

11-1995

## novC1995

Robert Kelly  
*Bard College*

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The way the light is stored in hills  
amazes me, I trust  
the ancient dispositions of the earth

yet it is snow and ice itself and wind  
might menace us this very night.  
And the bare knobs and the green

knobs all round the Georgia upland,  
all the wooden gouged out plateau  
south of the great greyblue mountains,

the massif. The earth we try to climb  
away from now to land an hour later  
in that useful sphere called home.

Where work is and this mind, even, kind.

16 November 1995  
Atlanta

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Sunrises. And now a yellower brighter in bluer  
clearer airer hollowtreed through one pyramidal  
spruce ascending like green flame the one that stands  
up from Mohammed's clothes and means his human form  
no image ought to handle, flame alone,  
sun-same as sun now who would dare to look at  
this nuclear resurrection in our morning parish  
hydrogen to helium in sky and look it in the eye  
our fields forces multiplexed in heaven yellow  
one sunrise over the old red broke barn.

17 November 1995

## PLEIADES

*Orion  
striding.  
The Pleiades  
caught in trees.*

*Moon a couple  
days this  
side of full*

*Star knife  
searching me*

Above you  
every  
    night and now you know it.

Welterfare, world of water and night sign.

A woman name's all is one  
and pick the stars those fine stern far fires  
apart like daisies.

    She loves me cause I know her name.  
I'm the feint in her paper,  
I'm the rule in her shoe,  
I'm the gin in her pocket,  
pebble her, wobble me,  
                    devious mind, the clever  
light comes in.

    There is much going in her coming,  
land's away, sea-bottoming ruses,

I said all this so you would touch me,  
numbered street in Boulder Colorado  
off Kalmia (latifolia), a house

sudden beneath November snow. Skirt of it,  
seven inches on the radio, a size  
we recognize.

Teach the courier  
to shoe his horse while it's still running,  
then teach the valleys to fill up with rainbows,  
small ones, very bright, odd shapes  
(coming and going; touching and retreating;  
repeating; the light is sitting still)  
many rainbows, one for each  
of your excellent intentions,  
the moral spelling of each acted day.

Then the whole cwm (coombe)  
lifted into the mountain, shadowfall  
and you begin to doubt the God you'd seen.

Tell me, can an eraser rub away  
the word you meant and wrote and stared at  
gasping at the pain of how true it was,  
all dark and accurate on the bland paper  
before you freaked and rubbed it out?

Write that word  
down again  
you do not need,

a word once spoken  
(written)  
becomes part of the geology

the place.  
Can a word become a rock?  
can a reed mock me?

Can a rock rede me?  
I'm not afraid of your music,  
death comes anyhow,

a concert is the best departure  
maybe,  
be musical.

Poliphilo pauses by the obelisk—  
what mind does this stone mean?

And then by the sandstone Elephant  
Messer Domani carved life-size

to symbolize out loud  
how heavily the memory is freighted,

verity,  
nothing forgets itself in us.

Sometimes you have to beat the hide to make it speak.  
Beast, drum, leash

run, and then it does, and bleeds and stars and blues  
above a little island in the sky called The End of All This,

slung from Orion's belt the Agony Nebula pours new raw worlds out.

17 November 1995

[revised 9 II 96]

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Demon bees in meditation  
Cathar crickets on the cliffs of Montségur  
katydid in clefts of rock

the clamor in the quiet mind  
of just this blood and lymph and sense  
sensing like christmas in this veil of grace

this flesh body lorn and lovely listens.

18 November 1995

JAMBUDVIPA HEIMSKRINGLA OH

Thicket of earth we breathe among  
caught in the branches of air  
stretching into our chests  
we work from that, we clock  
the occasions of the unspeakable  
in public building fresco poetry  
by Muses meant

in this shallow anthroposphere.

19 November 1995



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Cloud-herds, sky-loafers, dew-collectors  
Just watch.  
It's all written in the sky.  
And the doors float by,  
Shut or wide open so you can see through  
Into the previous condition  
Of which the sun is one bright shadow  
And your whim another.

20 November 1995

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The sky looks democrat today  
a subtle band of blue east by west  
then empties itself south  
into the prevailing luster.  
Pearl. Pack ice. Milk.  
Everyway the same and everywhere  
rise of the Dutch republic.

