

7-2021

**jul2021**

Robert Kelly

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk\\_manuscripts](https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/rk_manuscripts)

---

=====

The wait is over  
the conditions  
we call normal  
have returned.  
The fish is in the stream,  
child in schoolbus,  
feet in pain. Society.

But it is summer,  
the bus is empty  
and I have taken off my shoes.  
Daylight. The fish  
safe in his own mystery  
as much as anyone can be.  
The flow. Now  
the garbage truck  
grouches by, the internet  
is back, the sky grey.

But in my dream  
it had snowed  
just as I said it would  
to the doubters around me,  
and mushy icy inches of it  
covered the ground.  
And my own notebook,  
blue, No.434,  
had skittered from somewhere  
and lodged between the two  
front wheels of a car,  
our own car! someone  
has to get belly-down  
to retrieve it, and it hasn't  
happened yet. Where  
do they get such ideas?

1 July 2021

=====

When I was a child  
We had at least  
the illusion of free will--  
we would *go*  
to school, walk there  
on our own feet, linger  
along the way, as if  
school were just as real  
as the drug store or the pool hall  
or the flower on the bush  
or the cat asleep on the stoop.  
But now kids are carted off  
in yellow prison vans, no choice  
but making noise, no hope—  
but far down the afternoon  
they might be dragged home.

1 July 2021

=====

**These trees will make  
a catholic of me yet,  
a universal animal,  
they shake their holy  
water on me after rain,  
lift my eyes to heaven  
just to watch their leaves  
print their tidings on the sky.**

**1 July 2021**

=====

**Be quiet in me, comrade,  
we've been through enough  
already, don't need commentary,  
the names of the years,  
Burbank, Fresno, Valencia,  
Delhi, Dubai. Forget it,  
the road is sacred and empty,  
no nanes, please, we're all  
ancient teenagers shuffling along..**

**1 July 2021**

## IN RHINEBECK

Rain. The witches  
are out walking  
in their pointed hoods  
enjoying the weather.  
They linger along the sidewalks,  
their fingers trailing  
along the new brick walls  
between the elegant shopfronts.  
Witches love brick,  
their fingers read the creases  
the valleys and ridges of hard clay,  
each crease a letter in their  
own strange alphabet. Things  
are their language  
and they love to touch.

1 July 22021

=====

The sky a broken bone  
if I heard the lecturer aright,  
and we are the marrow  
of someone's meaning—  
you see it clearer in the morning  
when the trees raise it up again.  
Was that break the famous Fall  
of Adam, fall of one into becoming  
all of us women and men?

2 July 2021



=====

**The barrow has no wheel.  
It lies on the ground and tries  
to lift a little bit of earth  
into the sky, to remind us  
of the ones who brought us here,  
ancestors, heroes, demigods,  
by now we can hardly tell  
who they really are. But the hill  
or hummock stands, we step  
up the slope with some effort,  
rightly, every step a remembering  
and memory is hard. Here  
where they were we are. So sing  
a little coming down the other side.**

**2 July 2021**

=====

Spinnaker she called it  
and it came first  
billowing out to show  
where we must go,  
a cloth like arms outstretched,  
white as sea foam  
always hurrying to the shore.  
Or so I hoped. I love  
the ocean best when I'm on land-  
the ocean is my neighbor  
and I respect its immense privacy.

2 July 2021

=====

I have dared  
to love the world  
and I have dared  
to ask the world  
to love me back.  
I used a million  
words to ask, it  
answered with three:  
*Here we are*  
the morning said.  
And today said it again.

2 July 2021

=====

**Suppose you recorded  
your footsteps  
and played the sound back  
instead of walking—  
would you still get there,  
wherever it is,  
kitchen sink or Kailasha?  
I want a higher tech  
that takes us to the touch  
the taste of things  
while we sit in the joyous  
fullness of empty space  
seeing our dreams as they  
used to say come true.**

**2 July 2021**

=====

**Brooding philosopher  
dust in the eyebrows,  
upbeat theologian  
with a shiny nose—  
you can always tell  
what men are thinking.  
But you can never really  
know a woman till you  
see what her garden grows.**

