme insurgency,  
campaigns against the paynim  
d'Outremer, armadas,  
manifestos, new schools of art,  
juntas, Anschluss, coups  
d'état.

What else have men  
to talk about?  
Their will  
has banished them  
from any natural world—  
they have run out of beasts to prey on,  
appetites huger even than the garden,  
they're hungry enough to eat a rose.

“One step at a time, Majesty,  
our enemies are only shadows  
but like shadows they are everywhere,  
Majesty, around us and beneath us  
and no step we can take leaves them behind.”  
“Your caution, Admiral, does you credit—  
but have you never seen a shadow  
swallowed up by the weary raptures of the sea,

a wave rises up in light and falls in dark?  
Sail into the unbounded and bombard it—  
then sail back to me and tell me  
where your shells fell, and what strange  
cities they laid waste unseen.”

8. K.246 “Lützow”

Straw. We always are.

We always see  
flowers in winter  
made, colored with color  
by a will to see.

I speak this language too,  
am only an afterthought of it,

lyric footnote  
to what everybody else said

a girl dancing by himself  
a bird frowning at the sea

that proves nothing  
just as touching you  
proves nothing but that I have hands

But why do I always hurry, feel hurried,  
why is such a quick animal  
hunting all through me for the next thing to do?  
Is it prey, cheetah, or the moon  
you're after, little wolf?

The hard thing to remember is  
next time be born in the same year—

tourists grin on the cathedral steps  
their cameras, digital, are smaller now,

such childlike pleasures, I don't mind so much  
the delicate jabber of English and Japanese

I have my own shadows to herd along the dusty road  
my own language I'm trying to forget

the sun a cellphone ringing in my eyes.

II.

Or not see so much:  
a box, a box he brought in



to show us, empty,

“my mouth a disconnect,” he said,  
“if I can get the next trick new  
I think the war will end”

but I’m not sure his kind of war  
has even begun, not yet at least,  
I sympathize with his mistake,

I took my skin for a flag once,  
I imagined that what I felt was good for you  
and you needed news of it

pronto and I did. Now he  
feels that way too but without the feeling.  
Brings the community a box.

A box is to put things in.  
Things you don’t have and maybe don’t even want.  
But those things also need a box to call their own.

Is there a war we really need?  
Is there a circle with a cube inside it  
a pair of dice with no spots  
a man carrying nothing in his hands but  
thinking or supposing the space between them

is a box, or space enough, gift, a man can carry

space with him wherever he goes?

III.

A.

I know you now.

B.

This same road, a year ago.

A.

I know.

B.

You weren't sure about me then.

A.

And now.

B.

And now not either or not yet?

A.

I think I do, I think we'll go along the road a bit.

B.

Just as we did.

A.

It's strange to think that two people could walk along a road and finally reach some city.

B.

It is strange. But why is it strange?

A,

The blossoms, some pink, some white in the chestnut trees where the little river hits the lake?

B.

Or their shadows. Why do we walk in shadow?

A.

Why are we walking at all? Didn't we once have the convenience of conveyance, wheeled?

B.

Wheels don't work anymore.

A.

Wind, there's wind.

B.

Always, on this road there's always wind.

A.

You see to know much more about this than I do. Have you been this way many times before?

B.

*[Hums.]*

A.

Am I supposed to recognize that tune?

B.

I don't know about 'supposed.' I sang it to you last time. It's the only one we know.

9. K.271 "Jeunehomme"

The things the things  
the things one knows  
and every tune is stored  
and every new thing comes home

your father's shadow  
on your mother's door

The Things

live in a world  
a world is signs  
an omen is the world talking about itself  
and afraid, a sign  
is a thing thinking about itself

the things know how to sing  
the things know how to dance in dreams  
the things are elsewhere when we wake

but the things are where we are  
they are the angels

a thing is an angel

we move among them while they stand.

Thoughts embody'd  
here on this empty road  
a man is walking the familiar

the straight lines of his childhood  
to taste the shadow of where he's been

To breathe things in  
and make them breathe

the things that are his silent guardians  
they keep watch  
he feels them in his tears  
when the sight of a cracked plate  
or a crisp brown paper bag  
not yet unfolded by the grocer  
can make him full with feeling  
he can't find any label for,  
not joy not grief, a strange  
intensity of now,

a thing  
is always now

and when you've lost a thing  
(I've lost my golden ring)  
you've lost your now

Nowless then go sing

anytime you like

a lost boy on a lost road  
looking for a lost thing

he'll never find  
because a thing is now  
and only here.

Saint Seraphim of Sarov  
kept his monks and nuns apart  
so each could seek the lostness of the other  
and find and find,

patron of those who seek lost things  
(I found my ring)  
Saint Seraphim pray for him  
this little boy this little me

I will throw all my other things away  
and watch where they fall  
then follow as well as I can  
into the wilderness they show  
by vanishing, and I will go there  
and by losing I will know  
where all the lost things go.

II.

River that comes over the hill as mist  
river that runs me, river of no remember,  
all that is known about you is your passing,

no hint of where you're from or where to go,  
river that is just an animal of passing,  
slow as the sun, slow even as the darkness

river we are seldom permitted to see  
but sometimes stand on the mulchy shore  
watching driftwood, geese wild or resident,

the puzzling transactions of objects being moved  
by something that looks like a republic of intentions  
but no one I can stop and talk to, but you,

the whole of you, endure the flab of my address  
all of us, brimming over with our ideas,  
our ontologic jabber, river, listen one more time to me

river who swept Kant away along the shallow sea  
river whose main cargo is the summer stars



meek reflections of the uneasy mind,

Tu Fu's river, river of pine green ornaments  
that all are water, that all run through the hands,  
river it is dangerous to understand

but I'm trying, living beside you year after year,  
we live among signs and portents, we dream  
only what the river brings to mind,

the actual water, the water that is you.

### III.

The steeple is falling  
the street is full  
this color bird  
flies through the ground

the beggars run down the street  
sailors carry flower girls around  
it's all the way it was in books  
when you could read.

No help for the drowning man  
but go deeper.

No help for the hand  
but to touch more.

Gold coins roll out of roses

frightened children hate the sound of words  
a word is only to tell them what to do

run away, the light  
is disobedient, it shows  
more than it's supposed, the line  
runs through the town, the circus horses  
prance along the railway track  
only the children are afraid.  
Always afraid:

run faster. Stop and take a breath.  
Go through your pockets. Raisins.  
Dates. Stones. Enough to go on,  
the forest is close now, frost comes soon,  
people live inside everything,  
people nobody has ever seen,

there is always somewhere else,  
there isn't always only here,

only the dried fruit in your pocket  
the little stones to keep you company  
take them out and name them  
and they will be your little soldiers  
but even they keep telling you what to do.

To be is to be told.

Sometimes you sing, sometimes you get  
so angry you don't even want to breathe.

You want to disobey, just disobey,  
then you look at the stone again  
and it still tells you freedom comes from doing  
whatever it says. Freedom is being here.

You don't believe a word of it, all you want  
is to get away, away and never listen. Then  
break free, run fast, and learn to disobey  
this palpitating Torah of the heart.

11. K.413

Hold a curl. A curve. *R.D.*

Over the room is room around me.

Roof. A word?

A word is a knife with no bread.

Push harder at the missing door.

