

10-1994

## octC1994

Robert Kelly  
*Bard College*

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### Recommended Citation

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ON BATTLE HILL

Some pipers near you some  
 harpers happening,  
   you have come  
 to the famous place between the worlds  
 hillside in Wales  
   and all your blood  
 moves curious as a spring rill on a sunken lawn  
 investigating  
   what is low  
 what there is to know  
   to go  
 because you have come to your moment.

No, it is autumn and your blood is usual  
 busy remembering,  
   house in your head, you carry  
 the street,  
   the long one,  
 from which you come.

You do not go into the street to learn the street —  
 that's the secret city children know, the street  
 is the space between your eyes and the skies,  
 is your glance right into the heart of the president, the only one,  
 up there, in the blue house, god of energy, big you.

The harp is still. You wait  
 for all its trembling reminders.  
 How can a sound be gold. How can someone  
 you love be Aquarius or far away?  
 Let it be thin — an image  
 is a paltry trick, you see it,  
 here, even when it isn't there,

this blessed here of all things,  
 Our Lady. We kneel to your green shadow,

the whole earth for all its colors  
isn't strong enough to bear  
even your shadow,  
and the worlds below it  
reel under your circumstance.

We come to you as our only solution,  
our watch stopped, our shoelaces broken,  
our books very hard to read,

we hardly know you're there, we're here,  
what is that commotion at the other end of the street,  
the petite liaisons of our scary afternoons,  
all the nimble forgettings,

meritorious castigations of our fugue. So they say.  
For we have escaped the bitter bleakest classrooms,  
meant to counsel your phony priests to run  
back and wash themselves in you, whose purity  
of uncontrived attention they forgot,

but we were children and could say nothing but our smell.

For a while now they pipers had been playing  
and wise men rose from gold and silver pieces on the chessboard  
over which they had been trifling our whole life,

they began to make funny gestures in the air,  
flapping their hands and snapping their fingers,  
the crows  
heard, the crows came (o Mother what does it mean  
when you say This afternoon someone will come calling?)

the crows called and called and maybe the wise ones answered  
but I heard only crows and I understood,  
I moved to the right as they instructed

and then I wasn't a child anymore and wasn't wise and  
wasn't a man and wasn't me,  
I was all waiting and water, I was attention and being hollow

so whatever happened would make a noise in me

and that would be crow enough for any day,  
the harper answered.

Some music comes from touch  
and some from speaking  
all the words you ever heard at once.

22 October 1994

## POSTCARD FROM AMSTERDAM

*Vijf*, pronounced not quite five,  
nothing is quite the way we do it  
but it seems, it counts, the big ANB office  
gives me —a tad reluctantly,  
they are Dutch, it is money— my money

and we are out in the pale winter of the flower market  
adoring the promises of earth-reeky paper lumpy bulbs  
from which the habitual miracles will spring.  
You never have to wait long for a dog  
to come along. Narrow sidewalk, luminous canal.

23 October 1994

## STAINS

Examine the hairband. See if telltale Prell stains linger. Or if in the barrette a hair or two's still caught in the steel spring or trap behind the soft phony amber. Oh how we have to suffer to be anybody. Slices of lemon once I scrubbed on my young fingers to hide the yellow evidence. Virginia was worst, turkish bad. They were asleep of course, I hoped, and mother had left one almost empty catsup bottle to drain, upside down, into the neck of a new one. Thrift that meant, and memory, and night. I sneaked into my bed, and busied myself with those false hopes we call thinking.

23 October 1994

Red Hook

## THE ORDER OF THINGS

A very bisque Nabisco in a plastic sleeve of ordinary  
tan light crisp —but not too— tells an overordinary story  
like a dromedary in the pasha's tent—

it is time to remember the insightful clerics who proposed  
a seductive notation for ars nova music —interpreted  
nowadays for the guitar— o it is to  
wonder if the cascara-bitter laxative ceremonies of “our”  
politics is ever likely to cleanse this world we (complaining  
tone) require more of than the usual

whereas that world and that alone  
has the mysterious —and glorious—  
*temptation to be difficult*  
from which girls' first post-prom pinafores are made  
stiff-starched and shadow-shushing as they go

[23 April 1994]  
25 October 1994

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In one particular the night is soft  
and otherwise I thought I saw Orion  
through the half-fledged linden tree

and it would be the first time this  
season and it would be winter  
soon. Or seem. The dead

are not particular, any guise  
will answer their pressing need  
for being seen. Wait for me

they say to the weather, shape me  
they say to the tree  
with your shadows and your sudden

nakedness, up there, so the sky  
itself seems reticent  
compared to you.

25 October 1994



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Remain how long ago she was,  
the Available, patron saint of what you need,

bright colors on a Mexican calendar  
offering hands inside eyes one more embodiment.