**2 July 2021**

=====

**Second thoughts?**

**Ok, don't sign your name.**

**But don't cross the words out.**

**2.VII.21**

## TRAVELOGUE

**New tourist destination:  
migration  
towards the silence.**

**A big place to be,  
and see, and no one says.  
No music in your face  
no noise machines our  
accidental offspring  
howling round our knees.**

**Just as the Germans say *stumm*,  
*stumm*. Or as we say *mum*.  
Silence is golden  
and worth the travel agent's fee.**

**2 July 2021**

=====

*for R.S.*

The man who talked about everything  
sometimes drew pictures on the wall.  
Words need help, he meant,  
sometimes and here i am,  
to say them and explain them  
and draw their meanings  
on an empty board.  
That is why emptiness  
is so important,  
without an empty space  
we couldn't understand  
anything at all.

2 July 2021

i



=====

Love makes monsters  
masters of entrapment and control,  
bellowing voices  
whelming up from what might  
be decent anxiety.

Or no, it is not love  
but a smaller, older thing in us,  
a yelping selfing creature  
afraid of being abandoned,  
of being hunngry,  
of being all alone.

This creature steals the fear  
we should reserve for lions and typhoons  
and turns it on the normal  
interstices of intercourse

**and turns them tragic,  
every silence a rebuttal,  
every closed door an exile,  
Eden lost again.**

**What shall I call this animal inside,  
this jackal of the nervous system?  
It really has no other name but me.**

**3 July 2021**

=====

**Who am I  
when I stumble out of sleep?  
And who is asking?**

**Am I another often?  
Or just like Rimbaud sometimes  
in the masked ball of poetry?**

**And who was he to begin with,  
that glorious infant?  
A poet never grows up—  
that is what we should learn.  
All the lovers, all the Africas  
do not age us. Words  
rejuvenate the speaker. Fact.  
Now how to teach the body that.**

**3 July 2021**

=====

**At last nothing waiting,  
I am first in line  
for the morning silence  
cherished still mid-afternoon.**

**Put on your golden slippers  
before you go out walking,  
don't let the general earth detect  
the secrets of your house,  
secrets it takes you years to solve,  
even you. But our skin knows  
more than it s good for us to think.**

**3 July 2021**

=====

**Bear the burden  
be a stone**

**be a bird  
and lift the doubt away**

**somewhere in between  
your true me lives**

**walk with your me  
along the damp earth**

**now you're talking  
now you're here.**

**3 July 2021**

## **FORTH IN JULY**

**The sky has a handle  
you can find,  
turn it if you dare  
and open up  
a door. A candle  
you can read by  
if you learn the letters  
and shelter quiet  
under the almond trees.**

**2.**

**O the East be with you!  
the priests cry out,  
blessing the parting guests  
who wander all ways at once  
confident in what they've heard.**

3.

A wall  
is the oldest thing of all.  
It taught us slow,  
slow, almost all  
the things we know.

4.

I am not wrong.  
This is not some song.

5.

So rhymes are accidents  
of space and time,  
sudden revelations of  
what may be the truth.  
Language is full of them,  
they come by and go

like birds in the sky  
like birds in your garden.  
You are serious and kind,  
you try to remember each one,  
finch or sparrow but the crow  
knows everything for you.

6.

Almost ready to be otherwise  
on a bus to Denver, earbuds  
reminding you of music once  
and the hills ascend, ranches  
you pass by on the way to being  
a different kind of animal.  
That's why we go. That's  
why we city: to accumulate  
the other to hide the self safe in.



7.

It is a holiday,  
it gives us right  
to reason  
with ourselves,  
right to be wrong.  
Independence Day  
and we're still waiting.

8.

Or is that just me  
growling at reality again,  
wanting it to be realer  
and last longer, a woman  
with flaxen hair, piano,  
Mahler, Montezuma,  
landlord of the moon,  
a book that never ends.

