

A Rainy Spring

A Rainy Spring: from the Evergreen State College Library

drip. drip-pip. drop.
dridroppop.
dri-i-popping
one by one
a thousand
can be accounted for
or forgotten.

are you arrogant?
the rain
hits my head, sometimes,
before dropping to the ground.

outside, in my mind,
the faceless rained-on thoughts
mill round like raindrops
eyeteeth
10 thousand tiny pickaxes.

in Puget Sound country
one western red cedar stands
singled out among a rolling
smoke of alder.
along this edge of spring
leaveless winter drains on.

not yet.

ledges pocked by rain
hang full of cement reasoning
over the flat stress wall
to see below below.
what are you afraid of?

i. rainfall overture

pop. pop. pop.
poppin' poppin' poppin'a poppin.
poppin' poppin' poppin'a
poppon'apoppin.
poppin'apina popina

poppinida poppin.
popidapopidapopanida.
ponidapoppinidapopopopnida.

ii. rain

poppoppopnida
popanidapanida pop pop poin'
popanidapop. pop pop opanida
poppin' a poppin' a poppin' a nida poppin'
pop popopopopopop pop plushpop
pop pop plush pipopnida
plush plush poppinida
poppopponida
popanidapanida pop pop poin'
popanidapop pop pop opanida
poppin' a popinapopinapopin a nida poppin'
pop popopopopopopopopina plush
pop opo opophop plushpop
piponida plush plushpop poponida
pop plush popinida

pop plush popopopoppin' pop

iii. end of the rain

plushshshshshush plupllpllp
lip plup pop poppin' a poppinada pop poin' a popa
pop pop polplpa plush
pop pop plush
pop plush pop

pop

pop

plushhhh

the roof
is a quietness
without its mouths.

i am unfinished
unless i cry
with the rain.

For David, Full of Grace: Note of Fear

*I have come from storms
bough-whipped with loneliness
hear the winds of my despair
and shiver them with me.*

Alan Katcher

a hillside in december.
the unspoken language of the ground
finds expression in a roll.
a man in blackness so black
he can't see a thing bends
to pick a flower.
it is his tears, and they overwhelm his eyes
without hope of the outpouring
he needs. taking a shovel,
burying this, on a hillside
a man appears.
nothing there had indicated
him before. the mood
of the sky tells all:
indifferent, and the clouds climb
into billowed miles.
the wind becomes persistent in his hair
like a maddened warrior.
behind his eyes, the flower
is in continual anguish.
shovel splintering in his hands
he is together with all whom he loves
because he is terrible
and lonely.
the height of the skylclouds
pulls off the top of his brain,
and darkness extends
beyond the horizon.
he sees no hope that anything would satisfy
the gaping holes
above, and through them pours unearthly
quiet that will not blend
with the roaring that splits
his bones
and scrapes the marrow with greedy
bleeding fingers.
(onlookers are peeled
by the silence, and it disturbs them.)
screaming, he throws his shovel into the ground

digging
a dozen times before he can utter
a sound. wind is callous
to raw graves
and wind
blows over open moors
in unison with death.
he returns his body to
the soil
without a box.
he grasps the rain to his shoulders
and turns over; no comfort
in a cold bed,
wide open to the force
of a sexless giant. buried under the earth,
waves and waves move over his face;
he finds he is in a river.
twigs snap, float downstream;
he comes breathless
and frightened against
its mouth, where its borders wash away
and extinction
washes in. he treads the boundless
oceanic
white for an instant.
more lonely than ever in the black tide
he puts his feet down
and refuses to go out;
he makes his stand.
turning, he is an apparition that loses its hands
in the swirling waters.
coiling his waist and thumbing
through his skin, the current
hits like a marlinespike
and dissolves in frightening
patterns – faces
lost, a thousand in a minute,
threatening
and disappearing into his confusion.
he wades the roiling eddies
and watches the things he cared for
slip on that slender
momentary canvas, curl his fingers
that created them there
for no more than a moment,
and move on, out into that
white.
trees sway to their waists –
who gleans the bank of its teeth and floats them down

