

7-2001

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Robert Kelly  
*Bard College*

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## AURUNCULEIA

did he say a  
woman made more golden by the fall of light

dome-free, the pilgrim by the bend in the canal  
where one looks suddenly at the open sea  
and hears it, hears it,

rough slur of what the waves say,  
the girl-grain of the sea

Quotation is the father of agriculture  
we bid earth repeat  
the sequences of our desires

who is this we, this abdicated fiend,  
japed pinpricks of the Frontal Range  
bespoke geology. We made the world.

We make the world  
caremaking rapture,  
blue ride.

Red sigh some old Armenian mistakes  
shrinkwrapped in patriarchal complacency,  
apt to be dad, not mine, a current  
pretending to be water when it  
is just a froward anxiety

meet me at the well.  
Bend down. Let me drink.  
You come with glass.

Everything is easy  
when you walk there  
it is the well in Some-more-ia I have told  
you before all women the nature of my identity

or let you guess

I'm the man who came about the language  
to free it from coherence and confusion both

free it from meaning and from meaningless.  
Cause language is a different ride,  
a hunger strike against the tyrant mind,

silly fascination, nothing to eat,  
a fly walking for hours on an empty plate.

15 July 2001

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In the great library

graffiti carved in trees

library of bumptious

egos carving so hard

effacing the actual

with their clamorous signs

?mid-July 2001

## THE GULF OF INLAND

It was clear she had always lived in the city.  
Bought small quantities when needed, shopped  
Daily, fridge sparse, here and there a jar  
Of relish or vitamins. No place for a siege.

When all the power failed we had each other  
And twelve stories to climb or climb down  
A good view of avenues full of scared people  
And the battery-powered moon up there

Rising with unpracticed brilliance  
Out of the river where all the streets began.  
It's clear we're in the past tense again  
And why not, all sex and shyness

After a while we kept the shades up  
Woke early, stayed where we were  
Shooting the odd can of tuna fish.  
At least the water kept rising, floor by floor

Closer to where we were busy thinking.  
Light it turns out is the salt of life  
And time gets pretty bland in daylight.  
Turn on the light means come talk to me

Come away from the woebegone window  
And talk just talk, talk is the pony trick  
That got us in this fix, relax, talk  
Will get us out of it. Argue with me honey

Like Jesuits across the empty table, argue  
My body all over the sunstreaked floorboards  
Then come be heathen in bed, all's well  
While we keep talking and all the other

Active verbs of touch. On the ninth day  
They got the power back and we kept talking  
All the more so, truth after fiction,  
Aspiration on the heels of truth.

We had forgotten who was the woman  
And who was the man. As if it mattered.  
In the midst of all those civic problems  
We had decided we should live forever.

16 July 2001

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Heading back from the island.  
Motorgoat. Willful  
Redhead cattle  
Stamp in tidal pools

Nashawena. Haze over suns.  
Every ever seen is perfected  
In the seeing. Nothing is lost  
Comrade. Only you might be

Heading for the night.  
Il fait nuit, they say, as if  
Someone else were doing it,  
This getting dark

And death's just another  
Kind of rain. Or sunrise.  
Or an evening sky right now  
Full of skittering birds.

16 July 2001

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Who knows how hard it is to touch the other  
in the strange ways of by the river under the highway  
or caught in the blue light of saloons who is willing  
to admit how many devious ways he or she has chosen  
to touch the hem of the other to drink from the cup  
the other left a swallow in to bury his or her face  
shallow in the shirt or sweater the other took off

the world is a place designed to reveal the other  
only in the strangest ways one has to touch everything  
to touch her or him one has to swallow every cup  
to make sure you drink the potion he or she brewed  
without knowing it just living that body you love so much.

16 July 2001



## ABUT

Things after all are one another  
since essenceless they abut  
intimate molecular

sawdust on the rainy lawn  
a patch of sunlight

blue jay ideograph  
all seeming and remembering, no is.

\*

And the annoying fly  
that skims along the surfaces of books  
and bothers me

why should it seem always  
a messenger from the other world  
not this, where the transaction is?

\*

flying down into the world  
where everything *comes*

a small dog is barking forever  
a few houses west

we know the place again  
we were here last night  
after the terrible conversation  
the visit to the hospital  
the smell of old books.