4 July 2021

## EMBARKATION

Cythera, yes,  
the other way  
walk barefoot  
on the wood of the boat.  
boat-wood knows the way,  
wet-toed, ankle-damp.  
It is for you  
the boat is breathing,  
upwell and pitch down  
with the sea, you think  
the waves in place  
to carry you, marry you  
to your destination.  
You are alone on the skiff  
the skiff is alone on the sea  
the sea is alone on the earth,  
so much loneliness everywhere,  
marry me, marry me you cry  
to the birds as they go by,

hint of land, marry me  
you whisper to the cliffs,  
sand, strand, jetty  
where the boat snouts in.  
Step ashore. Rough shingle  
presses up in soft soles.  
No religion without commandments,  
don't falter now, *relax forward*  
is what the wind inspires,  
island of love, you're here  
and all at once everything marries you.

4 July 2021

====

**How could we know  
what was glaringly obvious  
to everyone in 1600  
if one of them hadn't  
written it down  
before the light went out?**

**5 July 2021**

=====

**Last night only a few  
far off feux d'artifice  
and only the sound  
of them, no artful fires  
lit the dark sky.**

**5 July 2021**

=====

**No one to answer  
no one to ask  
the see-saw of silence  
delicately poised.**

**5 July 2021**

=====

**It's one of those days  
when he mail doesn't come.  
The householder feels  
a mixture of relief and a certain  
anxiety about neglect.  
And what are all those postcards,  
love letters, electric bills  
doing, huddled together in some  
governmental dark while he  
stands on his empty porch  
admiring sleek hybrids passing  
wondering what time really means.**

**5July 2021**

=====

**In Mexico a man was selling  
skinned dried snakes  
in front of the cathedral.  
I saw this with my eyes--  
thank God I didn't imagine it.**

**5 July 2021**



====

Gaze into the opal of the morning,  
let the mind alone a moment,  
watch carefully out there  
everything that isn't happening.  
In there, I mean, the semiprecious  
jewel of time, and find the utterly precious  
diamond we call now.

2.

Sounds plausible..  
Pile up rocks  
to make a garden,  
let green things  
intrude upward  
if and as they can.  
The people who bought  
the house where I grew up  
playing in the garden

paved the whole yard,  
no dirt to dig in, t no blue  
hydrangea, no pussy willow.

3.

Strange things people do to earth--  
every natural space is Eden  
from which we are banished by the ingenuity  
of our contrivances,  
alliances, changes, we fallen angels,  
we children of Eve. Try this,  
she said, and moved a stone.

4.

O gloom of Robert  
thou fearful pest,  
canst see no progress,  
no rapturous wilderness?

**Be civilized, or at least civil--  
Isn't a soft white ceiling  
as much fun to look at as the sky?**

**5.**

**Going back to bed  
is usually the best answer.  
But the sun keeps  
chomping up the sky  
and we obedient mammals  
scurry to keep up with her.  
But still the silken pillow sings  
a lullaby sweeter than Isolde.**

**6.**

**You recognize the signs:  
{I can't get started"  
like the old tune said  
from a Berigan long before Ted.**

**How can anybody get started  
when they keep saying Wait  
a minute, what's going on here?  
What are you trying to say?**

**7.**

**Maybe nothing.  
Peace on earth  
and birds out every window.  
Let the Rhine flow north,  
the Rhone flow south,  
it isn't your fault  
I keep telling myself.**

**8.**

**But still: everyone  
who uses language  
is responsible  
for all that language says.  
Statements are inherently complicit  
even when in contradiction.**

O child, hold  
the welfare of the world  
safe in your mouth.

I think Saint Michael said that  
as I passed by a church one day,  
his statue above the doorway  
showed him struggling strong  
with he dragon coils of syntax.

9.  
So less talk  
more truth?  
Don't believe it  
language knows  
a way out of itself.  
The silence  
after each line  
of poetry shows  
the open road.

5 July 2021

**DEAR DOCTOR**

**How can you cure me  
if you don't know who I am?  
I don't play bingo or salute the flag  
but I love this land,  
all the men and women in it,  
animals and rivers and trees.  
And I give to the children  
all that language gives to me,  
language, the treasury of earth.  
How can you cure me  
if you don't know even now who I am?**

**5 July 2021  
Red Hook**

=====

Lifting it  
or shaping it  
a different way—  
alphabet blocks  
such as children use  
to structure their words,  
little wooden cubes,  
very letter a house  
of its own, and letters together  
make a town that meaning lives in.  
Come, knock on any door  
and hear the truth.