Milk. She's always

on time I'm always late

trip the marble steps

weather means danger

carved hillside

images in rock

image is the only treasure

pictures are huge rooms

each one a different shape

a telling

each one empty

a treasure is something waiting for you  
you have to plug yourself into its sense of space  
to seize the treasure and sail home

sail, veil, no home, no treasure  
but the empty rooms  
each room a different shape of big

shape is our treasure

you sashay past you empty me  
each me a different you

shape? pleasure,  
pronounced as in Oklahoma  
one time in summerwind the wheat

first syllable rimes with play  
the second measure

girls are running over the large but unpretentious lawn  
to be on time  
you are hurrying outward to them and through them  
to be late,  
pleasure!  
something you forget,  
pleasure! something somebody else

has to remind you of,  
that is what somebody else is for,

*[cadenza:]*

Do I have to tell you again?  
Up the ladder, gold-eyed  
wood of the granary door  
where the Dogon shield their millet  
push open, crawl in,  
call a name softly, there you are.

II.

so long ago not so far away  
we walked along Italian streets  
never got around to our affairs  
which must have been with the stars

then you sent a letter  
with a picture  
trolley car and snow  
can such things be

when we never got around to business and all the stars that push people around  
never looked the other way, no chance, and I thought about you taking the

Thalienstrasse streetcar out to the end of the line then riding back quietly getting ready for the middle of things

we always get ready for the middle because we both know everything is getting further and further away all the time and we are stars too evidently goodbye goodbye Big Bang and all that babble about the infinite recedingness of the universe everything departing everything rushing everywhere and everywhere there is anyway is just away

away from me and not so long ago and the city not far,

Everything exists to keep people apart  
who otherwise would fall into each other  
and make a bed of everything

when everything is supposed to be  
busy with its Father's business  
carrying everything else so far away

and then I looked down  
at the cold little stream runs past my house  
and saw a little fish hurrying there too.

I miss you. But the French say  
*you are missing from me.*  
So when we meet some day  
and ask who's to blame

let's hold hands and blame the little fishes.

Improper plural. *Tu me manques*. Blame words.

III.

Flags fly under water

cobblers work frantic for the emperor  
and everything changes.

This music is about everything that changes  
and for once has something to say

about that most vexed agent  
everybody. It says: beneath  
the ocean another earth is waiting

beyond the sky another sky is breeding.

What we use up will be replaced  
and somebody else will use us up—

how beautiful the wet banners of vanished kingdoms,  
how beautiful a king is  
when he is all power but has none,



when he rides in the tumbrel to the guillotine  
or when a queen rules a continent she has never seen  
army-less, and with her smile alone—

take back my words  
from politics and money,

let it be that when I speak  
beneath my word  
another word is waiting

and when I breathe  
another's breath is speaking.

12. K.414

In the middle of things  
the hunt  
methodical a kind  
of joyous plod.

Hunt.

There is a king in your pocket

a moon on your back

and already it's dawn.

Who knows you?

\*

Not what I see but that it makes me seen  
or to have been seen, silently hailed,  
two persons passing in and out of phase,  
their shadows touch—

ancient marriage!

\*

Tell me all  
things lying in dead leaves  
are full of life, is that

is that what you were getting at  
in a year of your life

the hunters stolid through the woods  
their white hounds distracted  
readily by truffles, bitches  
mostly, under the leaf mould, under

such oaks by which a stag once bled,

bratchet, such dogs are picked  
to bark or bell in tune,

harmony animals  
glisten of their teeth,

what are they after,  
this posse, so quiet?

No bear no deer  
and the trees stand close  
marshaled it is no thrill  
to gallop through

still they keep coming  
could they be after me  
and if they are or do  
who is this me supposed to be?

\*

I look down and count my legs

I look up and count the sun

timeless error to be me.

They're taking their time about it

but never stop

I pray to them but the trees suck up all sound

the king's out of my pocket now

running for his life

woodpecker, mountain stream, campfire ashes cold,

the hunters play cards till it's too dark to see.

II.

Not so never here

hands cupped around your face

skull ears

you hear their skin

your lips move slowly

you followed the finger

pointing words out in a book

bright clean fingernail  
shows breath where to go

pronounce this sentence

then try to remember it  
the name of the one you need  
is hidden inside it

the one you need to need  
is inside the sound of what you see

I have given it all to you  
her name her hawk  
her tower her little yellow car

she who once in Anatolia  
was mistress of such beasts  
lives near you now  
almost inside you

now it is squirrel only or flying  
fox and bat because you  
are only who you are at night

and here the sun comes over the summerhouse  
he must have been the loneliest man who ever lived  
so hard he had to work to say the simplest thing

it goes on without me

and with no you and no me  
the shadows would still come crashing through the trees

### III.

it has no heart here  
it locked it in a golden chest  
in a tired garden

story books tell what giants do  
smaller monsters like me and you

what happens inside the earth  
and there too the giants hide their wits  
where we hide our wants

come out come out  
empty head with ruby rattling in it  
word moving

and let the new religion come  
sunbreak over little hill  
we speak another language here

they are resplendent  
in silken mistakes

heirloom vocabularies  
lady I would be a word in your mouth  
he said and no other commodity  
be our community

came a phone call from the weather  
just the sound of wind  
breathing when you answer

just the sound of sun.

And at your backdoor you hear the cloud.

13. K.415

Stars do it.  
You do it. Speeds

out from the middle to.

Here. Take this.

I have carried it so long  
and from so far

so long so far so here  
take this

it has no shape  
and it has eyes in it

at first I thought you were the sky  
then they started talking

some story the eyes got busy with  
about two birds or a green box

who can tell the ins and outs of  
what is color to a bird

but you eyes  
have always seen me coming



the only tragedy: when a man has to say

I never had what I had

as if his life it had no shape

and his eyes were closed

two birds in no box

and they were blue

so far carried, fetched

the dream slipped jewels on my fingers

autist artist

and I couldn't keep the cat

and the cat ate the bird

there was no bird

a big yellow stone on his magic finger

and he told me who gave it to him

and and and

There is a ripple runs through all things

uneasy play someone's in the house

you think but never a girl just a voice

a voice with no eyes

and she looks at you

too much magic too little math

so I stripped off her pearls and gave them back to the sea

I hid the car keys from myself

and locked the tower door but it was too late

all the sound has come down the stairs

seeped into the room and formed a single word

thank God I don't know the language that it spoke.

II.

Scull across the lake

put effort in it

get nowhere fast

I love the amplitude of noon

mommy when do the trees sleep

are we the only people who lie down

boaters floating away from their bad consciences *B.B.*

who was your father in the war  
everyone has a murder or two to hide

some high finance with the petty cash  
a twisted thing in the mousetrap still bleeding  
unanswered mail unspoken mind

guilt is the same size as itself, same grade  
losing anything is like losing everything  
even the littlest

so don't let your pretty fingers trail  
in the cool water alongside the canoe  
who knows who's down there hungry

waiting to marry you and already  
the twinkling wedding band  
flashes in the sky coming for you

where we have been above and down below  
and have been two there too  
playing at being one

lie back and let me paddle  
thunder at the end of afternoon  
I like the little thing you sang to me—

*no more religion* – what tree said that  
or did its shadow find you  
and for once you simply understood?

### III.

Tamerlane, barking at his troops,  
paused and remembered  
a valley full of apricots

remembered he liked boys as well as girls  
remembered he could not write his name  
but ruled the world, remembered he was lame.

His soldiers were accustomed to his spleen,  
his silences, they loved him the way only tyrants  
can be loved, collecting such totalities of trust,

they waited and thought as little as they could  
lest they be thinking the wrong think when he spoke again,  
but he was waiting, he was tasting

apricots again and auburn weather,  
and half a dozen little more than children  
who met him once and one of them smiled,

a little girl in the hills above Trebizond  
when all the rest were solemn and afraid,  
and who am I, he thought, who could I be at whom

even a child presumes to smile?  
There seemed no point in going on,  
we do what we do to tame the world.

