

10-1992

## octC1992

Robert Kelly  
*Bard College*

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As a shoemaker works  
against the weather below  
he guessed these  
these endings to his lectures Aristotle  
notes scratched on the ash wood  
wonder / the punctuation  
turns out to be random

Greece  
is on the other side of the day

belief has nothing to do with it a night is cool  
after rain mist

again I look into the window of my hands  
there is a liveness in railing at you  
America the quacking of black ducks and

today Charlotte saw five pheasants in rain cross  
the road and enter the brush at roadside  
where I could see them also faintly  
dark wine bottle shapes stalking under the spicebush

what we see / the beginnings  
of an unpersuadable cadenza tells me  
the orchestra will soon come back  
the piece will be over the words  
scatter over the domain of melody  
until we can know nothing again

Greek on our pale ears

*labe, labe phrazou* —  
they hear me sleeping  
*labe, labe phrazou* —  
they hear me knowing,

they understand the air at least  
the bronze smell

when the breeze turns  
quick below the leaf

in the Livermore Valley  
gaunt against skylines the thrifty windmills whir

then the King failing to deter the Woman from her resolve  
meek bent him down and accepted the water from her hands  
washed his kingdom away and left him old

a mass-priest with a shabby book, oil slick on a stone.

11 October 1992

ABERDEEN

street heavy grey rough wool smell of  
my clothes maybe homespun  
a word in rain.

12 October 1992

WELSH MADE EASY

*hwyaden* a duck  
feminine a broad  
handsome white  
sort of water bird  
measured by pond  
the green circumstance  
that feeds a mind

and to speak  
a quiet clamor  
as if the water  
itself were talking  
inside the ear

all the coins of  
this long long culture  
my grandmother  
in her black dress  
a brooch of Snowdon  
pricked out of jet

her white hands  
pressing me into time  
from the grey-green  
channel before  
anybody is born

it is another language  
we are only  
born speaking.

12 October 1992

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yes I remember you you were a log  
of hemlock moldering beside the track  
and the red heartwood leached into the white chips  
chopped from your meaning yes  
I remember you you  
were the river flowing brown as Thailand silk  
along the barriers of language  
where wetbacks slipped across at night  
to bring music to exhausted children yes  
I remember you you were a plate of food  
poised on my bare knee I tried to eat at parties  
but eating is so terribly naked I remember  
you a red rubber ball wedged in the cleft of a tree  
always a tree to become us  
as if we only a little while were people or foxes  
and then we went back to wood

but until that terrible hour you were your skin.

12 October 1992

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but what I remember was an animal full of pain  
a broken flower pot no longer a common sight  
all that terra cotta lost from common view  
ah gone to the moon madam gone to the moon

for the dog was broken with moonlight and moaned  
softly from the pang of sheer desire  
no other wound could I discern in the beast  
except that which Love's penknife cuts in young and old

the torment house the liberal view turned back to stub  
its itching nose against the looking glass o good my friend  
there is no ardor in this interlude there is no fire  
in this hearth against the Caledonian dismay

from here to Judgment Day without a glass of beer  
and yet the sea is always kind by being always there  
there at the counterpane of earth the plucking surf  
turning ever beneath our chins to keep us clean

we sleep spread out as history and never wake ma'am  
until the churches out of their dead slates make flowers grow  
common vetch or sumptuous irises in holy drizzle  
stop me if you've heard this prophecy the dead shall speak

and what they say will sell fat books that women read on trains.

12 October 1992

## ERNANI

Let me explain what any opera is saying  
it isn't in the words isn't in the acting  
not even in the gorgeous opsis of the stagehands  
dreaming up dim cosmoses for us to stare at  
it isn't anywhere but what the music says  
and all the story does is make some music flow  
once just once long ago through Verdi's chest  
he heard with force enough so we can hear it too.  
If you want the richest story hear them singing  
in a language that doesn't bother you with meaning  
and then the meaning comes, the actual,  
the natural history of this planet built of noise.