5 July 2021  
Red Hook

=====

**I did not feed my difference,  
what shall become of my hour,  
the rock shelf, the glacial shale,  
dream as fossil of the broken day?**

**Imagine me again. Dubious waking,  
truth on the lawn. No one  
can help now, the order of words  
determined by some other  
and only me to hear them now  
one by one.**

**Pale filets of fish  
traded for six hours sleep  
or so it seems. Dream unrelenting,  
the morning stained with dream.  
Blessed. Now turn the lock  
around the stationary key,**



now move the wall past the door.  
Like that, yes, the prisoner  
walks out. Is there a heart  
in this chest? All I remember  
is Yosemite, on a high cliff  
watching the water silently fall.

6 July 2021

=====

Hope is a love song  
learn all the words  
or make them up  
as you go along  
but sing, keep singing.

6.VII.21

=====

**Men came by and wounded the trees,  
the hurt trees took a while to speak  
but they can teach forgiveness too--  
sing with what you have,  
sing with what is left,  
there's always something left to say.**

**6 July 2021**

=====

I pinned a motto  
above my door  
I'M HERE TO SAY  
is what it said.  
Then I grew shy  
at such immodesty  
and yanked it down.  
Yet here I am.

6.VII.21

=====

Have they finished with it yet,  
the inquest into what now means  
and what became of yesterday.  
Did you do it, or did I?

Something has changed in the night—  
the law is fixed, day, then dark.  
Dark, then day. The bourgeois enemies  
of darkness have to take some blame.

Stanza by stanza the house builds out  
around us. A clean tin can to prop  
Bellini's brushes in and keep them clean.  
Wet. Drought ruins more than California.

Wait. Just wait. A new white satin stole  
for the Mass Priest. Give people lunch.  
At times I think that all the books I wrote  
don't add up to a book I bought once

from a bookstore stall for a quarter.  
And it was raining then too. Tattered  
pages, the years pass. Tattered words  
dusty under my fingertips, a woman  
smiling as she walks across the sea.

7 July 2021

=====

She stood on the crowded sidewalk at the top of the subway steps, spoke in a fir clear voice but not too loud "*the subway is my sea!*" and then went down, steo by step, her shoulder bag bouncing of her hip at each step.

And when she was down in the dim, she passed through the turnstile legally, shoved her way in. The track is right there, no staircases or halls, right there the canal or sluice of firth that she would sail.

When the train slouched in she slipped aboard sole passenger through those particular doors that then slid possessively behind her.

**She stood in the half-empty car  
wondering where or whether  
to sit. Standing is heroic,  
she held firm the cold smooth pole  
like a conqueror on the pinnacle,  
watched her subjects and citizens  
scattered all around the car.**

**Not one of them is me, she thought.  
And I am far from my mere self,  
I am the sea now, I have become  
what I dared to enter, I am the wave  
of the moment and no more.**

**Relief flooded through her at the thought,  
she slumped content on the padded seath  
sat right by the sliding doors.  
She would be the border guard,  
the sea's lieutenant watching who  
or what this ocean holds,**



little boy playing on his cellphone,  
guy ith a racing form, granny knitting,  
same as always, true and holy, glory  
of the obvious, eternally right here,

so she cried out in the softest voice  
*who will dare to sail with me*  
*all the way to where the city ends?*  
But the train roared in its tunnel  
so nobody heard, or if they did  
they too took refuge in silence  
the way we do, the way we do.

So she got off at the next stop  
which was anyway where she lived.  
The sea is always about coming home.

7-8 July 2021

=====

Thunder woke us.  
Learn all you can  
before you sleep again  
it said, then it roared  
some more. Between  
wake and sleep we lay  
listening to the music  
pizzicato, raindrops  
on tarpaper roof  
or was it the wind?  
Where does sleep live?  
Knowledge is so hard.

8 July 2021

## GETTING UP

Look into the nil,  
the Nile of night  
flows by, ;eaves you  
crouched, breathless  
beside its monuments.

2.

What can it mean.  
In the first moments  
there is nothing,  
or nothing much--  
a sense of being here  
again, not sure  
where here is.