He left the parade ground and his soldiers knew  
they had lost their king. A man  
who remembers apricots is already too far away.

14. K.449

Suns come up hard here.

Interrupt  
to leave a space  
for you to hear.

Kiss my white collar  
and I kiss your waist  
where blouse leaves skirt  
and shows we all know

*the shimmer of far-off smiling cities*  
or whatever it was Stefan George said  
moved me so much I moved it

into my martyrology my High Mass

the shabby marble mantelpiece  
of my memory where it still rests  
a little dusty maybe maybe changed  
to make it more like the mind that holds it

the way we remember

Things change  
untouched  
they alter  
or fingered by our  
half-alert attention

Every time you remember something you wear it out

How long will we go on having the *Iliad*?

Smoother everything flows  
till soft as cheese  
it crumbles when you try to lift it  
fresh to some intimate occasion yuck

stale as your feelings

felt again and again  
always the same always yours

It stumbles along beside you  
this body-of-feelings all-your-life  
like a shadow you can smell.

\*

Hard sun. Vague wood.  
Save me  
from my answers.

Cross your hands here  
you're a Christian or a Mason  
trying to tell me something  
but my eyes are closed

So you say it again

your hand

a word in the dark.

II.

Under this river  
there is a river  
flows another way

where quiet tribes  
climb blue rocks

kiss me in Dutch  
little animal

you who discovered  
the *other way* of water

how nothing ever  
can descend to us  
unless some other rises



\*

Twist-lipped flower salmon and saffron  
roses of winter commerce—  
the flower salesman  
tracks you to your lair  
and lays his pretty samples  
all round the cave mouth  
and breathes the fragrance of them  
inward where you cower

like me afraid of sunlight  
especially the kind of light  
that hides in flowers

the tiny rivers rafting  
red through animals.

This kind of beauty I can withstand.  
This kind of river? I have one of my own,  
I keep it in a little bottle by the stove.

Advertising. Alembic. Currents  
of what once were feeling. Yet another

river. Stream over stream  
falling and never mixing, stream  
under stream.

### III.

Sometimes aren't you me?  
Tired too of dancing in the amber room?

I'm tired of ruling so many Russias  
I just want to file my toenails  
and watch the egrets fish my pond.

Everything is mine. And I am you,  
make free with yourself,  
I am all permission. I am yours.

Body. Bowl. The Deep Drink  
a wizard brewed in her cauldron  
to tell me about you.

Why ask her,  
drugs need us  
so we can release into sound

all their dubious gospels  
into a world desperate to believe  
anything as long as it has no name.

Poetry is this idiot  
who uses language  
to find out what lives  
on the other side of names.

Who climbs the mountain that is not there.  
I have washed the ocean till we both are clean.

15. K.450

My horn my horn is a habit  
a little forest to know you in

\*

where a star fell  
a stag died

a spurt of his life-stuff  
grows mushrooms there

truffles deep  
in the growl of ground

no one found  
not even the white sow

Aeneas spotted snoring on the bank

Woods woods fingers  
erasers  
more erasers than pencils  
more lines than squares  
toadstools and tomorrow  
more and more

volume of a frustrum  
(amputated cone)  
examine, heap up formulas.

More formulas than things!

Sweaters for morning  
a shawl for night time

a shawl with stars  
woven into it

try to tell the pashmina from the air  
around it not easy

as near as I can figure  
you never were an island—

I saw that tree  
moving through those trees

*Codex Seraphinianus*

lovely fake who needs a flower  
when we have an hour  
who needs a little cat  
when we have symmetry?

We're all a little autistic you know,  
John especially, and we are all named John

(as the poet wrote), what else would you name  
a tree come walking up the road and

we don't need even pictures of them  
we have words  
we don't even need words

we have this funny feeling in our heads  
the great land between our ears  
from sea drone to sly sunset  
so many cities  
and god is word enough for *we*

a god is a word the mind says to me.

Quite impressive. Now listen to this:

teapot broke  
tea ran south  
a river comes  
a river knows  
the tea is me  
the sea is close  
we drown  
among ancestors  
we do not know,  
we orient ourselves  
by how we smell

and I smell the night again  
coming over the hill.

II.

Let it think nothing while I try  
also to be a table  
gloss of a grey morning  
removing one by one  
such thoughts as pretend they think.

Arriving, arising.

A method to each wave.

I know these numbers, officer,  
they have counted me before,

I know the feel of each of them,  
this seven pressed against my skin.

And the one thing no one can forgive is love.

O you sly song  
you stone hidden in brown leaves  
you last meaning left in the world.

Tree. Tree. So many me.

How can I ever be slow as you need be?  
Hyperactive disorder  
boy in the cellar

chasing silverfish down the whitewashed wall.

Inside every brick  
a letter from the fire

he is too busy to hear  
though he rests his head against the cool wall.

III.

Everyone is here now  
I can stop being.

It's all about them and me.  
This is the you I used to be.

The one I knew, her father  
was a baker, she sat in the flour  
like a curved white song,

her father was a blacksmith  
she learned from him  
how to bend me round her finger

*nagelneu.* brand new, shiny  
new nail



hammering the guesswork quick together  
to make it stand,

her father was a carpenter  
and taught me how to build a tree  
late afternoons when I sat in his atelier  
waiting for her to finish titivating and come down

then we'd go walking out together  
strolling through the forest her dad had made

When we got to the oil well in the middle  
I always forgot what kind of oil it was  
It changes every day she said  
sometimes oil of mountain sometimes oil of sea

Is it good for us I asked  
so many times  
Try it and see she said  
night after night holding close  
but never did but never did  
even now I taste it on her skin

no, you never licked me  
no, the oil stays in the well  
the way the wood stays in the tree

no one gets married any more  
and a rusty nail is pretty too

a red kind of remembering,  
a girl in fact with no father at all.

16. K.451

Her voice is the same as his voice  
said the tree I feel in my limbs  
my body crawls with information and

Just and. All the rest  
is things trying to sing, matter  
trying to mean.

Hylomorphic symmetry,  
things trying to make sense  
perfect but alive

the way a whole sky fits into a lake.

More. The ripple  
runs through you,  
not the spine  
that common highway  
but through the subtle  
strange and devious  
pathways,  
meat is made of undergrowth  
sly asides, massacres and touch,

trust, that's where the signal runs,  
politics *is* physiology,  
look at any Vatican  
and feel inside your skin  
the organ tones of someone's business,  
selling the clouds, buying your time  
with the smell of roses,

Christ what a mystery  
it is to be alive at all.

**&** then, my gorgeous little ampersand  
with your cute bottom you  
impersonate the next obligation in my job  
and we agree to call it love, love,

since what else is there to talk about

it all comes back

to the simple minute underneath the tree

when you and what you see

suddenly seem to be two

can't blame that on the snake

and the sky swells out above the lake

and nothing fits any more,

sobbing gentlemen sit in shadow

scratching their stubble and write the bible

there has to be a record of these early days

when dualistic –hence impure– vision first arose

when everything went on inside

and only later spilled, slopped

over the rim of the cup

the way the sky (I'm sorry

to keep boring you with that blue tune)

slips out of the lake at last and runs away

night, stars, mist, and we

call this behavior a child

'not paying attention'

and slap him once or twice  
not too hard the way  
the branches slap against  
each other in wind  
a slip or slap here or there  
and he really doesn't mind  
do you?

## II.

Fuse my shadow to your body—  
that's all the alphabet  
is ever asking,  
like the Spanish Main,  
seductions, Carib vistas,  
driveways paved with shells  
crushed white Atlantic  
sunlight  
all those lives  
crunch under my feet  
and you blame me, calling  
me your desert island.  
But I am amber. Build  
your house of me.

