

Don't Go Back to Sleep

The door is round and open.

—RUMI

In the perfect silence of night
I open my eyes
to the clock's red digits
and I lie there,
breathing the sure, slow breath of sleep
for a minute, two, five,
until I arise, at 4:59,
to turn off the alarm
before it cleaves the calm.

Descending to my study,
coffee in hand, I pause
at the front door.
Yesterday a friend said,
"You're too busy.
You miss too much."
I denied it then, but now
I think, *So I am. So I do.*
So I go outside instead.

There's not a tremor in the trees,
no violence to disturb the stars.
The air's a cocoon
that cuddles me, cool silk
against my ears.
I sit cross-legged in a chair.
The blanket I have brought
to wrap around myself
I drape across my knees.

Out of the canyon to the east
 rises the pulse of steel on steel,
 the slow growth of a wave of sound
 advancing like a flood
 upon the neighborhood:
 first the trickle, then the swell,
 then the tide that overwhelms
 as the diesels surge through town
 and then the slow recessional.

To be conscious of my life too
 as a pulse progressing
 along a string,
 a vibration felt by every molecule,
 coaxing from each
 a measure of dew
 to moisten the lips
 and widen the eyes
 in case there were something to say or do . . .

A sound never ceases
 as long as someone's listening.
 It becomes, finally,
 the aftereffect of an echo,
 the subtext out of which
 the next vibration rings:
 an owl's cry thrilling the air.
 Don't go back
 to sleep.

RICK KEMPA lives in Rock Springs, Wyoming, where he directs the honors program at Western Wyoming College. His work has recently appeared in *Puerto del Sol* (New Mexico State University, Las Cruces), *South Loop Review* (Columbia College, Chicago), *Redivider* (Emerson College, Boston), and in the anthologies *Out of Line: Writings on Peace and Justice* (Garden House Press, Trenton) and *Beyond Forgetting: Poetry and Prose about Alzheimer's Disease* (Kent State University). His first book of poems, *Keeping the Quiet*, in which an earlier version of "Don't Go Back to Sleep" appears, is available from Bellowing Ark Press.