

6-2020

jun2020

Robert Kelly
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts

Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "jun2020" (2020). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 1444.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts/1444

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.

= = = = =

It all changes.

**The month
that is the moon
changes.**

**The sun
wakes the patroons,
the empty street
has lost its memory.
How can this be Monday?**

1 June 2020

= = = = =

**They get to go to work
and I stay home.
Obligation has become privilege
both ways round.
Home! This fabled paradise,
Eldorado intimate and mine!
The cars go by like ocean waves
and we are islanded anew.
Who knew be alone is be free?**

1 June 2020

=====

**Play with the grammar
till it plays right back.
You can sit with it
all afternoon, playing
in sunlight. But watch out
when the sun goes down
and that pale schoolmaster
moon slinks through the trees,
proclaiming the laws,
the grammar you're stuck with in the dark.**

1 June 2020

=====

for S.J.K.

A hundred years ago today
my father walked to work.
They still let Catholics do that
at his dock. Why carfare when feet
he reasoned, as he always did.

He liked to walk, to run,
it wasn't long ago he chased
the Flatbush trolley all the way
down to Coney Island.

I'm trying to remember,
I'm making it up
from what he told me,
sugar shoveling, unloading ships,
and then a life of keeping bnok
so I could liv eto write them.

A hundred years. The war
was over but Germans

were still the problem, for Irish kids in Brooklyn anyhow, *heineygeblotches* they called them, don't know how they spelled the blond brutes who beat upoor Irish redheads in Fort Greene.

That much is so. But how can I be sure about the day? Maybe it was Sunday--did he go to church in those days? Never knew. His mother was Protestant, Ebglish, making him always little different from the micks he lived with. Or Saturday when he'd go running errands, a little *shabbas goy* to help Jews who had to stay home, and Jews were the people he trusted, ask them for help, he'd say, if God forbid youever need a dollar.

A hundred years. How am I supposed to know

what day it was? I see him walking, that's
enough,
slim, quick. Loved to dance,
jump around, walked fast
drove slow. Paid his way.
He had yurned grey by 35
when I I was born, so een now
I can't see the color of his hair.

1 June 2020

=====

for Charlotte

**Morning. Now
that the words have spoken
I am free to speak.
A day belongs to its doing,
I'm just along for the ride.**

**But while I'm here
watching the trees pass
and the houses, cathedrals,
ruins, mountains
(I once saw Everest out the window)
there are some things I want to do.**

**Say, I mean, and they're all about you.
It maddens me sometimes
that when I try to write about you
I wind up telling how wonderful
you are to me, for me, with me,**

beside me, around me--
always that fatal *me* shoves its way
into the purest equation.

You are the most wonderful person
I have ever known. And there
is 'me' again, sneaking in,
as if I couldn't tell the truth
without it being my truth I would tell.
So forgive me, love, forgive me
for being *me* so much
when all I really mean is you.
And in a way it's all your fault--
it is you who keep me living,
without you there could be no me.

1 June 2020

====

The tin cup has an island
on it, blue map
of an island shaped like a bird,
a bird pointing east,
safe to drink my coffee from-
cools the hot faster than pottery,
tepid I am and tepid drink
the strongest coffee I can work.
So there. I agree
with all my enemies
as a matter of principle--
tepid again, fear of conflict,
fear of being wrong, fear
of being right. Just let me sit
and sip all day and half the night
writing all the stuff you criticize.

1 June 2020

=====

**We have to make up
so much of what we think
we know,
the punctuation of our minds
is limited to a few old signs,
yes, no, maybe, not sure
to the background music of fear and hope.I
look out at the tree
and say Answer me for once.
I always do, it says, now be still.**

2 June 2020

=====

The man who waited for now
all his life has a quiet smile,
a little curl of mustache
like an opera star
but doesn't sing yet.
It's getting late, he smiles,
now always takes a while
to get here,
he has to be ready for it,
washes his hands, trims nails,
reads old novels and new politics,
waiting is easy, he thinks,
feels like a game,
playing with time
and I have all the pieces
he said once when I still listened
when people try to explain themselves--
i know better, now.

2 June 2020

= = = = =

**Night is just a conscientious
worker getting the tools ready
to make the next day.**

2 June 2020

= = = = =

**History
is an empty bottle.
It was
and is.
What it held
we guess
from its shape.
Sometimes
a residue inside
we can decipher.
But mostly not.
Clear clean
transparent glass
curves distort
the form of things
when we look through.**

2 June 2020

= = = = =

**The hardest line
to draw
is perfectly straight.**

2.VI20

= = = = =

**Cooler yester and today
pale sky**

**trees look
waiting for something.
Or is that me?**

2.VI.20

THITHER

genial word
for the way there,
old word
to suit the cobblestones
of the road it is
to go anywhere

especially in thought.
In mind,
 the eternal hither
from which we go--

arrogant word 'we'
a word the mind
scarcely understands,
all it knows
is going thither
and beyond
where we might be waiting.

3 June 2020

TIN CUP

**the container
is lighter than its contents
but sturdy, hard to break,
dents a little but so what,
cools the coffee faster
than pottery and doesn't break
when I drop it in the sink.
There is music in all sorts of things,
this is the tin cup song,
utility, durability and nostalgia
all in one yellow cup
with an easy handle
and a soft curled lip.**

(All this came to mind when I picked up my solid morning mug, heavy grey pottery, and it all by itself sang about its friend, the tin cup still downstairs waiting for us both.)

3 June 2020

=====

**This is the day
that christmases me every year,
holy anniversary of the highest gift
we give one another with our lives
because a wise man great and good
understood us right:**

**Phone call from Nepal,
your dear voice far
but lose in my ear.
yes, we should get married--
angelic telephone, ten
thousand miles suddenly erased
and I was yours.**

**And I don't even remember
what day that was,
only this one, when the word
became a ceremony
with minister in ethnic stole**

**and parents tolerant enough—
they had their wisdom too.**

**So here we are. I'm only telling
what the world outside should know
so I'm using human language
to keep a little secret still
the heaven of knowing you.**

3 June 2020

= = = = =

**Darken the day
until it says.
La nuit se lève
I want it to say**

**as if the darkness too
were ripening beneath us
to disclose what the light hides,
or maybe just lift up
the other hand of light.**

3 June 2020

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

If a person can be defined or at least clearly identified by what they despise or just don't understand, who would you be?

3.VI.20

=====

I've been thinking today about my father, how in the tenth decade of life he would sit quietly for hours sometimes by his big window in Oceanside or on the rickety porch of my studio, his eyes keen, alert to whatever came by, if anything did, a few cars up here, a cloud, or an old woman hurrying home. But so alert, calm, patient, the sense he gave of something going on. I'd call it prayer—in fact I think whenever anybody is just sitting there, awake, alert. they're praying really, prayer as union with the divine, union with everything there is, asking nothing, I think prayer is really just utterly being there.

3 June 2020

**I used to be
a wind-up toy
then you lost the key
so I had to be me,**

**I used to be tin
but now am man--
that was the sin
where I began,**

**the animal I overcame
overcame me.**

4 June 2020

=====

**This kind of Siegfried
feels only fear,
fear is the fire
that fuels his life,
drives him where he goes,
teaches all he knows.
Not terror, not civilized
bourgeois Freudian angst,
just fear, quiet and deep
and always ready to decide,
ready to decode the world
and bring him safe
to his work. His work.**

4 June 2020

= = = =

**A sailboat going
up the hill
beyond the trees
I saw or thought I did
till reason supervened
with talk of wheels
and gravity. But still,
the lovely white sail
disappearing in green leaves!**

4 June 2020

BIRD SONG

**Hear me now
revise me later
says the bird.**

4.VI.20

=====

**I owe emails to
too many people**

**so I'll talk to my friend
the man in the moon
who'll be full tonight
or tomorrow to tell
the world down here
with his light that I'm well
busy thinking, not afraid
too much, health reasonable,
and that I'll get around
to answering my mail
before the moon is full again.**

**I think he'll do that for me,
I've never bothered him before.
And if he asks what keeps me
from answering my friends
and my others, why then I'll try**

**to figure it out for both of us.
And all of you. It is summer
almost, and my mind is busy
browsing on the light.**

4 June 2020

= = = = =

**To be famous
anonymous
like the oak tree
from which
but we'll never know**

**or is even the sun
always the same one?**

5 June 2020

=====

**My father spoke of men
shoveling sugar
in warehouses by the docks,
standing in it, shoveling the stuff
a hundred years ago
to sweeten their tea.
Bakery. Brewery.
What do we stand in now?
Who is our shovel?**

**Because there is still
beauty in the world
we need to keep
from getting damp**

**don't just wash your hands
you timid ones like me
make sure you dry them thoroughly.**

5 June 2020

A VINDICATION

**We grow on trellises of light
we organize the dark
we make things up
and we remember--what more
should they ask of us?
Forgive and be forgiven.**

5.VI.20

=====

**Nearer to the center
the hum quiets down.
Quietens the old books say
but old as I am I'm too young to say that.
Or quicken. Or climb the tower
where someone attends me,
someone vested with splendor,
or dare I, atheist for such meaning?**

5 June 2020

=====

**A drinking song I never drank,
a river I never mapped by heart,
a wolf who slept through the full moon
a child dressed as a dragon
I fumble through the resemblances
trying to find what I forget.
There was a city founded on desire,
the Bible was upset about it,
seems we should not want
one another too much--
but what shall I do
with all the words in my mouth
if not give them to you?
You are the key to the whole affair
because you are there, can endure
the ceaseless conversation of the actual
I wake up blabbing to your distant ear.
The secret of Sodom
was that they loved women too.**