Name more silly little countries,

I have to struggle against your tenderness,  
that dinner made up of nothing but dessert.

But there is an idle island where it is bare  
where birds are the secretaries of the sky  
and scribble nonsense on the sand  
while they scream into their airy phones  
on an eternal lunch break, shadows,  
and we walk among their doodles, shadows  
ever changing, but our business, duty even,  
is to make sense of it, become  
rabbis of it, lowly members of their parliament

Just let it someday get so quiet  
the mind is forced to listen to itself  
and leave the girls alone.

### III.

The root is in you, you are folk,  
the whole folk, the lore,  
the time at sea, harvest  
and lost property, umbrella upright

shoved in a rice field, train  
and truckle bed, lascivious clergymen  
and an old red bull leaning on the rain,  
be reasonable for once, you can't

get away from where I am.  
For many make me.  
Every kiss a thousand marriages.  
It has to mean something, it keeps moving.

It nears us of each other, you mean me,  
we are the marriage bed of primitive vocabulary  
we are the pebble in the flour  
sift, sift, till we are sifted

till death comes hobbling towards me  
and because I am so many  
I run away in every direction  
and outwit his compassionate fumbling

bone fingers on my rusty door  
he forgives me every time.

How can I hear you  
when I know your name

things too close  
appear to be on fire

they walk around like mirrors  
you want to take a mallet to them

but when one thing breaks  
everything breaks

a hand is the slyest wind

\*

“the things we think we see or mean”  
it said in my dream and so I said it too

a leaf is when no one listens  
sky is when someone is gone

The children break their mirror  
now each one has her own



the closer you get to the mirror  
the more you leave out

seeds fall out of the sun  
sun stands in the sky where it rises in winter

when there are enough contradictions  
men fall in love with women

I cannot say how the reverse of this may occur,  
the only time I ever was a sky it was night

a clear night in January  
and all I could see were the unknown lights in me  
that kept us both warm,  
forgot to look at myself in the looking glass

but maybe night has no mirror  
just the brittle names of heaven.

\*

The irritating thing about a flute

is a flute always sounds like somebody loving you  
and you don't know who it is  
and you're not sure you want their affection  
let alone the intimacy their sound proposes

so you run to the doorway  
and keep opening and slamming the door  
and everything is still there outside  
only for once you have said what you wanted to say.

## II.

There are no defenders here, no battlements—  
all my life I've spent  
besieging a deserted city.

A page of wheat,  
black waves  
history is only habits.

There is a word  
that spoke itself  
and wise women sit around and listen

teach their sons and daughters  
go out and measure it  
and while you're at it  
go measure where the shadow falls

then break something  
and cry your way home  
holding the pieces before you  
and the tune of your sobbing  
is all we'll ever know  
of what you found and how long  
it was or deep or color,  
did it have color, or was it  
something on the other side of seeing?

### III.

No life is wasted  
but everybody could have done more.

Drink this song then go to sleep,  
wake up to know  
you just missed something the sun said.

Wielding white and black paint such  
as to suggest color where they meet, *Juan Gris*

color from no color born,

color is contradiction.

Gold on my finger warms my knucklebones,  
all I am is what I feel.

The world never seems bigger  
than the culture we see it from  
then we go up in a plane and size is born,

the size of what you want  
is always smaller than what there is,  
and that's where love comes in

like the Austrian cavalry  
bright-tunic'd through beech trees  
hunting you down,

feel me or die,  
feel me, no matter how fast you run  
the shadow of my sound will get there before you

and you will sink down exhausted  
into the being I make you feel  
even if you never feel me

it is the contract with the earth you signed.

18. K.456

Ice rime frost *canities*

hunting weather

to where it rises

everything comes out of the woods.

Carl Ortwin Sauer disagrees,

everyone comes from the shore—

we are littoral:

from coast moved inland

only where river let us, led us.

*Aeneid* shows the pattern,

Book VIII, upriver, ascend.

Into the ever woods. The woods

are where we're bound

to be born. The white

sow and the brown boar.

Incest. We lied, we said we were wolves.

And so the morning was.

All this waking up, noble

touching,  
caring one another,

so much such.  
So much it hasn't started  
yet the familiar

silences. The familiar silences.  
Now you know Bernini's aesthetic  
the bronze church and the marble ship,

you know the sunshine  
carved out of oak wood,  
dangerous polished stairs

stars in every window  
as if it were always night.  
Or Santa Maria della Salute

as if nighttime never came.  
Bloch's Berlin. Sauer's Berkeley.  
The long streets. Nothing holds us.

Only the *sentence* leads us to one another,  
the distances, unspoken, the blue flash  
from the welder's torch, carved pineapple,

learn this dead language, darlings,  
stand up tall and learn your opera.

This is my last gospel: turn

everything into some sort of kiss.

Now I'm lost. I couldn't have meant  
something as simple as that,

could I, a crow on the lawn,  
perhaps I did. Let me count my fingers,  
fit them to all the keys,

keyholes, shinny up the flagpoles,  
get stuck in the sky, never come down,  
a lesser number, something between 2 and 1,

dim in midday, still give a little light  
come dusk, when the herdsman stumbles  
over the bull skull by the gorse bush and groans.

II.

Around, um, around,  
arm around, um, I'm hard to see,  
arm around arm around tumble from  
woods in ground mist risen, a bell  
jingles as if one of the dead before me

were getting a phone call down there,  
I can almost speak the sad words  
the little song proposes to the mind,

absurd sincerity of a machine  
I see the dead soldiers  
stumbling through the woods  
Ambrose Bierce's story  
the child sees only the aftermath  
men with bleeding feet  
lost in the trees. I try to think,

try to think of something else  
but everything turns into war.  
It is Christmas morning, even the music  
permits it, in the book it says  
When the whole world was at peace  
at Bethlehem in Judaea the Christ was born,  
But the name of the book is Martyrology  
and he will never be born again.

The cellphone rings, or the Carolina wren  
suddenly back or not yet gone  
winters with us and has something to say  
recognizable, appearances around us  
are still comprehensible, i.e., permit  
sentences to composed about them



the mad mind of the listener somehow  
makes cohere. Only fear  
makes us believe, Spinoza said  
And fear aborts valid inference.  
No church too dumb to say your prayers.

III.

Doesn't have to be anything  
just has to be.

No argument,  
serenity.

Swallowing reflex disturbed  
in certain neurological conditions.

Circular reasoning. In war  
poinsettia. Named

after someone. Candle, canticle,  
Africa named for sunshine

like the apricot cooked by the sun.  
In schoolyards the little boy

kicked and punched continues

to die. Big surprise.

Where do I go now  
now that I have lost the shadows

you entrusted to my care  
and where

with sun always in my eyes  
and midnight always an accusation

I can claim *My father*  
*did this to me*

but look what I did to my father,  
I was and I am and I am

look at the insistence with which I insist  
I am no one and nowhere and don't listen to me

do you hear me, stop listening,  
all I ever meant was music

and you have that already  
look down in your lap

from the heights of where we always are

climbing breathless up a level plain.

19. K.459

Swim swimming. [*orchestra*]

Accuse the thing

of being

being what I want

or not

it to be.

Swim. A leaf

as acanthus or

some spiny

sunburnt

fate a leaf

in plaster

to mark your wall

a part of nature.

You are you

because swim.

Things swim.

Wind swims your backyard.

The child comes out to play. [*piano enters*]

It has played this game

before. It may be he is born

knowing how to play.

To move each bead in place

or swim the air. The prodigy.