3.

And that is the Egypt of it,  
the ancient place,  
signs you only guess the meanings of,  
lion-headed ladies,  
owls mute on fossil trees.

4.

So call it today and get up--  
that's the least you can do.  
Or the most. Time will tell.  
It always has a tale for us.  
Up. Up is the point of it,  
getting there and being  
wherever that is. A dream  
is no dressing gown to wear  
in the chill morning. Need  
less than that to be warm.

5.

Naked is best. A blear-eyed  
reverie that turns out to be  
a world outside the windowpane.  
It feels familiar, you lived there  
or somewhere like it once  
just yesterday.

6.

How slow that river runs  
and then it meets the tide  
and the ocean presses it  
forces it back to what might be me  
or any you standing by the shore  
guessing at herons and mallards.  
Did you know a river could  
endure such contradictions?

7.

Midstream a sturgeon  
and a seal, wary of each other,

predators, and me on the bank  
a third. How big we are  
in this small world, we who grow  
vaster by everything we see.

8.

So that was up,  
and where you got to,  
I mean I did,  
we're in this together,  
snug in every word of it,  
*he became what he heard*  
as Blake almost said  
or maybe did say, lost now  
in the hush of the sea.

9.

Up, where other people live.  
No breeze. morning grows on us,  
yet the temperature has sunk  
one whole degree.

I live by numbers,  
and you would too  
if you could count  
the way I do  
in stones and leaves and signal flares  
and curious visitors  
passing through our zoo.

10.

When she comes  
her arms will be full  
with a great bouquet  
of salad greens,  
romaine and arugula  
we once called rocket,  
her Harley will be cooling  
by the fence, the sky  
will shimmer with a hint  
of rain. When he comes  
there'll be slim booklets  
in his hand, a box with some

unusual cheese in it,  
could it be brie  
from camel milk, or hard  
goat cheese from the Andes?  
Books and bottles,  
strange pleasures, snapshots  
of the kayak, of the family cat.

11.

When all are assembled  
the day begins.  
I tighten my belt  
and sit by the window  
finally forgetting  
how to count and what  
could be counted.  
How many is a river,  
how many is a bird?  
Why am I always alone?



12.

You have never been alone.  
That's how he answer reads,  
scribbled across the sky  
by a kind but busy crow.  
I get the impression  
I should stop bothering  
the known world with questions  
but I know no other song to sing.

13.

Rattle my chain  
dear lady  
and I will growl  
lovingly mayhap  
and beg for breakfast.  
Stroke the brain  
between my ears  
with questions of your own,  
tender or tense,

I can't tell the difference.  
Just ask so that I speak  
and what I say will be  
I pray what you mean.

14.

Still wet from the Nile  
I stand here  
a little shivery  
letting the moist meanings  
roll off my skin.  
Up is so far to climb,  
up is so far away,  
there was a dreamless sleep  
from which I came  
naked, meaning nothing.  
And this is what I find:  
myself by the window  
wondering out loud silently.  
I mean every word reveals  
the silences from which it comes.

15.

Leaves me free  
in the land of Up  
to be about  
the matter of the day.  
The French call it Venus Day,  
the Germans the Day of Freya.  
Love Goddess Day,  
I'll pull a green shirt on  
and hope for the best,  
look up at the sky and cry  
O darling love me like you used to.

16.

God walked through Eden  
one morning, spotted Adam  
writing fast in his journal,  
so many words! God said

**It is not good for a man to be alone  
and with his radiant hand  
slammed the book shut.  
Instantly Eve appeared  
newborn from the shadow of a tree.  
Linden, I think, from their dear  
heart-shaped leaves.**

**17.**

**I think that's what the Bible meant  
before someone wrote it down.  
I may be wrong again  
but at least it's raining  
gently now, and soft  
rain always sounds like Yes.**

**18.**

**Up far enough  
to see**

what needs  
me or might.  
Lonely in language  
I want to wake you now,  
share with me  
the silence of the living day.

9 July 2021

=====

**When it has begun  
the rain is democratic  
over its chosen target zone  
beyond which dry folk stand  
envious and anxious.  
But then we always are.**

**9.VII.21**