5 June 2020

== ==

**If you closed your eyes right now
whose face would you see?
That's the scary part
about being awake,
the fact of an elsewhere lingering
somewhere inside. Elsewhen.
No wonder we stay awake so long,
think up jobs to do and places to go.
A breeze stirs up the leaves,
gently teasing our precious stability.
But the wind can be an angry friend, so go
easy, go easy,
read more books and don't look down.**

5 June 2020

== == == == ==

**Maybe the hand
knows better than the eye
what I mean.**

**Better than the mind
I mean, something said,
not seen,
new-made
not remembered,
fresh glorious mistake.**

5 June 2020

=====

**Can't yield completely
the way summer does,
letting everything in or out.
There is an autumn in me
that tries to hold on
to things that are on their way
away, time's dandruff,
a curl of long bright hair.**

5 June 2020

= = = = =

**Do you take
milk in your meaning,
sugar in your truth?
Isn't the taste of whatever
taste enough for you.
I pin these verses to my mirror
and hope I get to read them someday.**

5 June 2020

LANDOWNER

The property line
is in the mind—
your border guard is how
far you can go,
your flag the handkerchief
you mop your brow
or blow your nose
when it is cold. Or you
lose interest in ahead,
fall back on the comfort of from.
Quiet ceremony, national
anthem of your breath.

5 June 2020

= = = = =

**Wind lifts.
Does not depress.
Air is always up,
we catch it as it goes,
it lifts our lungs
with the same generosity.
You may boast
of sexy fire and comfy earth
and sylphy water
but give me air.**

5 June 2020

=====

**The cogency of things
themselves
without my ay-so—**

**that's what I like,
that's what is true
about being,**

**being in the midst.
In the midst of mind
a thing counts.**

That's why we pray.

6 June 2020

THE CAPTAIN

of that ship
is always naked

the prow
plows through flowers

irs wake
scours the shore.

For it never
sails far out,

why should it,
its work is here

carrying here
just a little far away

so from it we can see
the way we are.

6 June 2020

=====

**To have doubt enough to tell
faith enough to keep quiet—
a person like that can surely
learn, but not from experience.
From sheer separateness
authentic wisdom in born.**

6 June 2020

= = = = =

**Can't have everything,
everything's owned already,**

**the wind owns it
and the sea**

**and the sun sees
everything is in place already**

**and sometimes lets you and me
just sit and watch.**

6 June 2020

=====

**Your flower
out of nowhere**

**you looked in the sky
but there it was
at your feet**

**think
what you might have seen
if you had first looked down!**

**Something up there
come down to your hand
and maybe you would have brought
that to me too,**

**the thought of it
somehow makes me cry, it
smells like lavender**

the purple fields stretching far away.

6 June 2020

SUMMER COMING

**On this warm day
the statues spoke
and shadows strolled
independently of light**

I am a museum

conquistador and courtesan

old janitor mopping the floor.

7 June 2020

=====

**Long sleep little pain
I never put butter on my bread
and am subject to annoyances
of a peculiar kind: treble
voices of cyclists Sunday morning,
well-dressed people, guitars,
friendly animals, windless days.
I have a list of grievances
somewhere but where?getting
organized is not my strong suit.
In fact, neatness can be nasty and
I am not above criticizing light.**

7 June 2020

=====

**After a long time
I reached the edge of the word,
the boundary.
But was I traveling in or out?**

**I got down on hands and knees
to study close up the edge's matter
and still can't decide
which way is silence, which way
meaning lies**

**. I feel the crumble
of the borderline, taste it,
still can' decide.**

**Maybe
there is no difference. Or only one.**

7 June 2020

=====

**Church come to me
ring my bell
make me holy,
of use to everyone**

**let every cup be sacrament
every breath a hymn,
let knowing me
be good for everyone**

**who comes by and smiles
or frown at my heresies,**

**church, church, come
and make me of some use,**

**let my shabby notions tell
stories glowing like stained glass.**

7 June 2020

=====

**What I write
yesterday
soon disperses**

**more clouds now
than one hour back**

**sudden keyhole
of bright blue—**

who peers through?

7 June 2020

=====

**Movements make meaning—
ask any symphony
and that's what it sings.**

To divide is to make whole.

**Or look at the fingers on your hand
if you don't believe me.
Though doubting isn't wrong,
doubt is a voluptuous way of knowing.**

7 June 2020

== == ==

**Yes, immediately
into the sanctum of the mind
where are generated
images of principles and deities
you entered, guided
into me by the intensity
and dignity of your presence.
This is what happens when
we think of one another.**

7 June 2020

=====

**Try anything twice
call of the owl**

**remember me?
but who are you?**

**to every bird and beast its call
some like serpents make us hear
by thought alone, transmit
their fear to us so we become
comrades in anxiety**

**while the bird sings free.
No single note suffices,
iambic or trochaic
dactylic, anapestic,
they teach us prosody**

spring morning open window lessons.

7 June 2020

ASKING

**Can you be
my father for a moment
he said to the tree**

**not easily it answered
for all my upright
I am more your mother
lie down in my shade
and understand**

**but it's father wit I need he said
sagacity of businessman
probity of priest
mothers arte too forgiving**

**the tree was silent
then dropped an apple at his feet
and added those men
are imitation mothers
now tell me what you need and go away.**

7 June 2020

= = = = =

**Day of the air coming through
day of now**

old thoughts climb into the sky

**space knows how to forget
but on this one day**

time too.

8 June 2020

PARTITUR

1.

**An ant climbs across the score
the violinist plays it as it goes
and music changes. The courtesan
in opera mends her ways,
ends her days in heaven even,
the angels listen welcomingly.**

**Words change their meek velleity
and roar defiance, whisper
ambiguities. Metal, wood,
paper, rock, remember.**

**Music leaves us nothing to forget,
it's all there, maybe two ants now
invade the staff, the violin
hard-pressed to cope, but copes.
Partita. Sonata. Even the bow
is costly, precious.**

**Let the wind
remember for you, let light
do your forgetting for you.
Just hover between, quivering
a little in the now. The ant
has crept off the edge of the page.**

8 June 2020

WIZARDRY

Robes of the wizard
leaves of the trees propose,
they somehow sweep
the paltry reality we think we see
and brush it grand again,
pilgrims and pioneers
they make of all of us
through their amazing
arguments with light.

2.

And now the grumpy worktruck gone
silence slips back into the Triangle
our open place among the trees.

It's like a birthday
when the noise departs
and not a cloud in the sky.

**Magic once meant kindly
help and no harm. That's what
wise men meant by wise.**

3.

**Now I am beginning to remember.
My impression is correct here:
over the years the trees
are getting leafier and more,
more of them and taller too
while I have not changed.
Tells you who's running this show,
who's in charge.**

I guess not me.

**And yet I wave my hand
like any decent wizard
and a bird flies off, the breeze
however little answers back.
You never know
what you never know--
I hardly know what I know.**

8 June 2020

=====

All of a sudden
one small cloud
has come into the picture
over the trees.
I thought you'd want to know.
Or maybe you know already,
maybe you sent it. Already
it's getting paler, paler,
dissolving without losing its shape.
Almost invisible now, unmoved,
unmoving just going away.
Gone. Do you know that too?

8 June 2020

=====

Inspanning the beasts in me
the muses brought,
led growling and squawking
down their mountain
to help me cross
the great plain. Don't think
of Africa they said, or Kansas,
or Borodin's Central Asia,
just keep going. The horizon
is your home, they explained,
that's what music always means.
Just keep walking. Or talking
if you prefer. Footsteps and words
always tell the truth, some of it,
some form of it. Something
we can always use.

8 June 2020

=====

**Start at the end of the story
and call it music. Let the red
fox behind the summerhouse
bother the wildlife as he chooses—
this very instant is in fact
the end of every story. Start
again. Deer, skunk, woodchuck,
chipmunk, red squirrel, blue jay,
Carolina wren, chickadee, sparrow,
mourning dove, wild turkey,
possum, phoebe, once a wolf,
raccoon, oriole, woodpeckers
red and pileated, hawk, and one
night in December snow a
catamount came by. The crows
keep watch on all this opera.
sometimes take part, sometimes
fly away. Begin at the end,
the end of everywhere and always,
lift your voice. Louder, louder,
the beginning is hard of hearing.**

8 June 2020

A WORD

**A word is like China
not the kind you break,
the kind you travel in
marveling at all the strangeness
of people's ordinary life,
millions of people, each
with a slightly different sense
of what it means. This word
you travel through, trying
poetically or linguistically or
philosophically to come
to the borderland and stand
there all alone, breathing
the wild air, and saying to yourself
so this is what it means.**

8 June 2020 late

=====

**Deserts are waiting everywhere.
Every tree has one close inside,
rivers of woodgrain, bare land
of sheer wood. And every person
has a desert deep inside, I think,
a place where he is most alone,
most herself, lonely but content,
glowing with absence. Sometimes
we stumble into someone else's Mohave
and we call that moment love.
The desert wind scours us clean.**

8 June 2020 late

FORESTRY

**Chop down the me
let the I out.**

**Suddenly a multitude
and all for you.**

8.VI.20 late

D

THE LETTERS

honoring Blackburn

**Paul told me this
again, the letters
of the alphabet
once were birds
in flight and we
saw and copied them,
we Greeks. Paul
woke them up in me
and told me, told them
to be true in me.
There is no telling
without telling. One
by one the days are told.
We still are who we were,
the letters linger, they
are left of us. He gave
me so much, so long ago.
Now I am far from the subway
where we learned to speak,
read, inspect alertly**

the imaginal world, alam
al-`mithal, take form
around us, human form
so that we could speak to it
and maybe be heard,
like your `trobadors of so
long before still
singing in your words.
Subway, I say, the city's
holy place, all the rest
is just stage set for those
miles of hidden pilgrimages
fast and noisy underground,
through the earth, the roar
of it made us raise our voices,
yours clearest of all.