It may be weather

that teaches him though,

does he listen deeply

enough to the weather,

watching the clouds

yield to sun the sun

to clouds and both to night.

He watches all day long.

Then follows the sun

home, goes in, he is home,

all through winter evenings

he remembers the game.

The molecules of it.

With a coal on the hearthstone

he tries to draw the game,

makes marks. Marks mean

he thinks. A clock

looks down from the mantle

in the shape of a cat, it

is no part of his game.  
A statue of a saint beside it  
but he never remembers  
her name. Bare feet. The moon.

When his mother comes to look at the marks he's made on the stone he has to  
distract her. This is not for her to see. Don't give anything away. Mother, why do  
we wear clothes, he asks, Mother, why do we eat three times every day? Mother  
would you sew a button on my coat, an ivory button maybe or a button made of  
horn?

Bone. Horn. Baby,  
where do ideas come from,  
why are your fingers black  
why does every child I have lie to me?  
What do these marks mean?

\*

Moth and mildew,  
milk and money  
mother mind,  
horn and bone  
your only child

mother baby

silver tooth  
baby mother  
untell truth

o mother I am going fast  
faster than forest

o baby you are staying just as you are  
it is the sunshine that is going  
and I will never tell you how far

O mother mother I already know.

II.

Suppose rose.

Yellow.

Wind sin  
color enough.

Touch till  
never. Stone  
among stone  
radical *why*.

An initial carved on a coping  
or gouged there, easy  
letters to incise, I's,  
all our names begin with I.

Pick a number at random.  
Then apply it to ladybugs  
and see them crawling up a white stone  
then count the dark little spots  
on their cinnabar or sandarac shells or wings.

Think. The mind thinking  
is a kindly surgery,  
the blood and lymph that flow  
are poetry and prose.

There, that's a comparison complete,  
expressed in the simple colors of the absolute.

Meet me at the roadhouse in 1943  
how can you forgive me for the war?  
I drive there through the fluttering leaves  
in a '38 LaSalle. You wait in satin.  
We lose our third dimension as we flirt,  
shadows we eat, I light up a resemblance,  
on shadows we get a little drunk  
and linger in the flickering moonlight motel.

III.

So to become a cliché  
is better than thinking one,  
yes easier to climb out  
of the black and white frames  
back into the world of color  
which wins us with tricks of its own.  
Coleridge, *Biographia litteraria* chapter 13.

That's what we need, an arrogant obvious,  
a mode that means  
invention absolute,  
but we can say anything  
only because it's all been said before

other islands other dictionaries  
other woman with long hair in her eyes.

Distinctions. I can think  
because I speak. Silent,  
what thinks in me  
is only colors,  
colors and contours  
touching each other,  
changing shape, moving



away, never a word,

thinking without words  
is only colors, leaning  
on things or leaving things  
potent in the smallest  
sky that still surrounds the mind.

I hear you (I think it means)  
only because I hear me first

Like an animal I am,  
holding words in my teeth,  
as I run towards you  
then in my excitement roaring out  
and letting them fall, bite,  
fasten the idea of my mouth on the idea of your thigh.

20. K.466

υδατ- root of water  
water, know you  
you make apple

there is nothing yet anywhere but an apple on the tree

in silvery clothes a woman waiting

meals ago a glass

there is nothing yet but a glass

the glass is waiting

waiting is empty

things do our deeds for us if we rest

water does it

it is a little like morning a little like lime

your eyes close together

what makes it cohere

and still be free

why can't we who are mostly water

behave with that coherent liberty?

but is water free?

But outside Cooper Union

in the great triangular they call a square

twenty thousand waited

indifferent to the debaters'  
practiced insincerities within,  
palaver unending, just like war,  
but the crowd waited, knowing only  
they would be martyred by the outcome

all a crowd ever does is wait  
the outcome is built into the stars  
of how we are  
the preacher shouted  
in the cold, the only cure  
for slavery is for all men to be slaves

white and black and in between  
all slaves, and only their masters free  
those strange thick men who smell of verbena  
and whose skins are the color of money in moonlight

For we are only water  
one woman thought  
and always find our level  
fill every cranny  
touch everything and leave  
everything we touch  
soaked with ourselves

glistening comely clean [*Beethoven's cadenza begins here*]  
glass amber stone china  
glistening clean clear  
knives spoons fingernails  
a summer's face come  
smiling up on Coney sands  
pretty comely amatory  
loose lonely o my new  
born child come  
dripping with my  
waters too and then

it dries. And then it dries.

II.

Can I hear you yet? *for N.M.*  
Dear so like dead or like  
deaf, your small blue car  
across what slapping highway  
pelts, do you even remember  
that there is something to remember?

This morning I need to know something about dying  
so I turn to you, I loved you when you were young  
and never knew it, there was a line  
around you and a still awareness  
that wasn't aware of me, hardly even of you,  
I loved the clean limbs of your ignorance

about yourself, you were the society

you were born, water in clear water  
poured, and you were decent, pretty, smart.

So I turn to you, now that you've had  
a dozen years to be social with the dead,  
tell me, is the company there like here,  
must I be to that manner born  
to do death decently?

Can I hear you hearing me this morning  
mildest December, the hills of your Brewster  
still autumn green, red-tailed hawks frequent,  
vultures up here too, and eagles,  
and still the conscientious crows patrol,

you have left me this whole mild  
protestant word to take care of for you  
and I'm not even sure I can hear you  
hearing me this morning, can't ask you to speak,  
you let me speak at last, to tell you  
how the silent liberty of all your constraints  
spoke long legs, fingers, your shy green eyes.

III.

Old sky scrapers  
when nouveau  
still was new.

They looked like  
fountain pens  
standing on end.

What did they write  
in the sky, guns  
aimed at God?

I think of little clerks  
in starched white shirts  
my father at his desk  
with glinty spectacles  
or trotting up and down  
so many stairs for  
exercise between  
the sound of money and  
what else can he hear?

How old a city is so fast.

A man lasts longer  
than a sentence  
or a stadium, a high  
house, office tower.

Nothing lasts longer than me.

The transplanted

rhododendron still  
lives outside the kitchen,  
shivers in mild wind.  
For instance.

The army invests the deserted city,  
puzzled soldiers press buttons  
elevator doors open and close.  
They ride up and down all day,  
hone their spears on marble stairs,  
what was the purpose of all this  
they wonder. And suspect at last  
that those who built it  
had no idea themselves.

21. K.467

Far quiet  
to hear  
the hum behind the head

“do you think it was there,  
the forest, pond,  
before you woke?”

“it was round,  
the sun shone in,  
things already  
and knew what to do”

listen to them – it could never  
be otherwise, a month  
with no eight in it, a tree  
reflected in the lagoon, the canoe  
slices right through the reflection

“film that in turn, level  
upon level, even further  
from the real  
deep into what you feel”

but the other doesn't answer  
locked in contemplation  
of the mysterious lagoon,

its whence. Its hither.  
People just want to know.

“Some people.”

“And the others?”

“Speak another language,



one without nouns.

A number system

without eight.”

“Why eight?”

“Oh pick a number,

divide it by me...”

they’re smiling at

each other now

drift out of earshot

a shape on water.

Canoe.

\*

When you’re washing dishes

and come close to the end

suds thick at the bottom of the emptying sink

you see strange writing in the foam

you trail your finger through it

to write more, you write your father’s name.

It even lasts a few seconds

before it dissolves into everything

you ever thought before.

Dyslexia. Royal throne rooms.