20 November 1995

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You'd think I have so many of them letters would  
Flow themward like the rampaging Yangtze  
Through gorges full of shouting gibbons. Friends.  
And so I have, but mostly I love them  
For the smell of their shampoo, their footstep  
On the hollow porch step, their midwest accents,  
Their feckless lasagnas, and their complaints  
Squelching like paddock boots through the muck  
Of this bad world. I love them for their complaints.  
Lips, mastery of foreign tongues, their wives,  
Grasp of recent trends in fiction, botany, Venetian  
Reminiscences, Thai food. But mostly (I confess)  
For their complaining. Planh. Their griefs  
My gift. Grief gives me something to discuss with them,  
Console them, advise them, talk them soft to sleep  
Even, in the tawdry Protestant attic bedrooms  
Where we all sleep best, between shelves of old books  
And the motheaten panda with glass eyes. Map  
On the wall of Europe in the war, Axis prussian blue  
Infecting all of France. Flags of our Allies  
In the margin, but where are our own devices,  
Keenly grieving, yellow consolations? Sunrise.  
How did you sleep? Here's your coffee  
Left over from the foundations of the world.

20 November 1995

## WHAT THE CLOTH TELLS US WE WEAR

Amaze me all over again, I am made from wool  
and I am anxious to ascend. Take me anywhere,  
I am your man. When men wear cuffs  
their rolled-up parts amass colorless fluff,

dust of all the secret Gobis run to fill each step  
until we are nowhere but where we've been.  
Hence the necktie, to hold the wind in place.  
Hence the Shriner's tie pin to hold down the tie.

Hence the body of a man beneath all that,  
even in the middle of some committee  
he remembers the feel of water.  
The hand of things reaches out to touch him.

20 November 1995

## UNDERHILLS

1.

It is a little thing to bother about but the hill  
is still waiting on the other side of the door  
and the sun that sets into it every afternoon  
is a calm cool waterfowl kind of luminary  
that waits in the greeny shadows of the earth  
where princesses in their whimsical variety  
cheer that weary lord with improving conversation.  
The hill is there and I'm here like a ship  
at the dock I suppose or (to make it warmer)  
a shearer waiting for his fated sheep. Waiting  
is everything in this large world. I have bided  
as they say my time until I wondered if I owned  
anything at all but its passage, minutes, hours,  
suns and moons. Into the door they all go.

2.

The hill I mean was taught me when I was young.  
A mother sometimes meant it, and the books  
explained every shade of green as meaning that  
grass-furred rounded upland with a sudden door  
would open to some accidental traveler. I yearned  
to be among their somber number and pass inside  
like a child, arms thrown back on my pillow,  
falling asleep. That's the way you go down  
into earth, not worried, just looking around.  
No one cares what you think, just go on  
thinking. And gently they come to you then  
to find out what's on your mind, touch you  
with velvet gloves, not wasting a minute  
they teach you the slow language of your bones.

21 November 1995

## TOWER OF IT

Oblivious newspapers tend to be politically slightly on the side of waking. An election in Lodz, pronounced wudj. The things we bother to know, the languages we made up frantically for thousands of years, every encampment dithering with dialects. And all for what? To make a parable in the Bible, a building with stones falling from it night and day, aye, it is death to be near one of those, glass crack, anodized aluminum sheets shearing down, pavement littered with the dead. For we will climb, try to get on brazen elevator cars and mount to the Welfare Department, deep in the belly of the building. The clerks wake up only to denounce us, their clear ceremonious rudenesses ring out. You understand that in any language, groan of sleepy baritones, shriek of midlife crisis. And the poor troop out again, foiled again by language. It's just invented to say No.

21 November 1995

*for Charlotte*

I'm telling too much about it and never telling enough,  
it's the forest again, the somnolent mathematics of the  
trees,

and somewhere deep inside, in a bank or a sunken hill  
a cave mouth opens, and a door swings free.

Because there is another country, I know it, we walked  
sometimes through it in the driving rain when we  
thought

it was just Canada or the Pacific or November,  
ravens and whales and dark houses with bright fires in  
them.

But it was the other country, sometimes we guessed it  
between one footstep and the next, there and back  
again

before the rain could dry on our faces. But we knew  
it.

We were there, and it was together, and five years  
pass.

I think we would not have found it without each other  
but I know I never found it without you. The hill  
is built of waiting, trees are made of patient wood,  
a tree looks at the air around it as a girl looks at the  
sea,

evening, when from the edge of the island there is  
nothing

but the sea going out forever and she goes with it.