2.

The crows come over.
Listen to me,
I live a sky life now,
can't find a way now underground,
listen to me, the birds

that taught us letters
are still teaching. Crows now
calling, listen to me,
listen and write down,
from letters words arise
as you listen to us fly
and still the crow is calling,
calling and getting answered,
louder, louder, language
means the two of us,
inextricably othering each other,
all of us. Listen to us,
the subway runs through light
and we are the rowdy music
of its passage--come ride with us,
write it all down.

3.

Because writing is going,
i finally learn this
this morning, the crows
conversing, including me
in their conversation now and then,

**letting me remember.
Writing is pure going.
Paul is dead half a century now--
it takes so long to remember.
But now the crows
have brought me up to date
and go quiet into sunrise.**

9 June 2020

=====

**Causeries are conversations
exclusively with the distant
or deceased**

**to use a word
my high school uses to identify
my classmates erased by time
but not my mind.**

**A list of names
is the richest conversation.**

9 June 2020

=====

**93° and I'm thawing out.
Soon it will be
warm as I am
inside animal animate
red blood rivering
past the winter of bone.**

9 June 2020

=====

Submerged, the songs
archived under water.
I was sent a catalogue of them.
all the arias, art songs, lieder,
chansons, each singer recorded,
incomprehensibly identified
by number. Bundles of numbers
floating under water,
each bundle priced, no way to tell
what bundle meant which singer--
I guessed the most expensive one
was Sutherland but who knows.
And then, waking, I worried
about all the songs they sang
never recorded--are they
down there too, in that vast
dark pool, still to be heard,
priceless, free?

10 June 2020

= = = = =

**Working from dream
without a screwdriver
still attach meaning
to the screed of sleep.
A morning carpenter,
a noontime nun,
afternoon alderman,
twilight knight,
so many things
a man has to be
in one slim day--
the hours eel by
so quickly, catch
your breath, citizen,
always work to be done,
all that heavy listening,
endless opera, pigeons
on this tranquil roof,
translate, remember,
buy bread at no bakery,
say prayers over the well,**

**wait for the bus, climb
down and up the wooden hill,
busy as a chipmunk, loud
as a blue jay, and be
your own watchdog, confess
your sins to the maple tree,
lick syrup off your sticky friends--
so much to do
and you're barely you,
but you have to do it.
You have to be.
Otherwise the words fall off the page
and no one sleeps.**

10 June 2020

=====

**The dignity
is what we need here
dignity of daisy
of linden leaf,**

**organ tones
in catacombs,
marble steps
and pyramids,**

**no more mouth,
show some respect,
the sun is waiting
for your Amen.**

**Dignity, not
persiflage, not cherry
pie and make them cry,
dignity like dust**

**to prove how quiet
this world really is,
only your gentle breath
to tell the whole truth.**

10 June 2020

=====

**Aristocrats walking on the moon
in vintage atmosphere, men
will wear periwigs again, women
do that dignified flounce
they taught in Versailles. It all
will come again, wait and see,
the impropriety of excess, the long
boring recitatives around slim arias,
and we, like the moon,
will put up with all that
all over again, age after age,
slaves shuffling in agony
through dark alabamas and brazils--
money will never set them free.**

10 June 2020

=====

**To tell the truth
is all.
and tell it fast.
Truth changes,
any cloud
in the sky will tell you that.**

**Morning is best.
And noon.
And night.
Words change too**

**just barely slow enough
for you to follow.
Follow. They lead
you to be true.**

10 June 2020

= = = = =

**Expensive vocabulary
of private schools.
What hat to wear
and when to wear it--
even I learned that
but would I listen?
My face is somber
but my skill's grinning.**

10 June 2020

GEOGRAPHY LESSON

**My hand
reaching
for the boundary.**

**Am I emigrating
or coming home?**

Only you can tell.

10 June 2020

CHANT D'AMOUR

**Writing letters
licitly.**

**The thought
though that
aims the words
is otherwise.**

10 June 2020

=====

**Faltering
in touchless time
this waltz
waits,
 mere music
and no dance?
Unending masquerade?
Be overt—
be outside,
hear the changeless birds.**

10 June 2020

THE ROWLING RULES

Women are only women
if they menstruate
moonistrate
 demonstrate
their bloody undies
to the magistrate.
No room for young nd old—
they'll have their chance
or had it and it's gone—
now they're just
imporstors in pretty clothes.

10 June 2020

SYMPHONY

1.

**Turn it around
let the whippet
chase after the wolf.
the plaster kiss the wall
and mean it. Moonlight
is a kind of answer.**

2.

**But I looked up
when I heard the blue jay cry,
you were looking uo too.
Could there be
one single answer
to all our questions?**

3.

**Drumbeat and double=basses.
music is all we ever need
the music says. Share it**

**then it's gone. The third
movement usually repeats
the conundrum of the first—
why? Why? And then
the ultimate question, who?
music always wants to know.
Everything points to you.**

10 June 2020

DARING

it said
but not clear
what should be risked
and how.

Just daring,
then silence.
Maybe silence
is our risk.
Doctrine or downfall?

A word in the mouth of morning.
Listen to me.

2.
Trees creak in the wind.
Chairs creak when we sit back.
Wood remembers.
That much is clear.

3.

**I haven't heard a bird
all morning and I've up
ten minutes already.
Only a word. And that
came from inside
and told me to do something
but not what. With whom.**

4.

**Dare to sit quietly
and hear the chair creak.
Endure the silence of birds.**

11 June 2020

=====

**The little things
that life accumulates
sand on every shelf.
Zoomorph or bibelot,
framed or fluttering,
shapely glass from Venice
or lumps of stone.
Everything I've known
and so much I've forgotten.
Who put this dry flower
once fresh in my hand?**

11 June 2020

=====

**What makes me me
is someone else,**

**salon dyeing my hair,
mask I wear, tune
I try to dance to, ha,**

**always another
shaping what I am.**

**2.
I thought it was a mirror
it was an open door.**

**The differences renew me
and the road begins.
Distance defines. The sky
colors my eyes.**

3.

**Every kid knows this,
leave home to find yourself.
That's the fun part.
Then the somber never-ending
carnival of who you think you are.**

11 June 2020

IN THE *THO.RANG*, THE DARK BEFORE DAY

**Pick this hand up
and make it sing.**

**Mourning dove
dawn on the grass**

**something always
talks**

**I hear
my heart.**

12 June 2020

=====

**Graceful afterplay
life outside Eden**

**no, not an owl
a dawn dove, raindove,
whose hoot is pure
poured into the dark.
How hard it is
to be simple, I mean,
we all were lovers once
and then.**

**The broken barrier,
exhausted husband,
disenchanted wife
the children all at war.
Sew a new flag, sister,
one with not a sign on it,
a handkerchief to dry your tears,
the years.**

**Outside now
almost like that Delvaux painting,
total night in the trees,**

**light in the northern sky.
I forget everything I think
so it can come to me again
purified of me.**

**A map on a wall
of anywhere else
is a holy thing, a shrine
of Sacred Possibility.
Go there whenever you pass by,
the gondolas and ski lifts are waiting.**

...12 June 2020

SEERENADE IN SILENCE

First visit to the summerhouse.

Suddenly France.
Denser trees.
Light traffic loud
passing not far,
but passing. Late
afternoon sun.

We are together
again, here, together
and no because.
Just as we are.

And they are too,
all round us
massive and green.

Or fleet—two deer
playing? circling?
in the sunlit glade

**back there, back
there where all
the trees are dark
then it goes dark
too and they are gone.**

12 June 2020

FOOD OFFERINGS

1.

Words

safe on the ceiling

in capital letters

it said,

and what was
the newly-awoken to make of
that?

Wolf howl in the attic,
cello hum in the woods,
there are children to be fed,
brats and brattesses, angels all.

Summer is coming,
the sea will open its gates
and port is a word that means
so many things.

Feed the little ones,
don't analyze.

Run home to recharge.

2.

Then there is paladin
a hero to be
in such uncertain strife,
Cyrillic? Pravoslavic?
Am I Orthodox all over?
Sword to be sharpened,
theologies to define--
who will doubt me?
I need skeptics on all sides
to keep my sayings plausible.
snickering is good commentary,
guffaw a critique.

Believe me

is not enough to say,
I must believe myself
before you can begin.
Beg your way into the conversation.

3.

Window means the same
view changes every day.
Door means silence.

the portal of speech,
linger in Gothic
before entering
the cathedral of the word.
Something like that.
VChair means your body.
Table means altar--
what else could it be?
And on this stone
the light gathers.
or in it, diamond.

4.
So that tells you what a ceiling means,
a little indoor heaven
to shelter you and remind.
Its stars show only in daytime,
stars or scars or patterns
time left for you to read.
Sing the score you sight-read above your
head--
it changes day by day
just enough to keep you sane.

