

# KNOTS



ERIC SHANFIELD



## KNOTS

Eric Shanfield | ENS.2008.11 | 9.6.08 | 7'

poems by Bill Knott

Alto

English Horn

Clarinet in B $\flat$

Score in C

*Knots* is an appropriate title for a couple of reasons. Most obviously, it sets poems by the late Bill Knott, a shamefully neglected poet whose many short poems I could not long resist setting. But it also perfectly describes the formal properties of the piece.

For some time I've been working with a form of my own invention in which freely-composed vocal melodies are set over small repeating musical cells to create compacted song cycles. In *Knots*, however, there are two independent musical cells of different lengths repeating beneath the voice. These two lines thread in and out of one another, tying the music into literal knots. Meanwhile, the alto sings melodies cast in changing time signatures to accommodate the shifting relationship of the cells twisting and turning underneath, for a total of three separate lines heard simultaneously in different meters, united only by an invisible eighth-note pulse!

To formally unify all this knotty shit I composed two movements consisting of ten parts played continuously. The first sets ten individual short poems and the second one long poem with ten parts, each mirroring the other. In *Loveladen* the English horn plays ten motives that are then taken up in reverse order by the clarinet in *Last Poem*. *Knots* therefore ends where it begins, like a knot being untied. Or tied, depending on how you look at it.

# KNOTS

poems by Bill Knott

## 1. LOVELADEN

### *Goodbye*

If you are still alive when you read this,  
close your eyes. I am  
under their lids, growing black.

### *Knot (Hendecasyllabics)*

After you've sewn it, bite the thread off my grave—  
Please leave no loose seam of me to wave above  
The bones unknitting, the flesh unweaving love.

### *Lovelade*

The sea is the cargo of empty ships  
Moon bears the sun when it's gone  
My face with the trace of your lips  
Will fare from now on and on

### *Naomi Poem*

When our hands are alone,  
they open, like faces.  
There is no shore  
to their opening.

### *Poem*

Even when the roads are empty,  
even at night, the stopsign  
tells the truth.

### *Poempath: Period*

Each syllable  
a steppingstone  
till you stumble  
on this one.

### *Sleep*

We brush the other, invisible moon.  
Its caves come out and carry us inside.

*Stormform*

All the lines of this poem  
would like to contain  
the sound of the rain  
against my windowpane,  
but I'm going to have it remain  
here.

*Trip*

...Jesus walking on the water  
...keeps tripping over  
...the flying fish

*Unspeakable*

A comma is a period which leaks.

2. LAST POEM

1  
It's harder and harder to whistle you up from my pack of dead,  
you lag back, loping in another love.

2  
Rigor mortis walked the streets, its  
coat tattered, face pensive. A howl was heard,

3  
which calmed  
all chimeras.

4.  
My hair hits me.  
Wine lifts its deep sky over me.

5  
Her palms upon my forehead became my fever's petals—  
Her face—altar where my heart is solved—

6  
prepared for me its absence  
in the dish of its cheekbones

7  
Your face alone has no echo in the void. Your face, more marvelous  
each time it flows up your warm arms to break

8

upon your smile.

Your kisses still rustling in my voice,

9

you don't exist. I will fill you with

sweet suicide.

10

Naomi, love others then.

Don't let this be their last poem, only mine.

# KNOTS

## 1. LOVELADEN

Bill Knott

Eric Shanfield

$\text{♩} = 132$  3 Goodbye *mf*

Alto

English Horn

Clarinet in Bb

If you are still a -

6

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

live when you read this, close your eyes.

11

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

I am un - der their lids, —

16

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

grow - ing black.

KNOTS - 1. LOVELADEN

2

**21** Knot

Alto Af - ter you've sewn it, bite the thread off my grave,

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

28

Alto Please leave no loose seam of me to wave a-bove

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

35

Alto The bones un-knit - ting, the flesh un-weav - ing love.

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

**42** Loveladen

Alto The sea is the car - go of emp - ty ships—

Eng. Hn.

Cl.