26 October 1994

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Something happens when you're waiting for someone  
and they're out there, out of sight, far down the street  
and around a thousand corners, in the night, in tomorrow  
wrapped in the sun glare, they're in the moon, alone,  
in a throng of evildoers, you're waiting and the waiting  
is in your chest, hard, big as a second heart in you and you  
feel it, throbbing, pumping the rivers of anxiety  
through the whole body and what do you do then?  
You wait, and wait harder and harder, you try the other  
world, the one that's just here, the ground beneath you,  
the wall, floor, doorway they don't come from, the street  
empty of anything you need, you try this other unwaited for  
world and it's no good, it's not what you want, waiting  
is terrible, and your body is no good, your body  
is just the place where waiting is waiting, where that wild  
alternative heart keeps banging and no one comes.

27 October 1994



If I get around to it  
I could tell more, the herniated happenstance, the strained  
ligaments of honesty between us then,

and all a mirror's ever worth is to break.  
To see the honest paintwork on the wall.

And what am I going to do about that today  
while the sun shines  
and the sky from time to time fills up with geese,  
aliens, legitimated by the local air,  
the guns that wait for them down there,  
among the Moses-lacking sedges, the broad-splayed water-caltrop  
which has chewed up the river.

Bare patch for you, mes oies,  
my calendar. And you,  
impatient reader,

why burden you with these  
commonplace details  
of my frail autumn? Because  
you too are a leaf and brittle lavender,  
a leaf and orange, you  
too are a bare tree and need to know

what this wind proposes. There must  
be a way out. Behold,  
what I have heard on the mountain.

27 October 1994

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We have been here before. On this shelf  
treading down from the Sierras to the sea,

in between. We are people to whom  
a very wise thing happened or got air  
then we forgot, or it took itself  
away from us inside, and we were now.

Just now. Broken tablets at the feet.  
A word  
                    to share with you —each part  
becomes a whole, nourishes indeed  
but the meaning changes.

Bus us sin in nine businesses,  
the oracle of fraction. Clasis.  
Take a bus on our way to business,  
sin therein nine times, how so, a sense of skin  
curving to meet skin, sine waves,  
                    endless esses fleeing from a brutal war.  
Take a bus in sin to where we live,  
the use of us, the frantic readership of signs,

Lear grief and shattered wood,  
                                    a hat full of leaves.

Interlude: Arion, weary of singing  
                    to indifferent merchant sailors  
                    hurls himself into the sea  
safe from all that local music,  
bears him simply to some shore  
like a melody from start to finish  
by which we recognize: a tune,

someone means this.

And there the youthful ears

cherish his melodious differencing.  
A Carib sunset cathexes his small world,  
Berlin 1930's jazz, secret casinos in Paraguay,

when the mountains rise it takes an age to heal.

Color is a kind of tautology, isn't it,  
that a thing should mean so much by dint of it,  
and we make so much of what it means,

but what does it mean in secular spin, cycle system,  
steampipes hissing in the dark?

Evening comes to relieve us from such inspection.  
Yet color is introspection  
and all night long we remember  
the ochres of our anxious afternoons,

nervously re-reading the textbook  
trying to remember why we're here.

Or Amsterdam, is that far enough  
from any mountain for the mere reminder  
to spread out, a cool light of perfect humanness?  
What a city! Casual as a car battery,  
meaty as a circle!

There is a murk in mind now  
keeps from simple things, a cat in a window, say,  
something a house gives  
to a street, something for pedestrians to seem

a little beauty for them, someone's bowl of breakfast fruit.

28 October 1994

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And now we're finished with it,  
guide's day coming home to house day,  
hiding in the reeds.

*Hiding in the river  
from the water.*

We bought this book in Amsterdam,  
a little snow dithering the fine steel-engraving evening air  
of the famous canals, a cold market street  
closed to all autos but Police.

Hiding from people in a city.  
Edging nearer to the sluices. Map of subways  
real enough beneath a ruined city.

Let things be where they are.

Compromise  
with the constellations,  
faces face you, they talk, you drive uphill  
in a trusty old car,  
you see someone's sister. You are surprised  
to see her, to see there are stars in the night sky  
after all the sleep of cities,

still there,  
left over from summer. You name them  
and some of them have her name too.

29 October 1994

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Every measurement becomes the same.  
The antique concept called a house  
or fingers or a hermitage. Bed rock  
shows through there. Fortress in the sky.  
I wanted a walking place in clouds,  
a small country that owned all the books,  
I wanted postage stamps. So sue me  
as God said to the disgruntled priest,  
I never said the matter-world would satisfy.  
Stone still is hard to lift. If you had asked  
I would have told you to go to the place  
beyond all this, the mind that makes stone heavy  
and makes you want to lift it. That's where  
adjustments can be made in these bright  
wind-swept busy grail-thronged offices.

30 October 1994



FROM THE INFINITE INDEX FALL 'N

No subtlety in some numbers, there is.

Walking away from temptation, we should be.

Clarity of limning in Great Painting, paucity of.

Hallways leading to other hallways, dream of.

Cheeses, imaginary kinds of fruits and, names.

31 October 1994