5.

But offerings? And to whom?
You know, don't pretend
agnostic ignorance.
You know the world is full
of Powers and Benevolences--
sometimes they take the form
of mountain lakes
or starving children in the street
or a sketchy friend asking for help.
Or light itself. Or tenderness.
Or a crow sitting in a tree.

6.

Is this a scandal
like a ripped seam?
Or a rain puddle
full of the reflection of a sky
massive with cumulus,
shapely, firm?
I can't decide what to give you.
ashtrays for non-smokers,

mirrors for the blind,
what was I thinking when I began?
Or was I thinking? Or did I begin?
So much you know, only you,
only you never tell,
all my life I keep guessing
and writing the guesses down.

7.

Come back to that ashtray.
It is some dark stone, blackish,
veined, heavy, polished.
Above its scooped-out core
a tin-like spindle arches,
its sides cupped to hold
some legendary cigarette.
The whole affair is very clean,
I haven't seen it in many years
but guarantee its cleanliness.
Maybe you could shove
a fat stick of incense in the thing
and offer the smoke of aloeswood
or what you please.
That much at least is clear.

8.

But remember the window
and pray to the door.

I've said that before
but the wind blew it away.

Bice breeze today
out of the north
sieved through the trees,
ah, fragrances!

I do like this planet after all,
there were so many when I was sleeping,
and this one seemed so small
I was lucky to land on it at waking.

9.

Lyric moments
in the ledger of life.

I mean comments
overheard, sneaked a peek,
fossicking in a friend's
not quite sober reminiscences.
So many sources of revelation,

so many angels who will help.
Lovers carve their lovers' names
in living trees or standing stone--
I saw a stone wall in Provence
continuously graffiti'd since Roman times,
How wise that hillside was.
Graffiti means scratched in,
which is what write meant
to begin. This page my stone.

10.

But ceiling? I woke to see
FOOD OFFERING
in pale letters above my bed,
I shook my head,
they went away
but I got up
instructed
by what I'd read.
What they said.
But what to do
with what they knew,
when I go downstairs

**I will offer food, yes,
outside to those immense
energies that pretend to be birds,
those atomic particles of life
in chipmunk form. Monk form.
Priests everywhere, rabbis explaining,
lamas cleansing the mind.
Toss food into the wind
and let the world decide.**

11.

**That's enough theology.
The otherday on the phone
a friend chatted about Christian
heresies and schisms. It's gotten
to be a habit, talking about things.
Ideas are clouds that drift
across the mind. Better stay blue.**

12.

**So it has come to this again,
the place where at last**

it all has been explained,
commented, illustrated,
but nothing has been said.
Lyrical interludes, like four notes
tootled on a bassoon
in some crappy modern opera
where all the singers only talk,
bark, recite but never sing,
never bless us with a a tune.
Never what used to be called an
air, an aria, and we know why
that was, it let us breathe, let
the music breathe into us
a life that was not our own
but well became us.
Maybe some words can do that too
if no one actually says them
and they are just there, here, for you.

13 June 2020

=====

**Sign the letter
but don't send it,
slip it in an envelope
seal it, toss it
in a running stream.
Or bury it in topsoil
and see what grows.
Sometimes it's enough
to write a friend's
name on a piece of paper.
More than enough.**

13 June 2020

LEDGER LINES

1.

Ledger lines
across unknown terrain
the words get slung
and land like birds
and there the poets are,
every morning Greek antiquity
or the beautiful archaic of before.
Did I say wolf howl?
I meant my owl self
roused all night to pointless vigilance,
harp in hand, no,
owls have wings instead
and they must speak
all their music.
I abjure my metaphors!
I leave it to the lines
to interrogate the terrain,
look, a world upside down!
Look, a flag with no color

and no device, a plain
with no pyramid, no, wait,
be simple, a table with no chair.
Not even one. But will it rain?

2.

The lines led here,
waking in a book
you never began to read
never even opened
yet here you are.
With her. Who?
You'll have to read ahead
to find out
but the book is gone.
Is it on the shelf?
(Prairie dog yelping in a hole,
Colorado antiphon.) Which one,
I mean the shelf, I mean the book,
the restless prairie
the bedtime bible
the grain of sleep.

3.

Still can't get it straight.
No one asked. No one
was even there, not even
a book or an owl
or a landscape even,
when we sleep we live indoors
even if half-naked on a su-swept beach,
the little house that is my head,
oy! as we said when I was young
in the place I came from
a dark and friendly place
ever damp from our neighbor sea.

4.

That's more like it, Samson.
rub your eyes and see again,
as you wake the temple crumbles,
pagans apologize, foxes
bring you our slippers,
the moon leads you to the bathroom,
wash your face. soap
itself is made from balances,

soothe and harsh, rinse twice
and drink some water,
it brings you news
of all the places it has been.
This world you have to conquer now,
this twittering bird-soaked paradise,
bonjour, ma vie!

5.

Excuse please. That was just
an aria. I needed to raise the voice
beyond the picket fence
of common sense. Song
ever irrational, hence useful,
a furlough on Venus,
a noontime nap in wilderness.
I recall the Black Forest.
felt like my Catskills
all up and down and dark, dark,
the Clove, the deep
insoluble mystery of local space.
I sometimes wonder why I tell you this,
it must be because I'm never sure

you're listening,
so I approximate, adjudicate,
pontificate, dismiss, waffle a bit
and try out guesses by the score.
Don't think I'm being confessional
or biographical. I could be
anyone, just like you.
The lines gave me their assurance
they go on and on
just as the terrain does,
never ending, no need to end,
but the song and song alone
has to reach silence
so silence suddenly gives
shape to what we hear.

14 June 2020

= = = = =

**The dawn experiment,
cloud lifting,
a deer crosses the road.
Say that in a word.
Today.**

14.VI.20

AUTOMATIC?

As Soupault and Breton discovered and exemplified, writing can only be 'automatic' if two or more souls do it interweavingly. Otherwise, the human faculty of utterance is incapable of real incoherence or utter non sequiturs. The last dictations of the brain-damaged Henry James are lucid as ever moment by moment. They don't go anywhere, but what really does? Twenty-four books of archaic Greek to get to the funeral of a man who tamed gorses? I mean, really. Our notions of consecution are tainted, we have grown used to the pointlessness called History. Automatic writing might sing a way forward, like the dawn sun striking the first leaves of the tallest trees. All the rest is still dark.

= = = = =

**I think your cantaloupe
will finally be ripe today.
I hold it in one hand
and feel the sun on the other,
I feel like the blessed universe,
wonder if I should ho back to sleep.
Or wake you to share
the absolute silence of first light.**

14 June 2020

=====

**Don't go knocking
on people's doors.
Let the sun do that.
You have quieter
work to do. Singing
say, or playing bells
in unknown churches,
'ringing the changes'
they call it over there
where this very word
comes to you from.
I mean this one.**

14 June 2020

THINGS SEEN

1.

Cast in cold bronze,
an emperor.
Or drifting almost meek
from tree to tree
an oriole.
Nothing is mute,
no one.

2.

I think he reigned
when China ruled the west
and poets like Li Po
came from like Tibet.
The transcendent, seldom
useful, unforgettable
truths of played-with language
have to come from somewhere.
Call it the west
so they can answer the risen sun.

\3.

The face so smooth,
humble nose, lean lips
but softly closed,
a miracle of gentleness.
Copper and tin.

4.

You could hoist it from its pedestal
and bring it to the temple
where it could serve
as a Buddha's face
or bodhisattva's,
glowing in the flickering light
of butter lamps,
light one for me.

5.

The bird aforesaid
has to make its own way
but when he gets there

to the house of the elect
the chosen branch, then
he is worth your reverence too,
sandarac shimmer of his embonpoint,
pale orange glow in leaf shade.

6.

In old Anglo-Norman law we read
la utilite de la chose excusera
any little inconveniences
of smell or sight or sound.
the usefulness of the thing
is what matters to the law,
lawnmowers shredding our sleep,
that sort of problem. Or smells.
Or skylines pockmarked with
villas of the entitled.
But what will excuse the law?
What will let us go on sleeping
or wake in beauty
to listen to the oriole?

7.

You don't think I'd forget the bird,
do you? Charlotte was very
careful with him, quietly observing,
him in the camera's sanctuary,
60x from across the long lawn,
a bird up close.

The great black Boston poet
said *Look, look and remember--*
that's how to understand
whatever you see, flutter bird
or Tarot card, sandstone ruins,
shadow of a passing bird
crossing the features of a face,
the truth that only mirrors see
but never show.

In the evening I get to see
the pictures of the birds she's seen--
they are like Gypsy cards a little,
each one compelling, mysterious,
full of telling waiting to be heard,
and sometimes the leaves
speak louder than the birds.