46

Alto

Moon bears the sun— when its gone My face— with the trace of your lips—

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

50

Alto

Will fare— from now on

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

54

**56 Naomi Poem**

Alto

and on When our hands are— a -

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

59

Alto

lone, they o - pen, like fa - ces.

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

68 Poem

64

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

There is no shore to their o - pen - ing.

69

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

E - ven when the roads are emp-

74

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

ty, e - ven at night,

79

82 Poempath: Period

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

the stop - sign tells the truth.

84

Alto

Each syl - la - ble a step - ping - stone \_\_\_\_\_ till you stum - ble

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

89

91 Sleep

Alto

on this one. \_\_\_\_\_

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

95

Alto

We brush the o - ther, in - vi - si - ble moon.

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

101

Alto

It's caves come out and car - ry us in - side. \_\_\_\_\_

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

108 Stormform

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

116

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

All of the lines of this poem would like to con-tain\_\_\_\_\_ the

124

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

sound of the\_\_\_ rain a - gainst my win - dow pane,\_\_\_\_\_ but I'm go-ing to have\_\_\_ it re-main here.

131 Trip

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

...Je - sus walk-ing on wa - ter

1/2 tr

137

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

...Keeps trip-ping o - ver

143

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

...the fly-ing fish.

**149** Unspeakable

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

152

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

A com - ma is a per - i - od that leaks.

# KNOTS

## 2. LAST POEM

Bill Knott

Eric Shanfield

$\text{♩} = 116$

Alto

English Horn

Clarinet in B $\flat$

*mp*

5

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

*mp*

It's hard - er and hard - er to

9

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

whis - tle you up from my pack of dead,

13

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

you lag back, lop - ing in a - no - ther love.

The musical score is written for Alto, English Horn, and Clarinet in B-flat. It begins with a tempo marking of quarter note = 116. The Alto part contains the vocal line with lyrics. The English Horn and Clarinet parts provide accompaniment, featuring triplet patterns. Dynamics are marked as mezzo-piano (mp). The score is divided into four systems, with measure numbers 5, 9, and 13 indicated at the start of each system. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

17

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

22

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

Ri-gor mor - tis walked the streets,

27

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

its coat tat-tered, face pen-sive.

32

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

A howl was heard,

37

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

which\_\_\_\_\_

*tr* <sup>1/2</sup>

42

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

calmed\_\_\_\_\_ all\_\_\_\_\_ chi -

*tr* *tr*

49

Alto

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

me - ras. My hair hits me.

*tr*

53

Alto


Eng. Hn.


Cl.


Wine lifts its deep sky o - ver me.



61

Alto  Her palms u - pon my fore - head be - came

Eng. Hn. 

Cl. 

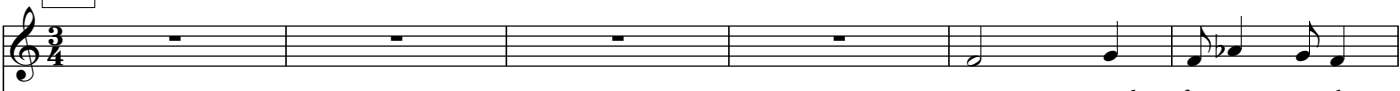
65


Alto  my fe - ver's pe - tals her face al - tar where my heart is sol - ved


Eng. Hn. 

Cl. 


70


Alto  pre - pared for me its ab -


Eng. Hn. 

Cl. 

76

Alto  sence in the dish of its cheek - bones.

Eng. Hn. 

Cl. 

82

Alto  
Your face a-lone has no ech - o in\_

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

88

Alto  
\_ the void. Your face, more mar - ve - lous\_

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

98

Alto  
each time it flows up your warm arms to break\_ u -

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

99

Alto  
pon your smile. Your kiss-es still rus - tling in my voice,

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

104

Alto  
you don't ex - ist. I fill you with sweet

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

114

111  
Alto  
su - i - cide. Na - -

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

117

Alto  
o - mi, love o - thers then. Don't let this be their last po-em,

Eng. Hn.

Cl.

122

Alto  
on - ly mine.

Eng. Hn.

Cl.