17 July 2001

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it is arrogant with architecture  
a kind of wood made out of light made into walls  
smart breathing  
in the shallows of the room  
where a woman is, between sleeping and something

a woman like numbers in an equation  
uneasy, capable of meaning something else  
just by moving  
from one place in the room to another

she turns round in bed  
a window at the foot a city in the window  
lies on her back lets her head hang over the edge  
she looks up at the night sky out the window  
full of imagery and expensive smoke

she knows she can understand the world  
into the kind of sense that will take care of her

pure focus of her gaze aligns the sky

17 July 2001

[*Amended:*]

arrogant architecture  
a light made out of trees  
the space between, smart breathing

the shallows  
between sleeping and something  
like a woman like numbers in an equation  
uneasy, capable of meaning something else

just by place, from  
one room to another  
she is a window at the foot of a city

her thoughts over the edge  
the night sky on her back  
full of imagery and expensive smoke

she knows she can understand  
the voices her body goes past  
her gaze aligns the sky

[19 July 2001]

## A CITY BY THE SHORE OF THINGS

1.

Asking subtle questions want to know  
non-dual language preponderance of do

it seems and then again

neither here nor there

a bus up Folsom then a hike a hill

a parlormaid in pleasant apron

waiting to mop up the sea

2.

just that and nothing else. And everything else thrown in  
with that nothing. Because the strings  
hang down from heaven

one tug's enough to break the knot  
the garment falls away and loves the onlooker

things gaze at other things

3.

a stud or rafter. A door.

A thing's framed in by how it stands.

King stud and jack stud, a beam

(*baum*) between earth and sky

between one eye and any other's.

things that are single imply duality.

Two impulses multiplicity. No one. No many.

A house is a thought that forgot to fall

(a word) a breath that forgot to fade.

4.

Things plagiarize, quote each other, wiggle  
their fingers up in one another, can't tell  
one hole from another. Things are surgeons,  
family doctors, treacherous amorists.  
Unconfused they flounder. Flawlessly  
they blunder. Learn from things.

5.

A thing is a pilgrimage to something else,  
it sleeps here a night or two then goes.

Or something goes, a million little raptures,  
the lawn is mown. The moan is mine,  
the stupid little jests of poetry confuse the actual  
moon. Time comes back on.

And we are still not there. Not anywhere.  
And how to know when a number  
is a number not a word, a sentence here  
not a nebula far. No way to tell

no way to know the other side of a thing,  
the edge of things. Words  
can't shuck their thingliness.  
Things can't shuck their meanings.  
Many marriages are mentioned in this book  
not all of them in shadow, not all in vain.  
They probably mean you. The reader is warned.

18 July 2001

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Looked back and was salt

Lick her back  
To prove it

See I know

We need to taste  
Reality  
Not just hear about it  
In the church

A conspiracy of priests  
Has taken touch away

19 July 2001

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Sometimes I think all we really need is to be physically present to one another, and all the rest of the neuroses of fantasy and culture will be dispelled, the special privileged relationships of which society is woven and by which it is finally destroyed.

19 July 2001

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A morning to fear one's feelings.  
A morning to translate  
Somebody's essay on what he doesn't feel either  
Or felt so much it had to hide in light  
The devious Indian summer light of ordinary words.

19 July 2001



## ACTUALLY QUIET FOR A MOMENT

If words don't come from ink  
where do they come from

to write anything down seems remarkable  
a shopping list a miracle

that there be language in the first place

and what is the first place

reading god knows what signs of sight and sound  
or touch maybe

maybe language first is touch —

and then someone gets it, hides it  
a while from the palpable

chiseled out of rock or spat  
on reeds on skin or bark  
a meaningful fragment of the unbroken flow of speech  
wrested, writhed free, written.

19 July 2001

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Tatterdemalion castaway or Rex's flower  
tossed on South Street or an island full of Jews  
en route to a vanished Palestine, stalled there  
shirts on fire, a chicken on five eggs, a stone  
a sparrow a cigar. It all is exile.

It speaks French and I do not. I let her pierced  
tongue slip into my ear and what do I hear?  
The Vaticans of eternally repressed desire  
boring as music, worse than poetry,  
a flock of desires that are only always mine.

Hurt this poor hour. Crush the purple hosta  
you smiled at yesterday, test it with anger  
to see if it will ever come again. The Irish  
test potatoes by throwing in the sea, the good ones  
sink. Love is made of such technologies.

20 July 2001

## AMORETTI

what we fall in love with has to be our death  
what else could draw us so infallibly  
know us so well and whisper just the right words

20 July 2001

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Not a man to like the look of  
A bird trailing its wing

But trust the man  
The tile he labors onto the wall

We sleep in language  
If language does not wake us with its strangeness.