**8.
This is the real name
and work of sleep:
to remember
what we have never seen.**

**9.
Now of course the bird
has flown away
to other applications
and the emperor
is back in his museum
safe from incense and interpretation.
Monday morning,
banks washing money,
lawyers plying their chisels,
poets hungry for praise.
Sometimes waking
is a friendless task**

**but look out the window
and remember, all that light,
the sun has no friends,
she has her work to do.
Be the sun.**

15 June 2020

=====

**In marching bands in Italy
they use a weird trombone,
the sliding valve sticks out sideways
to keep from hitting
the trumpeter striding just ahead
and knocking his pom-pom'd hat off
or whacking his ardent neck.
Music is so difficult.
Opera needs a whole house of its own
and some tunes never leave you,
once becomes always,
so sometimes I come to bless
the piecemeal silences between the notes,
the Gulf of Elsewhere with its quiet ships.**

15 June 2020

=====

**Poetry is like improvising
at the keyboard
maybe, being serious
or even doodling
but the difference is
we have to make the keys
join them to the sounding strings
and pound away
or tinkle reverently
or boom like Bruckner at his organ
in Sankt Florian
because poetry can use
all those pipes that line the wall
waiting for us, our breath
we imitate with fingertips.**

15 June 2020

====

**Dry summers ;omg aggo
bleached stones
on the river bed
bone white**

the Delaware

**between me
and Pennsylvania
;ike an old Roman road
I think it led me here.**

15 June 2020

=====

**There are times
when an eagle
done fishing
comes in from the river**

**times, sad times,
when the leaves
say goodbye to the trees**

**or is that sad
only to you and me,
are we the only ones
who step back from
everything we do
and wonder why
and where and what
else there could be,**

**when with all our thought
we still don't come
far from the river.**

16 June 2020

= = = = =

the trouble with going
is staying is better
Siste viator domi
I used to say
when I dared Roman
well-aware that Brutnuses
lie in wait for more than Caesars,
the quick knife could be anywhere.
Even home. But here at least
the shadows are congenial,
you know the echo's habits
in your halls, the tricks
of light in the old pale curtains.
And on these old oaken floors
you fall more gently than on alien grass.
The lawn lights up with danger,
the road snarls.

16 June 2020

=====

**You can feel the edginess
in me now, my fingertips
want to tell lies. I wouldn't mind
climbing into little boat
and rowing it far out from shore
then drifting there, lake
I mean, not river, not the sea.
Lakes have to be good for something,
yes? Nymphs and nightmares,
placid afternoons, the dragon
has other things on his mind?
Drift, which is the opposite of going
and also of staying, drift,
the soft breath of nowhere
drowsing you to doze.
Can that be transitive?
Am I already sleeping?**

16 June 2020

POETRY

**is about not
wanting to go to the doctor,
about letting the chainsaw
rust in the garage,
about not making the bed,
losing the keys,
hearing an oriole
in someone else's yard,
tossing pebbles in a stream
or skimming them across a pond,
how many times
can you make one word skip
before it sinks?
Now do last night's dishes
and sing as you scrub.
some tune from Verdi or Rossini,
make the words up as you go.**

16 June 2020

=====

**Praising
used to be enough
but now the moral
athlete wonders.
Pindar in his place,
yes, but slaves?
And those who had been
and never forgot?
Forget?**

**2.
I do not know the answer.
The answer is a number,
one that as in calculus
approaches zero,
number of injustices,
death by reason of race.**

3.

Where can we learn,
poets and readers,
singers and song,
learn that kind of mathematics?
Praising used to be enough
so all I can do herewith is praise
the hand that drops the gun,
uses the knife to slice bread
for hungry strangers,
priests and pundits who
weigh in against violence of all kinds,
light-footed peacemakers,
calm brotherly police,
disbanded armies hurrying home
the weaponless calm of prairies,
the divine in every human skin.

17 June 2020

=====

**I know too much of what I mean,
my certainties drown out my words,
keep them from rising
out of that temple or gymnasium
deep inside us,
the place that knows before we do,
knows what we do not,
speaks only when we are humble
enough to shut up and listen,
Speak from silence and music comes.**

17 June 2020

= = = = =

**I woke up in dark
wrote a few words
and the sky began.
See what I did?
the child confesses,
boasting of one more
day he has made up the curtain breathing with
light.**

17 June 2020

=====

I don't think I'm ready
is how every song begins.
Then the pilgrim thoughts inside
start marching to Jerusalem
shouting as they come--
write down what they say
while your mind is busy somewhere else
like Pindar watching a boy run
triumphantly out of breath.
Breathe for him! Say the sound
his sandals sing--something like that.

2.

Be modest, music.
We built the sky by looking up,
the earth we made by standing still.
Intelligence is an accident of song
but be modest, music,
your turn will finally come.

3.

Sat naked in the doctor's office
shivering in air-conditioned angst.
I felt my language hurrying inside
to keep me breathing
even if not warm. Words. Words.
Jabber to the doctor, chat with the nurse,
Nurse etymologies, movies seen,
events deplored, anecdotes
of travels in even darker lands,
the leper in Darjeeling,
the opera in Vienna, anything
to keep the body warm
Origin of poetry.

4.

See, I learned something yesterday,
time isn't always angry,
the late lunch was good,
tacos for you, barbacoa for me,
I could eat that every day
and still worry about the government,
wouldn't you?

**5.
What I learned I guess
is what my body said,
what body teaches
to all who have one
and who listen, shivering,
patiently, always wondering
can this be true, but always
saying so.**

17 June 2020

=====

**It starts obscure
and lights up as it goes.
Roads make destinations,
we are quietest when we are learning,
a child reading a fat book.**

17.VI.20

=====

Could this be another year
another me besides,
playing the piano after all these years?
What do nuns think in the night?
Or grade-school teachers
striding the aisles
while children ake the daily quiz,
or senators waiting their turn to speak,
does the naked muse Aletheia,
Truth, the Unforgotten, Unignored,
dances in their consciousness?
O rich beautiful continent
of what is never said,
the before-place,
the absolute Preliminary,
the never-spoken from which
I guess all language comes,
echo of that other sound.

17 June 2020

SILENCE

Silence is radical to poetry. Essential. Not just the silence of the unspoken implied by the words said, or the reader infers from what has been said. More than that. The dynamic silence at the end of every line of the poem, that shapes, molds, makes that line complete, a statement wrought, a complete fragment of the incomplete. And the grander silence at the end of every strophe or section, what makes a whole, a silence like the kiln in which soft Babylonian clay turns into a bowl that lasts three thousand years. Silence shapes. Silence summons our answer.

17 June 2020

=====

**How interesting and strange
that children are taught
to learn about the whole big world
by going home and doing
what they call *home work*.**

17.VI.20

(Wed. 4.30-5,50 A.M,pp. 129-139).)

=====

Every, any,
couple, any
two who come
close in any
way. love or
lore, they
becomes a tree.
One tree.
O do be caring
with your friends
the roots may
grow deep
and strong, but do
be careful,
if both don't tell
the truth a branch
can wither,
the fruit on it
can dry and rot and fall.

17 June 2020

= = = = =

1.

**To know the beginning
as a species of flower,
hold it in your mouth
chew most gently
and begin.**

2.

**To learn religion
(there are so many
nowadays there
might as well be none),
learn religion
sitting on the lap of the mind
and listen, listen, o dear child.**

18 June 2020

THE EDUCATION

Be normal, be late.
Let experience
percolate within.

2.

Religion you learned
(I'm speaking to myself)
in diners, watching
people talk so loud
the waitress coming and going
bringing mysterious offerings,
saying things you didn't understand.

3.

So loud the food
and strong the taste
weak coffee too
hot to sip, every table
with a source of music
on it, cost somebody a dime
but you paid with your ears.
Bach waited for you outside

(as if in Leipzig once) but here
the grilled cheese oily bread
sweated on your lips, the quarter
on the table tip, the girls behind you
chatting softly as you made
your careful way along
the narrow space between
booths and the backs of men
at the counter, how hard
the tile floor, how far the door.

4.

Between booth and back--
between the many and the one
the child is caught. Looks
at the waitress for help,
her hips are smiling but her eyes
are far away, weary from all our asking.
You felt it was almost like a sin
to ask for something more.
No demands. Eat fast
and hurry back outside
to the land of trees and roads,
scary too but in a softer way.

5.

**So what's the verdict, doctor,
am I sick with reminiscence
or am I just making things up
to talk about in the desert
between me and the next person,
hoping for an ear, I mean
am I sick or just in character,
barking my way in this endless opera?
And why do we leave it to
people like you to decide?**

18 June 2020

=====

**So many to be near.
Look into your phone
and try to remember
what someone else is like—
the whole animal,
heaven and hell,
soft skin and sarcasm,
the works.
Language means to build you that.**

18 June 2020

= = = = =

**Listen to the table,
listen to the chair.
This is gospel
coming right through you.**

18 June 2020

=====

**To welcome Thevos
into the work,
the great one
all around him—**

**to answer music
on its own terms,
to answer light
by what our hands
learn how to shape,
luminous opacities,
faces of the gods,
stairs to the sky,
towers on the hill.**

**(17.VI.20)
19 June 2020**

LLANTO

**Don't you know how hard it is
to be with you**

**even in the shadow of the linden tree
hands get tired of being empty--**

**is there another language I could speak
maybe the tree could understand me better**

**and you would too? Or do you
only come to see me to mine my vacancy?**

(18.VI.20)

19 June 2020

=====

**One day shy of summer
and the mystery of other
people thickens. How
can the morning be so bright
and I know nothing, almost,
of what they're thinking?
Why do I have to make it
all up by myself? There is
no knowing, there is only
telling. The wind said that
as I watched the leaves
try to stay still.**

19 June 2020

=====

**Stern and by the Schuylkill
a sculptress reigns.
I am too far away
to see what she has made.
I have to imagine
all the houses around her
subtly changing, trees
exchanging species in the wind,
light hardening into new forms
over skimpy city parks
and everyone who passes by
silently rejoices. This
is the language of Yes,
and everything can be said in it,
just as everything that is
can be reflected in the river.**

19 June 2020

=====

158 years ago
the slaves were freed
some on them
haven't heard about it yet,
somehow some of us
keep the word quiet,
or say it but don't mean it,
the theoretically free slave
pays more attention to the
gun in our hands than
the words we recite. And if
they ask what or why or when
the gun is likely to go off.
How many more years
have to pass before they hear?