She who is always returning. And there is nothing  
you want the sea to do. It is always our first evening

in that country, enough to be there together, arrived  
against all hope in the accurate condition. You were  
born  
knowing these things. Being with you is being there,  
so in some sense like that I was born with you—  
happy birthday to the world inside the world!  
Happy birthday to the door that lets us in!

22 November 1995



## HUMANKIND AND POTTED POTHOS PLANTS

And we were swearing to each other  
the kinds of oaths that bars elicit  
with their green white amber red  
and never blue, despite all your pousse  
cafés there are no really blue liqueurs  
and patriotism goes the way of smoke,  
up from the hullabaloo into the exhaust  
and we're left with television's mild  
obscenity and the private weary lists,  
lusts, dusts, musts, mists we carry  
in the hollow of the heart. Meet people.  
They are just like themselves. Hot Wings  
now and pickled eggs forty years ago,  
no different. Or same difference,  
as we used to say in Astoria bars, cool  
only on the hottest afternoons,  
when we waited for Ronnie Ritter  
to get finished powdering her nose  
and saunter her brunette way back  
to the table so her boyfriend Gene  
would stop worrying about what she was up to,  
what could it be, she dances and gets tired  
then sits down. When we're thirsty  
we also drink. Don't make a religion  
out of it, for Christ's sake. Soft cushioned  
sleazy vinyl booths, darkened lounge,  
juke box goofy with white jazz.  
Sometimes she brought us sticky  
buns her father baked, nipped  
from the showcase for her lover  
and all his nogood friends. Embarrassing  
in a saloon, bag beginning to show grease.  
Nowadays bars frequently have green plants,  
Boston ivy, spider plants, and pothos  
that wandering waxy leaved explorer  
that will cruise around the room for years

looking for someone, the way we do  
all afternoon, all night, and at 4 AM  
they coax us out so down the subway  
and up the frosty el we go, spirits  
of investigation and complaint.  
For some reason the name means yearning.

22 November 1995

THE DARK MIRROR SCRATCHED DESPITE  
LOVE'S CARE

*1. Among the Vessels*

What I did and what I thought  
I was doing. Where the Plymouth  
thought it was going. The hill  
up the road, the old Palermo recording  
of Scotto singing *La Straniera*,  
how the world is mostly weeping,  
the hill, the hard, the silent  
father, the landscape below  
untouchable in simple distance  
blue as a pearl in no one's hand.

He did not answer. Things  
don't answer. Not till we make  
them speak. I had a little red book  
with empty pages, I was sworn  
to fill them using what was called  
writing. I was a chemist, a composer  
of sonatas, a classical scholar,  
a detective, a beachcomber, a pianist  
mostly, great tenor, conquistador,  
a boy in the front seat alongside

his silent father. Vinyl weaving  
seat covers old car the War was over,  
there are few professions closed to desire,  
I was Heidegger, I was Mahler grieving,  
I was the faithless wife of every Cæsar,  
I was the Pope and brought Stalin to his knees.  
Silence breeds talk, music breeds  
interminable conversation. The father's  
silence is a fire in his son, and now  
the chorus out there disguised as dawn.

*2. Arugula*

God this is boring, all this remembering,  
call it *A Silence Remembered* and make it  
vaguely Irish, full of potted plants,  
liverwurst sandwiches I detest, show tunes  
whose lyrics don't stick in the mind. Fake it.  
Rooms and rooms of relatives quietly  
making each other uneasy. Don't you hate it  
when it gets boring, and nothing happens  
in a line of poetry but words, words, words?  
I want every instant to be eventful, ripe

luminous confusion, a rush hour crowd  
crossing Sixth Avenue and Forty-second Street  
like limitless shoals of mackerel  
and nobody touching. I want every word  
to break out in a sweat and start  
babbling about its original meanings,  
tell everything, break into images  
and images stand up against the setting sun  
talking their heads off like aunts at a funeral,  
telling rosary beads and fathomless histories.

But it would be better if I were even more boring,  
a bored audience is the sign of successful Art—  
bored out of their skulls and plenty of silence,  
plenty of time to think and think well of themselves  
for putting up with such tedium in the name  
of Art, and by extension feel good about the artist  
who puts them through such a moral misery,  
uplifted by inattention, the sheen of sleep  
glimmering between the rare events. And later  
the sheer release of going out into the street.

Art. Dingy classroom that sets you free at last.

23 November 1995