Satin jackanapes prancing,

ladies in fancy waiting, coiffures  
like Babylon, a woman  
and a man either side  
of their retarded son  
refusing to admit anything  
wrong with their fine young man.  
Dancers. The music  
of denial. A few are drunk.  
After all that's what music's for,  
majesty asleep, love climbing  
up the espalier, the skin  
on love's hands smell like pears  
(a picture of you smelling it).

## II.

Water when we leave it alone.  
Pond at dawn. Midday lagoon.  
Even frost on the green hill,  
so simply the many things  
and water always only one.

Water when we remember,  
old man carrying a red brick,  
old woman without a coat,

a cat walking nowhere,  
the secret fuel of everything we love

animates the world around us,  
engine of the immediate hums,  
the secret fuel of every decent action  
washes the stone steps of your house,  
Baltimore morning, rivers  
through your dreams, little brook,

little wooden bridges, o water when it  
loves you interferes with schemes  
of edifice and ownership, only winter  
knows how to tie water down  
and God has taken all our winters away.

III.

The diamond cracks.  
Planes of cleavage  
each one a Midnight Mass

pray in your sleep

sip the golden cup

Crystals have catastrophe built in,  
each particular to itself  
the lines where fate comes in,  
the lines of me.

Through long years of mastery  
I grew a crystal somewhere deep.  
Doctors called it a disease  
but I knew better – this hard  
knot was the me of me,

loud at times, with a merry  
feeling reaching down my arms  
as if I were dancing with somebody fine  
and what my hands felt  
ran back up my arms  
and stored that information  
in the augmenting crystal,

sunlight fed it and the dark  
gave it milk,  
everything I ever saw  
seems to be reflected in it

facet by facet, playful stone,

fatal luminescence of the sayable—  
 because finally I called the crystal by my name.

22. K.482

Dragon is a dragon still.  
 Smoke of Danube  
 caverns. Duna. Passed  
 once over the Iron Gates  
 as if I were a piece of air  
 safe from everything  
 but breath. But some  
 being was breathing.  
 Breathing a word.

A man with a cobbler's awl  
 conducts an orchestra of mice.  
 And this is Germany again  
*langue* I loved and land amazed.

Astonished land  
 turned to stone  
 pine log outside Lauterbach  
 fresh cut, red inner bark  
 fragrant, vapor rising

from morning dew.

Dragon has to be.  
Smoke in Leipzig  
a tall tree of poinsettias  
in Wiesbaden,  
at the baccarat  
and no wheel for him,  
our only heaven  
the hands of other men.

*Nos autem homines*  
and what else were we  
to begin, every Catholic  
knew a piece of God  
back then, put them all  
together and could fit in the mouth,  
Lord's Latin—

the dragon said:  
all that's just a piece of air,

sweet air, called *aria* in opera,  
called gasp in the hospital room  
where my mother couldn't catch hers,  
her breath kept trying to go out,  
go forth and be gone, quiet quiet

her breath, soft little gasps,  
as if she knew not to fight too hard  
to keep what by its nature is always leaving,

sweet air, and then no more breathing,  
and the selfish air goes out to fill  
all the rampant selves in sunlight still,

so many I have seen die  
once is enough  
the dragon said  
to teach you what to do

and where you travel  
following the breath  
to where it goes.

And who is this dragon,  
the power of anyone who breathes,  
pounds the piano, speaks the oboe,  
orders his men to ready their rifles,  
aim, and Maximilian falls.

The watch unwinds then  
and I can feel no more  
and I too fall, the way a body falls.

II.

Acanthus leaf  
or something like,

stiff and spiny  
sculpturous

is that a word,  
Eve, my artist,

sculptress, how's that,  
for a sad old genome

cloning into the west?  
Where love is, that

dramatic difference  
you have taught men

to carve out of the wood of war,  
biology of plants and men,

neurosis of glaciers and rivers,



Eve, how can we sit

so close together  
only a million year

apart and still  
see your clear eyes?

in the day of music  
I hear no religion.

\*

One is a rough agate  
tumbling in grit  
to be polished  
fine by friction  
of attending

listen listen  
all you have to do,  
I do all the  
work the music says

agate I was  
and flute I am  
and nothing forgets

no business to be me.

\*

One by one the lovers speak  
until Eve chooses  
then up the wooden hill  
to Bedfordshire  
where my ancestor  
beneath the quilt reads Sophocles  
and waits and waits

in a world that wants to make every boy a girl  
and every son become his dad's Antigone,  
names, conditions, aspirations. Sophocles!

The arrant madness of knowing anything at all  
like Kafka standing in the snow  
midnight in a nameless town.

III.

Unwearied caravan of I am  
trekking across the manyness of sand.  
What an endlessness of me,  
disgusting gazetteers, autistic atlases,

mildewed maps I follow to keep on.  
dead general, no quartermaster to feed us  
and still the infantry of me hobbles on,  
the merchants we're escorting  
lost their cargoes long ago,  
the panniers of their camels are full  
only of dust only of shadows,  
cool dust sweet in this dry sand.  
Someone is always humming, we follow  
the tune by night, follow the color  
by day and getting there becomes  
a fabulous religion. No gods in these places.  
At sunset we sing our dreary anthem  
and rest an hour, trying to catch  
between day and dark that one  
interstitial gate a few of me feel  
we were one day promised. But by whom?

And where could it lead  
more commodious than this vastness,  
could it be the gate of a walled city  
in which Being found better employment  
than just Going On? Sometimes  
we listen so hard we think we hear  
the squeak or groan of that gate spreading  
open. Or it could be closing, who can tell?  
Rusty screws tightening further the organs

of our perception, mind driven mad  
by listening alone. Night march.

23. K. 488

It could be anybody's face  
the smile  
micro-managed muscles  
saying

what we are supposed to see.

There is an embeddedness to things  
how we wake with an image in mind,  
risen then, risen to appear  
from never know where.

Birdland. Boardwalk.

Dreamland. Ballroom. Cakewalk  
before your father was born,

and you walk that way too  
cradling colors in your arms,

you've got class, you carry  
your smile like a basket of fruit  
contadina, citizen of the tender cliché

all government bows to your power,  
Pomona, radical,  
let the bulls  
fight each other a while and let men sleep.

Unless they wake dreaming of you  
and the dream sticks to the corners of the room,  
shadows, pale window frame  
revealing nothing,  
no clock anywhere.  
No time to tell.

\*

And then he thinks of you again,  
and this time you're talking,  
all talk and no reaction  
just the way he likes it

a swan with no sugar  
a radio without a single flame  
someday he will write down  
a catalogue of all his father's silences,

their flavors and durations  
then he'll come to yours  
the unforgiven index of what you never said

and smiled all the while you never said it.

Then the day takes over.

We have longer obligations:

to mourn the murdered dictator

on our way to mourning those he killed

and made the likes of us complicit

paying our silent taxes for this war or the next

then quick as a bird flying away from the window—

suddenly I know what silence is for.

And what will I do with what I know?

Let it fall, dear friend, armload

of leaf and flower on the empty table.

II.

Poinsettias. Red bract

big on someone else's

petals. Dull green leaves.

A quality of saturated color

but with no brightness,

no sheen. No shine.

It used to scare me,

still does a little, so red, so dead,  
and the twenty foot tall tree of them  
in Wiesbaden, can't get that out of my mind,  
as if in every lifetime you  
have to come to this bright casino  
where colors lose their own sheen, shine,  
and Dostoevsky flees by night  
leaving thousands of rubles in bad debts,  
one for every day of his life,  
running from his life  
through the ever increasing numbers,  
numbers where the distances are stored  
alone can heal him, hide him  
from what he wants to be.

And I have walked with him  
from the casino, night, December,  
through the well-kept park of the glamorous suicides,  
neat pollarded elms  
clubby fists of them against the sky.