19 June 2020

=====

**A crowbar hidden in the mind
cracks open an old wooden chest.
Creak. some bats fly out
just like a cartoon.
What have you been doing in there?
We are mammals who have learned to fly--
what is your
excuse for living?
How can I answer
what my own brain asks?
Make things simple for yourself--
learn to fly then fly away.
But I live here! Here
can be anywhere, take wing.
Then I will flap my wings
and stay right here on my perch.
At least, little bird, the brain says,
at least you can talk.**

19 June 2020

PRIDE

**Once I met a celebrity
and thought
I am someone too.
But who?**

19.VI.20

= = = = =

**Unwavering insight
into the unspoken--
that's the power
language wields.
To say it is to make it so.**

19.VI.20

====

**Politics
is a shirt
you can't rip off,
as Nessus learned
and burned.**

**Your politics
layers you
with boring distances
so lovers flee**

**or neighbors call the cops
who have their shirts on too.**

19.VI.20

=====

**Little bits of sing
but no long song
I deplore my shards
of semi-precious things
malachite, chalcedonies**

**yet they do glitter
in the morning sun, remind
me of the dreams they
come from or still are.**

**But where is the omnipotent
emerald ode that lifts
the singer with his song?
I will go walking in the woods
and gather leaves and dream some more.**

19 June 2020

= = = = =

**On a very hot day
the heat exhausts you
but does no harm**

**just like being
in a big family at home,
overpopulated living room
everybody trying to be alone.**

19.VI.20

=====

**Porpoises playing in the mind
how high they leap
up and out of the unresisting wave
wet hide glistening in sunlight
as they twist and spin and fall
all muscularly to the sea.**

19 June 2020

= = = = =

**I run my hand
down your side
and learn how to see**

19 June 2020

=====

**The curious asymptotes
of desire,
 always reaching,
never seizing,
 always a little
further to go,
 to satisfy.**

19 June 2020

FROM AN OLD PAGE IN SMALL TYPE

When the thought began to think me
I waited by the thought to see
what kind of swill
the pigs won't eat—
and there is wisdom in them
for their own advantage
and what do I
accumulate from vast
experience to make me strong?

But if they were waiting
would I know them
those faces of Ailleurs
with such strange bodies?
All hips and happenstance
like a woodcock scooting
out of the marshland

And then the children come
back in the day
when there was still
meaning in fractions

Then the thought began
O think me

I waited by the trough
Suppose there were another way of doing this
an alphabet the camels read

or men in loafers
trying to reclaim their aureate
jeunesse,
tu sais? i.e., ne young again
the way their clothing is.

And if they are ready to begin
there would be some sort of
splendor

**left in the blue closet
where the mother creatures
wait for the news to
come**

so long the waiting

*(from several years back, testing typing on a
typewriter, transcribed here NOW)*

19 June 2020

ORANGES FOR ORIOLES

for C

On the last night of spring
we know our needs,
love and letters,
giving things away.
Stick something sweet
and juicy and nourishing
up in the middle of the air
and let them come
at their own time, own pleasure,
then read the words
they make your heart say.
What more can I tell you--
be my bird.

20 June 2020

====

**Look in the roadside mailbox
that old tunnel of tin--
of course no one has written,
why bother with paper,
just bills and catalogues and yet
to swing down the door
and peer in, dust and rust
and sheer imagining--
something about knowing
beyond knowing, something
about hope. Sometimes
I speak quietly into that
shadowy tube, no way
can I remember what I say,
maybe the government remembers.**

20 June 2020

FRIENDS ON THE VERGE OF TRAVEL

for T, L, M

**Anything answering
the quiet
is worth doing,
hearing.**

**Travel means work.
travaux. travail,
Lift the Roman stone,
see the Grecian dirt,
scoop a spoonful out,**

**Eden in your palm.
Feel it— you're there,
I can only remember.**

2.

**Because you're going
where our mind is made,
high-school antics of the human race,
the Muses our cheerleaders**

scantly clad, but clad—
nakedness belongs only to the mind—
sex is the body's charity,
its gift to the soul.

3.

I wouldn't go there on a dare.
I come from somewhere too near
and it is fatal to repeat. Retreat.
Look again on what the light itself
made me see to make me start.
No aliyah for such as me,
I have to keep going till I get where I am.

4.

So I envy
your bouquet
of departures,
your rosary of distances,
no two sips of water taste the same.

So I begin
the banquet
of your presences,

knowing you'll soon be gone
into a reality lost
long ago in me.

5.

I thought I was writing English,
it came out like Hebrew
only it actually was
the language of Eden again—
a book of mine in German has that name.
I still read it to find out what I mean.

6.

Sad when people go away—
away is the longest day,

a crocodile without the Nile,
a tune you can't place,

some moisture in the eyes
distracts from grief.

7.

**Sometimes people *leave for good*—
a strange phrase that means forever.
Don't do that. Remember
it's only a real pilgrimage
if you get there and come back.**

20 June 2020

SUMMER SOLSTICE

**Girl on horizon
arms outstretched
in her right hand a pan of fire
in her left a bowl of water.
She stands on earth now
and breathes towards us
the air we live.**

20 June 2020

=====

**Counterpoint of winds
hot night, two blades,
window fan and pedestal
different sizes, different speeds,
how can I ignore such music
and just sleep? Size
makes timbre, speed makes pitch.
I finally sleep and dream
Marin Marais, or did I dream
of carrying a woman on my back?**

21 June 2020

=====

**Who are those people
we meet in sleep,
more vivid and intact
than the ones in waking?**

**They are with us
and then not, not again,
as if all their being -- or all
our comprehension--
is used up in that moment
of dream, and they are gone,
or they are there but we
can see them no more?**

**They come out of the dark
and change our lives and we
don't even know their names.**

21 June 2020

=====

**Without moving
a foot or a finger
play with the space
all around you,
fill it with Alps
and cablecars,
temples and factories,
yes, factories, make
something useful
pour out of the air
to feed the hungry,
house the homeless,
kiss the photons
pouring from the sun,
building block of light.
The world is new now
and you can close your eyes.**

21 June 2020

=====

**Saint Martin of Tours
tore his big cloak down the middle
and gave half to a shivering beggar.
I think that's the saint, the garment, the deed.
How strong you must be
to rip a cloak in half! Heavy wool
like my soldier's cape from Slovenia.
Or did he have a knife?
Picture the beggar waiting,
wondering what was happening?
Had he asked for cloth, warmth, alms?
Maybe it took a while to cut apart and they
both froze together
till the deed was done,
a shared distress, a bond between.
In even a short life each of them
must have done ten thousand things
but all I remember is the cloak,
the smiling beggar limping on his way.**

21 June 2020

JOTA

**Why is J pronounced H
and H French can't pronounced at all?
Why does S hush you to sleep
in Budapest but hiss out loud
to get your attention
everywhere else? Why does C
jam open your jaws in Smyrna
but just click your tongue in Cork?**

***O everywhere else*
is the best place to live,
where birds fly
and all things
are just as you
suppose they are,
no surprises
dare jabber from
your innocent mouth.**

21 June 2020

LETTERS

Circle cut in the stone
we see the sunrise through—
that is the first
letter of the alphabet.

The second is the sound of water
rippling in the nearest stream.
The third is the brass
doorknob on your mother's door.

All three are consonants
but now a vowel comes
sung high in the mouth:
a bird flies by. (Choose
the species according to gender,
crow for men, oriole for women.)

You must decide whether one
vowel serves for all. If not,
the breath is up to you, your
churchbell skull, your iris lips.

**Then more consonants arrive:
acorn fallen from a windless branch,
angry child crying out a block away,
a bicycle clanking as it falls on its side.**

**The last letter of all is a goat
come skipping down the mountain
shouting as he tosses his long
horns joyously through the shadows.**

Have I given you enough to spell the truth?