12 October 1992



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As if I were waiting for someone else to come  
and that told every story  
the waiting and the coming what else is there  
the maiden on her golden tower  
and a red beard with no man  
tossed on the October wind

*there is an oak tree in the mind  
that knows the difference*

but knowing that is that the end  
of the beginning the woman gazing down  
into the red tressure of her garden  
nothing much in flower  
so many times he came and broke a branch and stayed

*there is an oak tree in the mind  
that knows his name*

13 October 1992

# *the day of battle*

and the woman stands in sunlight  
shouts down from the summit of the sky

**I AM NOT MY BODY**

but the man in howling midnight  
half broken on the crests of the world shouts too

**I AM NOTHING BUT MY BODY**

I am nothing but what you make happen  
I am only my body and what it wants of you

the intersection

crisscross

the crucifixion

need you

to make me what I am

.

13 October 1992

## THE MIND NEVER FREE OF WHAT WE HAVE SEEN

These are here for us too  
in toto like Venice sleeping  
under silvery mud  
piazzas are under it  
a sleek of poisoners  
scattering gauzy pigeons

memories of every glory

memories to inhabit  
and having this  
need no other  
except this alertness  
to what the mind  
sees steadily before it  
inward looking

but we have been given  
also this,  
to walk on this golden ground  
October, scarlet sumac yellow spicebush  
tawny linden, it goes past us  
and we walk upon pure colors  
the tilework of this time

as we walked in that weird  
English catholic cathedral  
with shadows made of gold  
it turned out were mosaics,  
a haughty triumphalism  
borrowing Venice and Ravenna  
to splay against red brick,  
this is the strangest building  
I think I've ever been in,

the feel of it, only the beggars  
on the steps were real,  
the beggars and those pale  
Stations of the Cross

that Eric Gill made, a lust  
no dying God could silence,

the sleek slim of human *line*  
against the dingy silence of the place.

13 October 1992

## the blazing of the **W**ahoo

in tended gardens  
    when outside such precincts  
    blaze scarletter  
        the self-sprung Sumac

we stopped the car to check the deer the giant Buck  
hill-high it looked across the scrappy meadow  
off that lane I will not mention  
for fear I might be heard by hunters  
    those small men with their sticks

and not far from there Charlotte saw  
some pheasants easing into foliage  
to be gone from us

        an age from us  
    to see them  
        iridescence in their throats  
    the step of them  
and the still-stand of the deer  
    regardless.

13 October 1992

## LYCOPHRON

and what would this be that is so near sleep the owls  
nuzzle against the dark the blood of things vague in their beaks  
I am too murky for notional judgment they called me Skoteinos  
the dark one the obscure one no one understood  
for I heard in her skin the delicate geography of her ravings  
I knew all the countries of her agony and in each one  
the same buttery sun slipped down the sky the same  
rational fluid shaped like a vast uneasy plain  
swallowed the light and held her cries between its hands  
wave up and wave fall the cry of her intelligence rehearsed  
the inevitable tragedy of those who are born  
until I thought I was listening only to the gulls  
the hungry white harrowers of her hells

*the sea has swallowed all argument and every meaning  
and the princess has pronounced all the words at once*

I hear her behind me now warming her hands in a towel  
wiping the whey from her chin and missing her father

13 October 1992, late

## FIRST BROOKLYN SONNET

To drink this praise outrage  
of alabaster or a storied urn  
to picture narrative  
but by showing it to limit it  
to just this man and just this form  
mother-helmeted against sheer slip  
this black upon her bistre tell  
spring satyr and mock Sileni  
at the outskirts of the oval universe  
galactimorph or lens like spring  
Purim nights and Sunny in her underwear  
pretending the moon above has wherewithal  
to live: translate my fingers from old Greek.

14 October 1992

## SECOND BROOKLYN SONNET

Football was one thing I never cared for  
football and Davega's though I bought my chess set there  
pedestrian the flavor of vanilla malted  
whereas a patriarchal kind of inner food the sheen  
of chicken fat around the derma yellow glinting  
in wartime fluorescence o I was cheap  
then and am cheap now a little memory  
spoils the spicing of the soup break soak dried  
mushrooms Miriam climbs before me up the B14  
dissolve all my tropics into one Southern Continent  
and let it be this word that fills my cheeks unsaid  
for I have spilled an oral universe for you  
telltale chalkmarks of hopscotch and permissions  
stand on the trestle to make the open door.