III.

Hope again. Habit  
keeps you going,

the jailer brings breakfast,  
good enough to eat.

You measure the sun  
through the sextant of your cupped hands,  
flesh telescope.

Today's the day they let you out.  
You wipe your tin plate and wake.

No one to stop you but your feelings.  
Carve a door, fit a handle to it,  
throw it open and go forth  
screaming Easter at every step, *da bin i!*  
here I am and am and the roses  
are to be happy with your company.

Here I am, girls, here I am  
abbesses of so many secret convents  
deep-daled in dragon woods,  
here be I, with no roses,  
no flowers at all but blossoming need.

\*

You step along a way  
you've been before  
but this time you know it,



everything brings you to you.

\*

The violent association  
of thing with other thing  
that we call thinking  
requires an equally violent  
disjunction applied by  
waking mind – hauling  
the rose out of roses—  
and making the mind work  
to dance modestly on  
the other side of being,  
we have a name for that too,  
look close and you're doing it

and out of the smile comes  
a kind of strutting forward  
and out of the forward gait a road.  
And you are the road.

24. K.491

So many wars

columns of soldiers  
between stone columns  
squeezed, march  
into the city

the mind hovers around catastrophe

bees on linden flowers

the mind hovers hard around catastrophe

ripens, even tragedy  
needs time,  
and a man,

needs a man, always alone,  
walks along.  
a man walks along

a woman always attended  
no matter how far she walks  
can never outwalk her faithful suitor

fateful

some man  
her shadow

1. a woman can never walk alone
2. a woman can never escape her shadow
3. a man is the shadow of a woman.

and from these scant axioms  
we have built our culture

columns  
between  
we also march

later, when the city falls.

\*

Self in society,  
the music flees,  
everything you want is right here,  
why run from that?

flight reflex  
cadenzas of flightless birds

love sacrifices  
heaped on broken altars

smoldering. Thou hast turn'd  
the very air to incense  
and made a church of every street

love poetry heavy left hand  
translate this excitement  
into the steady state of metal  
which hides its crystal structure  
in general sheen

is *ælf-scîn* I explained,  
staggering potency of beauty  
mere beauty locked in every single thing,

the hidden Powers of the world  
time to release,

Bruno Schulz dying in the street  
his head pillowed on the curb  
at the feet of the beautiful invisible woman  
he still served,

your skin, the shine.  
Once he paused, drank,  
tasted another person's lips  
one time on that same cup

before him, he wonders,  
wonders. Who. One column  
is wonder, one is doubt.

Within their shadows  
the city rises and falls,  
armies come in and go out,  
lovers simper in the shelter  
of ordinary rock.

The street  
where I was born  
I have no other  
body but the time  
it comes from  
a dreary little song  
getting excited about itself  
and then the shadow  
slips down the column  
hides under it  
and it's noon

leaving us to wonder what language  
our masters will try to make us speak next.

II.

Such little things  
commas in long sentences  
wielding sense

to be little  
is be everywhere  
a servant of sensation

bird trill  
and now the world  
is just a dream of dead friends,

strange cigarettes  
in a country they still smoke  
and going downhill

(but I was staying)  
they vanished into the ravine  
underbrush and a bird

was crying, one that thrilled you  
with what you called its baritone  
cry, a bird I knew an octave up

but this one was now, low,  
and forests had vanished, a friend  
just one more dubious frontier,

daylight itself nothing but a customs post,  
we're left alone with daylight fading  
winter afternoon in opera season.

\*

You and your candles  
me in my miner's cap:

we risk it  
can we get through the dark

one more time and still not know  
those odd potentates dressed up as animals

who wait for us there  
trying to catch me by the sleeve

and make me turn, expose  
my startled crime

to their glowing eyes

I have been running away from all my life.

III.

That is the power here, beneath the lovely lyric is the lonely lover lover-less. idling down some path. And beneath that idleness a horror waits. What. This music is all about the horror underneath. And how to pass over, how to get to one more morning, safe once more from the demons of which I'm made. This is the truth now, music is Montaigne, music knows itself so well it can distract us both from what we know — don't we?— is going on down there, down here in me and thee, down here where music leads the way, crying, to all the dead friends, the gods who failed, the religions that just went away, the languages I couldn't learn, the houses that crumbled underneath me or the claustrophobic ones I fled, all the dead loves, all the doors, all the sensations, every feeling, all banked down there, my father's furnace, a bomber falls from the sky, everything I ever knew or felt died and went to heaven, and heaven is this hell to which the music summons, step by step, inexorable: What you have experienced is all you are, all you ever are. What you have done is all you will be. Don't look for some identity – you are a wave in water. And your friends are dead.

25. K.503

It always is another room  
other people talking there  
in other language



only the light comes through the door *Wiesbaden*  
gold inflected from the chandeliers  
a few real candles among electric tapers:

I am staring at and into the doorway  
from across the empty lobby

revelers and stately gamblers  
spilling their glamorous time

for what else have we to give?  
A tree of poinsettias,

and Heine's low Taunus hills  
just before Christmas north

and a camel lumbered down the street  
its shabby wiseman saying nichts

not even ogling women, just  
being there as a reminder

to bring something to our mind  
but what? And what are they saying

all of them in their elegant languages

in the bright casino, why

can I see everybody and understand nothing?

Or is that the same as beauty itself

naked, no palaver, no resonance

but the intensity of presence

a child staring at bright lights

a woman in a blue dress, and the dress *shines*?

You go away five years and meditate

scarlet bracts on a dull tree, that's all,

child looking, dimly but intensely

conscious, the way children are,

his mother sobbing in another room,

someone lost, something missing,

one more thing he can't understand

I can't understand.

Be beautiful while it can.

They'll let you look your fill

and fail to speak. It is here: gold,

it really is, tell what happened,

what happened is what counts, old father,  
ram in a thicket, sullen obedience,

rain on New Years, night of power,  
camel in the market, Roman altar,

shadows by the museum and through them  
a harlot passes, meets me at the river,

such a little river, speaks to me  
one more sentence I'm ashamed to answer.

It is here, all round. It shimmers everywhere.  
It is not meant for me to understand.

II.

Is it rain?

Head lightly over music, ran,

no heard, rain,

like one more woodwind

offered to the sense of organic form,

could this be hearing,  
the tiny copper filaments of the ear,  
the brush that writes the sound upon the feelings,  
rain on top of music?

\*

On the day Seven-Rain  
an American day, a good day  
to wear new clothes.  
Break an old word  
and take the new word out.

\*

As it gets true  
the word gets short  
till you can say it  
in one breath,

no more, one breath  
is all we need  
to say it, to keep  
the heart straight

if you have one

or find a new heart  
if you lost the last  
one you had at cards

or love or just  
left it on the couch  
next to you and then  
lost sight of it when

you got up to sniff  
at a wild rose or stroll  
out in the yew hedge  
the maze in moon.

### III.

On the last day of all the camel  
plodded through the Christmas market  
sluggish as a citizen, the Arab  
at his side might not have been to so wise  
but there he was. We watched,  
safer than watching people. But those  
are what we wanted. Those we love.  
For them we came down from heaven  
disguised as starlight, crept  
into your mother's womb,

she thought she was just admiring  
some amber in a jeweler's window  
by the Grand Duke's garden  
but it was us, inside her already,  
admiring the whole world  
through her shine, this amazing  
arrival, the mother of all mothers,  
she who is alive and wanted us  
and we wanted her and there you are,  
all of you, people in the winter street,  
for you we came down from heaven  
and sprawl in the gutter of your lewd  
bodies, milk and blood and lymph  
and god knows what inside you,  
chyme and hormones and dreamy  
chemicals sloshing round us we endure  
the musical material that soon  
will spring us out to be seen, moving  
among you through the market,  
hurrying sometimes, even whistling  
when a little drunk, but never  
saying a word, we have nothing  
to report, we are here for your beauty,  
people, casual people, there is no place  
in the universe more beautiful than you.