21 June 2020

=====

**The world says its prayers
in you, only in you..
Give voice to the matter,
the sacred chatter of all things
in you, only in you.**

**Language came to us for that,
only for that. The rest
of what we say is just practice
for saying what the world means.**

22 June 2020

=====

**You looked at the screen
and saw a camel, I looked
up and saw a horse. Colors
of some Middle Eastern place,
soldiers. You went back
to reading, I closed my eyes.
Temples and courtyards
and camels are better inside.**

22.VI.20

== = = =

**It is something like beginning,
something like a red bird at the window,
something like a tree, like a used
red car for sale in a closed lot,
something like milk, remember
milk?, something like gravel
alive under our sneakered feet,
something like Spain
you hear in a song but maybe get wrong,
something like copper, like a fish
a little, something like moss,
glass, hair, chandeliers,
old-fashioned telephones
with cords attached that led
who knows where, something like
ice, Vienna, teardrop crystals,
something like waiting
all alone at the side of the road.**

22 June 2020

=====

**Write poems
under a different name
publish them,
later claim them as your own.
Make people wonder.
Doubt is good for the reputation—
there is always something
mysterious about celebrity.**

22.VI.20

=====

**Walker on a leafy road
soon vanishes in trees.
One slow hot day glimpse
and he's gone. If this
were still magic he would
turn out to be a person
of the trees who just
for a moment came out to get
a breath of human air as we
from a crowded party might
for no special reason step
out onto the terrace and be
for two or three minutes
alone with the night.**

22 June 2020

=====

for Xerez

**I hope the new cat
is up to its task.**

**A tower is so tall,
a room so big,
a cat so small. And yet...**

**they know their job
is mosrly just being,
being what they are
vividly, tenderly, quietly
all over the place.**

22 June 2020

FAR AWAY

**the statues begin to move.
They want to love us too,
teach us what they know,
learn how little we know
Greece, Anatolia, Parthia, China.
They come from there,
nimble, glide (the Romans
called it *incede*, the way gods move,
not quite traveling but filling the contours
of the land. Our land. Our mind:**

**So there are no footsteps
to warn us of their approach.
We know they're coming.
The night is so still, so quiet,
air hardly moving— nothing
is to interfere with their mission,
their pilgrimage to us.**

I think some of them are here now.
The solar-powered outdoor sensor light
goes but nothing is to be seen.
You can't see a statue when they move,
you see them only when they're still,
becalmed in the Louvre or Vatican.

They are here now, I feel it
in the soft hairs on my arm.
Stone breathes softly too,
but we can feel it, must
feel it. It tells us.
It may be Artemis
my first love who moves around me,
circling the house, filling
all the books and papers with her breath,
or it may be that stalwart, sturdy,
unknown god from Isfahan, glad
to leave his world for an hour
in the tossing and turning of ours.

22 June 2020

====

The semaphores are at it again,
long arms flailing, switches
twitching in the nervous system,
the news being made up inside.
Wait for the train where the tracks used to be,
something is bound to come along,
space os practiced in our ways,
it will come along and take you home
glad to be done with your messaging.
Now try to silence the dream--
but thank god it will never stop.
And when you wake tomorrow
you'll be glad to hear the old
semaphores clanking and clatter.

22 June 20020, late

PILGRIMS

1.

Now the pilgrims wade ashore.

“Why are we here?”

“Where else could we be,
besides, it’s taken us so long
to get here. don’t you remember?”

“What does memory
have to do with where we are?”

They haggled thus as they stepped
half-drenched onto the welcoming shore.

“The clouds are pretty here,”
one said, and all agreed.

2.

Shallow rosy sandy beach,
lush tall grass ob the rise,
trees in the distance, none
too near. One jested

“We;ll make our pilgrimage
to the tree,” but others

took that seriousl--"We could, and could do worse. A tree is a very holy thing." The jested smirked, as if he had meant that all along.

3.

They made sure their skiff was moored securely to a rock then rested a while on the sand, sharing food, admiring the sky. This is the quiet time, softer than any adagio, some of them even drifted off to sleep, unmoored from the actual day.

...23 June 2020.

=====

The things we used to do
that no one does,
canary in the parlor,
cushion cat on windowsill.

Proust could still be living
so many are the duplicities
we get up to that might tempt
his sardonic, tender, eye.

But here I sit in late sunlight
grumpy as a Californian,
soft wind coming over the hills
they used to call the Blue Mountains,
long ago, speaking of time.

23 June 2020
Kingston

=====

**Midsummer dream on my lap
white birds circling in darkness
over the civil street, thunder
with no rain, headlights,
Latin vhted in the pine woods
or are they hemlock, Hebrew?
An ant walks across the monument
carved with the names of the fallen.
Enough reality. Turn on the news instead.**

24 June 2020

=====

**What if it were like this
all the time, this glum
confusion? But then a breeze
picks up, a cloud reaches up
over the trees, the countryside
is full of insect life that has
problems enough of its own.
Lift up your eyes, the book says,
and we have lifted them
and what they see
is another country
starting right in here.
And when we close our eyes
the vision lasts, our proper world.
Like the ants we have work to do.**

24 June 2020

PACTOLUS

**river of gold
hidden in Lydia**

**and this river
ours, what does it bear**

**and Metambesenstream
where once I saw
a philosopher from Kentucky
panning for gold dust**

**Is it everreal
to be where youare?**

**among the idle
several and curious senses?**

**I answer you as ever
by questions**

**as if it were enough
to remember!**

and what are you asking
when you say you are--
isn't am the oldest question?

so I can't call out,
can't cry your name
like a night bird
baffled by desire,
all those ways in the air!

stained with journeys
the sky awash with goings and comings,
stars those shy arrivers

glitter in still water
in bend of stream
where the heron stands

can't call any name,
names too secret too sacred

we shameful heretics
every name a new religion

and he claimed he did
find gold enough
to justify the spending
of a spring afternoon
knee-deep in what flows
down from eastern hills.
where lead is found
thence too come
he said silve and gold

but philosophy is always
offering consolations like that

while in the blue mountains yonder
hidden clefts keep their secrets mute

but it is morning now
and all the colors are green
just as we are all named me,

why can't I remember your name
well enough to call,
is another person's name

or an name maybe even one's own,
a foreign language
we learn too late in life
to feel ever comfortable speaking,?

calling
in the dark—
calling out
brings the dark
all around you

every summons
summons night

remember telephones?
the maiden murmurs
when you barely knew
who you were
let alone who you were talking to,

I almost feel guilty
for saying the river's name
when you want real answers

but isn't a name the only answer,
question thought is?

This is about calling
and need and night and gold
and long ago and now
and all the improbable actual--
otherwise why would a dream
ever bother to wake me,
assuming it did, assuming I am,

what were we almost
going to do
before the river flowed by,
find space in a self for an other,
why bother,
aren't we alone together on this prairie,
puszta, steppe, grassland, veldt,
aren't the distances
heresies enough,
do we need names too
to drive us even further away?

**Please don't use my name
it doesn't belong to me**

**I am a telescope
slides open
in perfect dark,
already for never,**

**of course not speaking personally.
because the edges
of experience
stretch all around the coasts of Africa
last longer than Egypt—**

**all the convenient analogies
of geography
why don't you just
take off your clothes
so I know enough to run away**

**as once from a chamber
of chattering aunts I fled
fearing to see them as they are,
yet every one of them a river of gold,**

aren't you, isn't that what it means
to wait for an answer?

This so-called poem
is a choir of rabbis
wrangling over a Talmud text,

so this confession
is like a terry cloth robe
held out to you as you step
shivering from the shower

and when you read it
try panning for gold
as the words flow by

they come from those same hills

but now the sun has come
to chide me for lingering
but that's where I have to be,
interviewing the obvious,
trying to crack its story,

track it, refract it
until I understand
how and why we are given so much
and who am I to talk about us

taking our name in vain?
And we weren't even we!
We were a bunch of mumbling foreigners
trying to read
the runes of a picket fence,
skid marks on a busy road
and always leaves, leaves,
don't you have trees where you come from,
don't you have roads, fences,
stars in the sky?

Does it all come from language
after all
and nothing's really there
till we say it is?

Next I'll be holding your hand,
trying to wake us both,
why else would there be sunlight on the lawn?

Or an I quibbling again
and I've lost my place in the text,
and why did those rascals
who invented the keyboard
dare to put U and I side by side?
Is everything a marriage?

And here I thought I was alone,
six in the morning on a summer day,
trying to remember
what I was trying to say.
The word came from nowhere
but then we all do
on this strange world
where the lowest point
is deeper in the sea
than Jomolugma in the air—

I read that somewhere and closed the book.

25 June 2020

=====

for C

five yew trees
by our door

count the ladies
by their gentlemen
the world is worth
our tender mathematics

kingdom! come!
and were they fingers
skipping on me
in an almost dream

your hand touching
my face as if it too
could hold you
and it always will.

25 June 2020

DEFINING HIDALGO

Turkey cock weathervane
precipice simplicity
but interference, metallic,
rose the dawn, elsewhere,
sword clatter, lute.

there is a real world
among some others.

After the book fell into the well
I walked in Atlantis
sipping air out of a little flask
from time to time.

The streets were orderly and clean,
people focused on their tasks
or pleasures, friendly
seeming in an absent way.

In Plato Park (how ironic!)
I met my great-grandfather,
and so at last could question him

on all the things they never told me
but I knew he knew, origin
of the alphabet, what words
really mean, who a woman
really is, and where the rock stood
on which my house now stands.

So much and much he told me
but before I could learn
whether he came at first
from Somerset or Devon
a truck came by and woke me up--

2.

so now who am I?

When the pages dry
I'll leaf through and find out,
but that's a maybe, maybe, maybe,
like all the birds that fly around here--

but they are quiet now,
the sky says Look up.
And in that soft unclouded blue
I see his face again, no, not his,

his wife's face, no, his daughter's face,
a noblewoman from her bearing.
one of those who in ancient times
struggled west to bring
high intellect to empty islands.
You can see it in her eyes.

3..

Things fall
that never fell before.
Smell of mint,
cloud begins to breathe itself into place,
up there, up there,
we all have to wait.

Wait to make the same mistake,
Incidents of travel through his own house
by a Spanish nobleman
lost at sea but found a year later
teaching Bible to the natives
who fed him well and loved to listen--
such stories! Temples and betrayals,
promises and people turned to stone,
a voice out of nowhere--

everything strange to them
except they knew already and full well
that trees can talk
and what they say is urgent,
imperative, and full of light.

4..

So a nobleman is one who knows
some of the truth
and doles it out so we
can have some too.