14 October 1992



### THIRD BROOKLYN SONNET

By virtue of knowing number the Andes even  
are submitted to rule where in the highest pasture  
the vicuña lords it each male with precisely  
twelve consort does It is this beast  
men from the bleak city must entrap  
in the aesthetic hinterland the high learned places  
which first taught Israel how to sin  
hunt the beast (the bird the wren the salmon  
slipstream silver in the bear's ravine) beauty  
of architecture reminds a young man of stars  
he sells his t-square and his alabaster  
becomes an interpreter of dreams exactly twelve  
one doe for ever hour of the day every wing  
of the great wheel the mountains thronged with intercourse.

15 October 1992

#### FOURTH BROOKLYN SONNET

Twelve dreams would be plenty Sutter different  
avenue Maubert is Russell Square Embarcadero  
of the pigeons crows on Nyon Kaaterskill Falls  
Darjeeling uphill by the monkey temple —that's  
no monkey— what is black?— the coast  
of Baja falling infinitely south Vancouver Island  
with black beaks of cloud beating on the small  
city of rain and right here where the late sun  
pinks my hand with simple earthy life  
the kind that men in dreams wield with content  
over million-womaned foreign cities  
where language is a kind of weather  
rainstorms fall out of the suddenly open  
mouths of faces you almost recognize.

15 October 1992

## FIFTH BROOKLYN SONNET

The imperfections abound like food  
can't eat without something dying a dream is plenty  
calling from the mist beneath my own bought trees  
all voice is love and talks about the science  
love on earth in fact a matter of inserting  
this inside that she says and striking the surfaces  
that so give us pleasure it has been raining  
and a voice worth hearing comes out of what happens  
I hear her plainly for some while talk has been waiting  
even mouths my name so I know who I am  
in this discourse fallen out of the everything get wet  
hiding that way in the trees while the rain insisted  
in case I have forgotten after all these weathers  
I will never forget you you wait inside my skin.

15 October 1992

## THE SAME BOAT

the one we're in  
the *Misericord*  
locked to the dock  
to tether me yet  
again to going  
sheer going

pump of my valve  
we course the all of us  
pumping together  
no choice and no stopping  
in gentle swoopings  
over her dim Pond  
proustwise through the green  
impossible to hold

and suddenly a taste  
holds it  
long hair and strongest coffee  
of a North Beach morning  
and then the hold  
happens off  
and she is lost  
whoever she was  
into the human memory

the storehouse of all possible  
misadventures  
from which the mind  
*when the sun blazes at midnight*  
breaks free.

But where is free  
in all these circles  
eddyng,  
the sweep of mind  
over its own resources  
golden leaves parachuting  
down into scummy water,

where is *there*  
when everything is here?  
The otherness of answering  
takes the breath,  
the little boat  
swings on its frayed rope  
and we hope  
idly at the shore,

no shore,  
a manifold of colors  
turning only into others,

memory remembers only the tether,  
but there's a mindful  
miracle beyond recall—

what makes me think there's any boat at all?

15 October 1992

VARIATIONS ON THE THIRD STROPHE OF DAVID GANSZ'S *PER MISSIONS*

1.

Veiled eyes though, see, do see. Take in, only. Nor hearts ease earth's hardness to withstand its own stability. Sin is a star that penetrates you, faith leads to silver. O apart you are, body, full of all hitherness and close, the yellow flowers of his passion queen it in the purple of your mass. Clement amnion to wash into this sphere once more the greenest howling, hope a royal noon receive us fallen from the One into the Cup of everyone.

2.

Validations are plentiful in a world of seeming, heal scars easy under sin's abilities. Parapentes float on scarlet updraft to do a little thrill upon these easy crusaders of the air. Body, you were mountains and were fuel, the cross your one erection when heavy metal parliaments blaze this decidedness. A tomb spares spirit — don't we know that yet? O grievous psalter science mumbles to itself from the unfriending "One Is None."

3.

*Full of all hitherness* I heard, and then the view was darkened into the guess of seemed only died, only seemed to rise? The yew comes at the end of it, darkgreen, red berried it bodies forward where the pale mountain used to swagger and now queen Hel has it, and it is an it, we think, but almost fearfully we purge our Europe, then past the little corporals of its morning theosophies we suddenly find a stone, a stone

4.

to view from, stand on, doze not, only hear and ponder, keep vigil by the hearth of mind. Pure meditation sweeps history.

15 October 1992