26. K.537 “Coronation”

Would there be triumph here  
without the name?

Leaves without a tree.

Questions seep into assertions,  
a woman walks along a battlement  
everything is always waiting

a nervous man at your elbow  
wondering how fate brought you to this encounter

then babel starts  
the ordinary conversation of the deliberate day.

Your hands are cold  
Don't touch me

A raft is on the river  
Come flee with me

into the intergovernmental agencies

that rule the stars

every human ruler is the shadow  
of a crazed autarch elsewhere

sometimes up to good  
just often enough for us to forget

he's mostly not.  
She is.

Hence dance.  
Long song.

We paint an image on the sunbeam  
and kneel down to worship it  
then sob when a cloud decides to come

at least a girl like you is kind  
the neighbor's cat  
the charitable volunteer

\*

I am the rock where everything changes



but you have heard that line before,  
I put the names of things in at random

to make you think the world is real  
and my discourse somehow subtends it  
sweater streetlight toaster full moon

but all those things are just the sounds  
of themselves, assassins, museum replicas  
you bought in the mail, mall, no, none,

there are no more words, and things  
have had enough of your caress  
so there's only one nationality left for you

a place to stand but there are no places  
no island and no sea, a mere  
continuity like the colors

you see when you press your eyes—

that is your homeland.  
You never did care about the rock  
and all those trees just fragrant obstacles

though sometimes in the endless plain  
you were glad enough to nap in their shade

dreaming what?

a wordless thingless certainty  
you woke from feeling comforted,  
loved even, even known.

II.

Red harbors.

Not here again,  
so close to the frontier

my shadow  
falls in the other country.  
Doesn't it always, dear?

Yes, but it isn't always France.  
There is a post that marks the border,  
a goshawk on it, who could that be?

\*

I get afraid sometimes in the afternoon,

I ask myself why I'm doing what I'm doing  
and not something else worthier or truer

but what could that be?

Why isn't the word I'm writing down a better word  
telling a better story in a better tune,  
I get afraid when I do what I do

because it's always me doing it  
if it even really is,  
I get afraid that I am no one

using someone's instruments  
for some preposterous vivisection  
of an imaginary animal,

afraid I'm no one using someone's words  
to hide what I don't have to say,  
sometimes in the afternoon

I get afraid of listening to my shadow  
smiling or sneering at me from across the frontier  
like a smart young man who's been reading Valéry.

III.

Wake up it's yesterday  
the light plays tricks  
seeming through saplings—

nimbleness is all,  
to get lost in thinking  
and then spring out of it again

deer-footed, leaving neat pellets  
inoffensive on the neighbor's lawn.

we walked by the river  
on New Years Day  
mist and clouds then finally  
that circumstance  
technically called Glory  
coming at us from the southwest,  
the sun herself clear over the hills  
under the momentarily suspended clouds,

leap, from perceiving to perceiving,  
leaving children to play on the cold grass  
when we've drained it of our shadows.

Let everything begin again, Herod cried.  
But there is no again, lord,  
only the same children playing on the lawn

alive or dead,  
or what lawn you left them,  
Biafra, Somalia, Darfur,  
just names, of course, the names  
are the only things we really do know how to change.

Of course it's sad.  
Music has to turn its back  
on human misery  
to exist at all. All  
its nimbleness is fugitive.  
Just as I here, for you, now,  
running from my own shadow  
show you how it's done.

27. K.595

Everything comes from far away  
but the far away turns out to be  
something deep inside here—

perhaps in the sense that someone who travels  
is always more or less who he is  
no matter where he goes,

or there are changes,  
perceptions, character brought into the open,  
he sees only what he is prepared to see,  
or things always getting clearer  
hidden in the lyric importunities of travel,  
absurd lingering identities a place confers  
stuck in your mind after you've left it,

remembering and all those stones  
all the hues of that one color 'stone,'  
Mozart on the road to Prague.

So it turns out that music is really about everything,  
not perhaps every  
thing, but everything of which statements can be made  
that make any kind of sense

like: everything you are you take with you  
on the road to Prague.

No road but a journey, a journée,  
a day and a night of flickering experience,

everything you are comes with you,  
cat and car and nurse and kid,  
family bible and Britannica,  
coal scuttle, parakeet, tea towel

porringer, plaster statue of Saint Lucy  
holding her eyes in her hand,

easy, a traveler's mind is like a hand  
nibbling at the keys of a piano  
while the other hand holds a letter  
someone wrote you, someone  
is still writing you after all these years,  
her too you take with you on the road to Prague,  
*night and day keep working*  
just to get to the next day,  
next note, every decade an octave higher  
until you pass the brink of human hearing.  
Still you go on, you read the letter,  
you fingers mumble some tuneless sequence,  
one guess at a time, the fields are full of weather,  
if it were Sunday we could stop for Mass.

But there's no stopping now,  
you are committed to observation  
and your insufferable patrons  
demand verbose reports, tell all!  
they told you, you do, you try  
jumping down and running up the hill  
but from the top see just another hill,  
the road voracious for your company,  
tell them everything, they have no lives

and need them to sing into their ears  
as if they were living and the music  
meant more than the wind does passing.  
And it does. This thing you do  
is about everything. You bring it with you  
forward and forward till it is simple as you are.

II.

There is a medicine  
shaped like a leaf,  
bring it to me.

There is a barrier  
somewhere in the world  
make sure the gate is locked.

Let no one break in  
between one thought and the next—  
if I weren't so close to the frontier  
I wouldn't worry, or would I,  
strangers keep trying to get in.

And they stand there some  
mornings like leaves on a tree



just looking in at me

till I think I hear their thoughts  
thinking, their terrible homeless  
thoughts desperate for the Exile's  
Dream, the little cottage where  
for one little lifetime you  
don't have to wonder *Where*  
*shall it go next with me?*

The randoming. The curse of  
fleeing, no one understands—  
their thoughts make no more sense  
than raindrops from the eaves, who are these  
thinkings, who are these folk  
against whom I have locked my door?

The question, so phrased,  
romantically, despises easy answers.  
But you know who they are.  
If you were very young  
you'd call them lovers,  
bailiffs of the heart,  
businessmen who come  
waving bags of money,  
offering again to write  
your requiem for you.

## III.

Turkish fabric, Indian shawl, madder,  
indigo, green and white of hellebore,  
sun shining on them, winter sun  
and amaryllis coming to a head,  
signs, fiber, we wear clothes  
just to put colors on our skin, colors  
we change every day of the week as  
Monday moon day white or silver,  
Tuesday Mars day scarlet of blood,  
so on, except on those full moon nights  
when moonlight is green and frosts  
the earth as if a snow had fallen  
but no snow. We walk in colors  
because of all things we trust color most,  
and when colors fade we know how to weep  
salt tears, mordant tears, when colors  
fade we fade with them until love herself  
brings us a new blue shirt  
strong as the night  
and we put on the sky.

There, that's where it's been going all along.  
Enskymment of simple folk,  
we, the children who believe everything we are told

because all everything is is what can be told  
and there isn't anything on the ground or in the sky  
you can't tell me about or I can't hear.

Remember that when you put on your new sweater,  
the quiet one, the one I thought at first  
too old for you, color of ancient Greek bronze  
in sunlight, the one with little shiny beads sewn on  
that draw the shape on you of something like leaves.