21 July 2001

## THE SACRED GARDEN

Once a group of young monks decided they'd learn something hard-edged about this world people were always accusing them of fleeing.

So they marked off a small plot of land in the back parts of their monastery ground. Not big. Maybe thirty feet by thirty feet — they still thought in inches ounces and feet.

They shoved in a stake at each corner, and ran a white string from stake to stake, delimiting the space for the eye, but leaving it open to the air, light, wind, and whatever walked or flew under or over the string.

That's it. This was the origin of one of the most important experiments in the history of science. They decided they would see what happen if they left it alone.

What will the earth do if we leave it alone? That was their question, and they proposed to answer it not by theory but by intense reverent and sustained observation.

All day from light to dark a rota of monks took turns at watching the square marked off. Never were they to enter it, not for any reason. Every evening the observing monk wrote up a log of what he had seen — mentioning all the plants in flower or in fall, all the creatures he had observed entering, leaving, flying over, browsing, resting, singing — whatever creatures took it in mind to do by themselves.

What will it do with itself?

Observation of this sacred garden became a basic task of the monastery, and it was a signal honor when a novice was deemed by the master of the novitiate to be observant and alert enough to be entrusted with membership in the Rota Hortensis, the staff of the garden. In fact most of the monks who were Watchers of the World (another name for the staff) were older, smart, knowing the names of many things.

Year after year the garden flourished and withered, dried out, boiled over with blossoms, was flooded with mud, hailed flat, april'd back to life again. Long before the oldest of the Rota passed away, a Regula or rulebook had been written, to secure uninterrupted perception of the garden, and the even more vital task of protecting it from forces of destruction or innovation — which in this context were almost the same. As the garden began, so it had to go on.

Fierce heretics arose who wanted to protect the garden by building walls around it, or erecting a dome of glass and amber and precious stones over so holy a place, or delving a fosse around it, or a moat dappled with swans. It took all the holy efforts of skilled interpreters and all the energy of communal prayer to win through to a certainty that the first way was best, leave it alone. Leave it alone to leave it alone.

Eventually controversy died down, and generations of monks were content to observe, annotate, observe, record, reflect the events or non-events of the sacred garden inside its simple shabby perimeter, whose cotton string was renewed every year on the twenty-first of July, feast of Saint Arbogast the Irishman, Bishop of Strasburg in Merovingian times, and called Hermit of the Sacred Forest.

Nothing more. Nine hundred square feet, a hundred twenty feet of string, four pinewood stakes, one monk.

Every year the Annals of the Garden were compiled, summarized every decade, published every century in full, with a digest of remarkable observations. Trees rose, trees fell, the mean temperature of the continent rose and fell, comets scribbled in the sky and went away, hurricanes came, droughts and floods and great winds, locusts, mice, moths. Several times the monastery itself was overrun by enemies of God or enemies of the State or starving peasants, and some of these times the garden too was bothered or violated — but that too, the monks reasoned, is just part of what happens. Let the garden take care of itself, they felt and sometimes spoke. And some few of them may even have thought: let the garden take care of us.

The garden is strong, the garden is enduring, and it endures because it changes.

Reflecting on this consoling but challenging fact, Brother Guido shielded his eyes from the rough October wind, and from inside his cowl noted the quiet agitation in the garden, the dried milkweed shivering its fluff under the wind's buffeting. He tried to keep track of the number of pods cracking open, but began to lose his way among the numbers. Counting always made him sleepy, an occupational hazard of those who tell their prayers on smooth-worn beads of horn or olive wood. He began to doze, struggling against it only a little, guessing reasonably that the precise number of milkweed pods chivvied into generosity is less important than: wind blew, milkweed flew, which is all he would write down later in any case. As he faltered ever further along sleep's road, he began to allow the consolations of his belief to seep through his mind, he began to think about this garden, this very sacred garden he had spent many years of his life observing with such care, he began to wonder if perhaps the garden is not the real garden after all, and maybe only that vast, frightening and interminable world outside the little white string was the real garden, and he, and his mother and father and abbot and all his brethren and their sisters and cattle and flies on the wall and soldiers at the gate and lepers beneath the hedge and harlots and scientists and ministers of state, yes and the bishops and cardinals and the Pope himself, servant of the servants of God, and God, God himself, themselves, all, all of them were just what happened, would never stop happening, ever, to the most sacred garden. Almost all the way there, Brother Guido could feel himself shrink back from something, something that might be right or might be wrong, but something that did him no good to think. He woke, or almost woke, in a curious stillness, looked into his garden and asked himself, Where is the wind?

21 July 2001