

# The Roots Of



*Robert Kelly*

I have opened the Seals and found the Roots  
and they are these they are here they are you

you know all this stuff  
it is in you

the mother and the father and the hand on the wall  
the moon to line up against the hill and measure  
the sun to make the animals hide

*hide is die* said backwards  
do you know that now?

And no shady caves, none of that,  
we were out on the lawn  
drinking tea from the beginning  
from the beginning  
weird leaf in dubious water boil'd

the cave was for Sunday meeting midnight revel *Church*

and the signs of things we made with our hands  
 anything a hand could sign  
 another hand could carve in the rock

and nothing happened for fifty thousand years  
 till John Sebastian Bach.

or the slim but clumsy fishing boats  
 came into Sheepshead Bay  
 Friday evenings always late  
 laden with flounder but mostly fluke  
 we'd bring home glad enough

mystery of the bottom of the sea  
 both eyes on one side of the head  
 and a firm white flesh  
 not delicate as flounder let alone sole  
 but decent, a frying,  
 scraped skin and bones sinful in the sink.

Why have I waited to hear myself speak  
 under the Broad Channel causeway the never  
 fulfilled Rockaway yearning to handle  
 the machinery of things  
 to turn the crank of the ocean  
 and make the thing work

the girls of the town in the courtyard set  
 to more than dancing as  
 some human body with color in its blood sets  
 words to music, the grass  
 knows how to sway when the piper tells

hemoglobin rhapsody the valiant  
 orgasms of the stone age  
 dragged us out of the alaya here

the surface of the earth is the bottom of a sea

bottom of the sea bottom of the cup  
 something lives that you can't see  
 identical mystery the yelling  
 seagulls mock me for not understanding

even then I knew it was about the sea

that big animal had to make up its mind about me  
 things put up with being worshipped  
 for a while

her skin was white and she was slim  
 it was eternity I had hands  
 four years old no one to tell me  
 no one I trusted the crucifix attacked me at night

no one to tell me no one to ask

the hated nuns asked the wrong kind of questions  
 the ones whose answers are all in some book  
 I knew all that stuff I wanted to know  
 what I didn't know I was convinced in illo tempore  
 that somebody knew, but who, I don't know,  
 blind Borges counting birds in the sky,

Tommy Lomanno flying his pigeons  
 from the roof on Crescent Street  
 they wheeled over Blake  
 where the empty lots began  
 the fields around the church  
 the marching band blaring  
 what later came to make me think  
 Verdi's *Force of Destiny*  
 the overture to everything

but it was so much so blaring so satin breast so oil  
 so animal so close together so old man laughing  
 so clackety whirl of the tombola the screams  
 so sugar dredged so zeppole so hip thrust jostling

that it might as well have been nothing at all

and into that nothing I have spent what I had

and still seem to have more

Because memory is a bottomless pool  
and everything that swims down there  
is just a reflection on the surface

water is skin deep

and all this stuff I remember  
is the shadow a body casts  
on the mind right now

which is a very different mystery.