A noblewoman knows more
but is more sparing in her generosity
knowing all too well how
little of it we can bear.

Is that a satisfactory definition?

Why not?

It feels as if the beard on my chin
is trying to tell me something.
But then everything is.

5.

Back home near Sheepshead Bay
we had a pussy willow in the yard
that looked over, leaned over
into the alley along the narrow
path by the cinderblock garage
where pansies grew in window boxes.

What more can I tell you?

That's all that childhood is.

Does that sound lonely?

Far from it. Such silent friends
taught me how to listen,
listen till all the world
was full of voices, not just
grumpy grown-ups and taunting kids.

Back to the hydrangea
blue as this morning's sky
that made the middle of the garden.

I can still hear its azure pleading

Do all your strife

with symbols and signs,

words are your tin soldiers,

fight on and be merciful.

6.

All I was trying to do
was find out where he came from
because i come from there too
obviously and what kind of children
don't know the language
into which they're born?

Answer; every child
has to learn that speech
by self alone and not much help
from the way people talk in the street
or at the dinner table or in school.
Only as we shuffle home
from one obligation to the next
kicking pebbles, lingering to touch
a stalk of milkweed or an iron rail
sometimes we hear it, faint at first
but louder every year
until we almost are.

26 June 2020

LIMEN

**Here at the other gate
I wait, linger
deliberately, in hopes
someone will rise up
to forbid me, so then
I can force my way
into the dark.
But the door swings
loose on its hinges,
the way is easy,
relatively peaceful
I go in.**

26 June 2020

THE LINGER

After humans die, the totality of their reputation, influence, presence in civic or academic or theological memory, their images in public and private memory, is called their linger. Some have lingers of great strength that continue to increase, some have lingers that remain steady and strong for a long time, in other cases, the linger dwindles and perhaps even vanishes--though lingers can be revived or refreshed by determined minds among the living. One thinks of the linger as a word shouted out that resonates or re-echoes or dies away in the long noisy silence of time.

27 June 2020

=====

**Rain at last
the lick of hydrogen
on our dry skin
our leaves.
We slept somehow
till noon
eased by its ceremony
and the stream outside
was waking too.
How we live
in this charmed
circle of reciprocals.**

27 June 2020

AWAY

1.

**Sometimes
children too
wait at the
gate. Gate
means going.
Children love to be gone.**

2.

**For orderly departures,
entrust the wind.
Sails can't do anything
by themselves. Ask
the world to breathe
the word of your journey—
the sea will understand.**

3.

**Sometimes I wait too long
and then it understands
ahead of me, instead
of me— and who will I be then,
the gulls all flown away?**

4.

**When you come home from your journey
the world will be waiting
for you to say it. Your friends
on the dock have
eager ears, needs, keen ears,
hearts. Do not fail to speak
the word that waits.**

27 June 2020

= = = = =

**Language uses us
as we are,
makes the best
of what it finds
in us to be clear—**

**maybe even too
it scrubs us clean
as it passes through.
Fools think.
The wise know.**

27 June 2020

= = = = =

**Everything is offering.
If we were not here
the sky would not be blue.
Fact. And everything
would be something else.
As it is, we offer it up
by saying its name.**

27 June 2020

THIS QUESTION WOKE ME FROM SLEEP

Is objectivity the sun of all possible subjectivities, so that when all beings have seen, it is truly seen?

28.VI.20

=====

The road begins
at the big toe
and continues
till you get there.
The music tells you
when to stop, birds
and so on make it
easy for you, crows
especially. Now what
you ask, but the road
is already behind you,
can't hear, its work done
it hurries home. Wait.
Waiting always makes sense.
Maybe the music
will start up again.
At this juncture early
cultures resorted
to prayer. We have no
equivalent yet. Wait.
Waiting might be as good

**as a psalm, I doubt it
but what else do we have?
You may already have answers.**

28 une 2020

=====

**You could peel the apple too
and shell the peas,
these tasks are meant
for more skillful hands than mine,
me so slow of flesh but brisk of mind.
But I persist, it's all an opera anyway,
the audience too far away to see my tears.**

28 June 2020

= = = = =

**Looking out the window
brings the sky close.
Maybe looking at the sky
a long time will turn
our thoughts into fishes
swift in our cool nourishing stream.**

28 June 2020

RHAPSODY ON A THEME BY ANYBODY ELSE

**As not be me, as linger
in the bushes, the somewhere
of an Irish dreams, allow me,
macushla, the wund lifts,
we slept aneath the fairy tree
and got our words awrong
but from the missing
the little children play,
myJewish uncle frowned
in the sweetest way.**

2.

**Wait, we haven't come to the theme yet,
you'll hear it soon enough,
may even recognize it
before I do, I so want
to get away from me
and only words to carry me
out of range, over the hills
and far away, to the land**

where pomegranates grow
and each one opens to a feast of color,
rubies that cry Eat me,
tart white fiber of civilization,
no, when you and I were young
there was magic in every tree
and so we learned to find it
in everything that grows,
every random chip of wood,
nothing flees from us now
that once did us seek,
Slavic trumpets and Saxony's trombones,
what shall the pose sound in,
we know that we come back to live.

3.

At last not me. Rimbaud's I
showed us the way but would be follow?
Thirteen decades passed
and we're still in the classroom
watching the clock. What else
could set us free?

4.

Nibble at it till the grand theme appears,
the new one the variations discover
lurking in the memory of what we've heard.

Did you hear anything?

A glass breaking?

A wood[ecker at the house wall?

A wafture of leaf rustle through God's window
into the sweltering earth?

The glory in the meekest things
takes us by the hand

leads us up the Abbey's aisle

to our crowning. This

is the actual. We have come so far
to be beyond ourselves.

The organ plays, the sleek equerries
jostle for our attention,

we have enough for everyone!

I am we now, lost in a multitude!

Paradise found!

5.

More people now
than ever before.
Where did all our
souls come from,
and what were they doing
before being summoned to this place?
I promised music
and offered only questions,
werewolf riddles,
semiquavers of doubt.
But here we all are--
you want music, boychik?
open your glorious new ears.
So this is the latest variation,
the coma.
the world as it seems to be.
a picture hung up on the wall
of your grandmother's house,
tattered a bit and much faded
but we are in there, somewhere,
she keeps the back room
too dark for us to see.

6.

(aria)

Seated one day by the pine tree
I was weary and ill at ease
and my fingers wandered idly
over the rugose bark.
I know not what I was thinking
or what I was dreaming of
when my fingers encountered
something carved into the wood.
I sprang up to examine
and was shocked to discover
right there in the bark
my own name
spelled with the letters
of someone else's.
O wise tree, kind and full of memory,
if ever thou shouldst tumble
in a tempest
I will build my skiff from thee
and sail to the truthful realm
your living form reminds me of.

**But do not fall, stand there
for centuries so other dreamers
can find their names in thee.**

7.

**Is that enough, a century ago
that would have been a song.
But now the cities are full of doubt
and country people sing no more.
If there were a church
I might go to it
but as it is
there is only you,
thank God, always you.**

8.

**Amaze me, walk through the door
again, just like the first time.
rustle of silk makes me turn my head
and there you are.
You are the spring wind,
the summer's vast field of wheat,**

**the autumn gloaming,
the intimate inwardness of winter,
all these, all these,
and you are all the songs
my father sang when I was young,
my mother's smiling silences.**

29 June 2020

=====

**So much sleep
must tell me something.
The martyrdom of waking life
gnashes at the door.
workmen failed the deed
so the mind sent its small demons
to reconfigure the task.
The pyramid. The Doric temple.
The dissident cathedral,
massive library free of books.
All the things we think
float breezeless through the forest
and not so many trees in it either.
Not like here, deep woods
where I go on sleeping.**

30 June 2020

=====

\
.

It wasn't bright
it wasn't dim
it was noisy
to begin

but now the air itself
rests on the palms of my hands--
you know that feeling,
everything waiting
but not waiting for?

2.

Olson said poets
should get a job
and gave me one.
I'm still working
and can't understand
how fifty years ago
he died, early one

**winter morning
but his words never noticed.
They too are ardently waiting.**

**3.
And a prayer is waiting
in each creative act:
make what I make
be of some use
to someone someday
and prove worth the wait.**

30 June 2020

=====

**It must be a school.
The walls are words.
Through the three
legs of the M
a child can use his two eyes
and see beyond.
Maybe even through the big
hole in the O the child
could wriggle to freedom.
But would a wordless world
be free? Struggle all your life
to find out, using the words,
using the words until
they're all used up—
and then you'll see?**

**(27/VI/20)
30 June 2020**

= = = = =

**From this one
escape, escape
down the iron rungs
into the actual,
the spinning gears
oif where and
what we are.**

**(29.VI.20)
30 June 2020**

=====

**The mind is a green man
hurries through the dark
on one straight line to reach
and press against and touch
the person waiting, always
waiting, knowing or not,
in the bed of the deep woods.**

**The green man runs, presses,
says not a word,. no more
than a tree does, presses
as a tree does into the earth,
welcoming earth, green man,
roots of one mind deep in another:
mind hurrying through the night.**

**(29.VI.20)
30 June 2020**

PSALM

**Feed the hungry.
There are hungry in heaven,
yearning for your song.
That is why, o that is why
the singing goes, goes on
and you too listen as you sing
and learn, and learn
the way to heaven
and how to be yearning forever.**

30 June 2020