

# Long Distance: England

ELLERY AKERS

—for Alexander Graham Bell

Somewhere along the line  
hail strikes the wire  
that holds your voice,  
and that wire,  
slung between two poles,  
sways in the wind.  
I think of the men who stood in a steel bucket or climbed those poles.  
I think of the poles themselves,  
stripped of leaves, standing among live trees  
smelling of sap and chlorophyll:  
spike after spike stuck in the wood  
and still its cells remember the breeze,  
though bolted and coated with creosote.  
Bell is in this call, too:  
his patience during the day,  
trying one magnetic strip after another;  
his doubt at night,  
looking at the moon through a window,  
inhaling the smell of dusty curtains.  
Somewhere back there in the forties  
is a bored woman wearing a hairnet in a radio-transmitter factory,  
her blouse stained with crescents of sweat  
as she places knob after knob on a conveyor belt.  
This copper was dug from the ground, from the bald scrape  
of an open-pit mine, a hill turned to powder,  
and so in this call are the miners and smelters,  
the odor of packed ore dumped on a truck.  
While I'm telling you how much I miss you,  
a red-winged blackbird, his talons wrapped around my voice,  
is picking off bird lice — he shrugs, and his wings blaze.  
While you tell me how much you miss me,  
a rough-legged hawk clasps the wire —  
feathers lift on his thighs  
as he tears off a gopher haunch, and stops and eats, and tears again.  
Our voices course through hundreds of talons  
before they plunge into the ocean, where fish hang above your name  
or bump the cable, and kelp loops ropes around my questions, your answers:  
spliced together as we are  
so I can speak to you; so you can speak to me.