into him?
grappling slippery logs all night
with unnerved fingers,
women rise out of the depths at him –
who crushed their eyes in fists
never angry with stones, like the cold
cold sky?
beds of all kinds lie crushed or
sterile or left
but not forgotten; all howl like Lear
and are washed up in the flower
within his eye of anguish.
god! and god was lost, for men come to the ends
of their lives and find
muscles ripping, ligaments strained
from kneecaps – but last
before the storm-torn day left
him nothing,
he watched birds flee overhead,
using the wind
to climb the infinite sky.
he lay where the hills gave birth to giant thoughts.
distilled in the water, in the
earth, in the ominous, impassive sky,
he emerges – oh the pain
of breaking the seed case,
the strength
of the thin sprout.
december unencumbers may;
incredible beauty moves in little
legs that lift a spider along a flowerstalk.

A Few Men Whose Work Is Not Done

it must be night, for stars are out.
they gather around wells and look in
reaching for their own reflections.
outside, the rain falls
in its steady thousands.
not in a sheet, but in needles
a long downward cry
piercing the earth.

slanting off the construction shed
roofed in plywood
and through midair, more come
and more –
the raw rain rolling cold off
the rough house
drops like hands releasing, one
by one, the roof edge.

a gray slate slides inside, an interval
that is calming –
to watch rain without end
and a few men whose work is not done –
wet men who gather
around wells and reach
for the rings the rain
leaves, spreading
away like fish that were never there,

puddles left by day
into which night falls.

Construction Workers

the construction workers
leave at 4:30
first a few, then a rush
of balding men in overalls
bare-headed in the rain.
older men
grizzled, the rain
rolls down
among their whiskers.

i drive before 5:00
down dusky Kaiser Road
in the rain
and go home
myself, to learn to say
just what i say
and no more.

For Sara, Until We Are Finished

staffing the lines at the Olympia Crisis Clinic

Words come –
over the phone, seas gulf
into our hands.

Sun-washed babies,
take them off the line;
they hang (like Dali prints
hung out with wooden clothespins)
losing from their pouring eyes
light
on suites of light.

Sara Bassett, training me for the Crisis Line,
your face long and loving as a hound dog's,
until we are finished
let us have no failures,
no liberation of the unscrupulously lawful,
no assemblage of saints.

See how
the pins in their shoulders
are pulling their bleached grins crooked!

Would You Follow the Thread of Insanity?

casting the great fire behind (like party laughter)
the thousand spun threads –
fugitive trails of smoky light and cinders –
spindle down like uncertain spiders,
quaintly darting, never far
off course, spitting and cracking
well into the darkness and out of sight;
night-bound, as if a spark
to frighten the baleful swaying trees
had climbed out of the lost man's mouth
and like a blissful sail
on a pitched and slivered ocean
wandered aimlessly away, humming,
through the black cause-ways of waves
disregarding fever and the half-dead,
a small lost kiss burning
in the mouth of night forever.

Repressed Household

The quiet mice scurry
from stove-corner to stove-corner
making the rafters tremble
as if silence were too still.
The chairs crawl in and out the woodwork
when they're not watched.
Momma steps over rugs that slip licentious hands
over her ankles, fishing in her pan with a stainless
steel spoon, while Pappy
rumbles like a furnace under heavy dampers,
carried around the living room
by a restless chair.
Pencils left from children's games
litter the front hall
by the stairs, as if the bannister
were seeking a way
into the French parlor.
Children, put to bed under a patchwork
quilt, ask
what is real.

Rooming with Paul

(for Paul Wolman, Evergreen, 1974)

Paul, pinched and white,
symbolic, revolutionary, and mumbling,
 carried within raw New York winters
 from his home state,
fed and kept alive on despondent Russian authors,
holding out abject hope, soul-sick and dogged.

i lived in the windowless room
in his house.

there, wearing through our opaqueness,
great bodies moved across the backs of our hands,
seas behind our faces. wisps of hair
crawling to the peak of his hatchet head,
Paul, wrenched and drenching,
committed through pages of radical history, ethics, politics
to that irrational sea
whose boundaries we call ourselves,
told me that the symbols he saw when stoned
scared him so badly
that he couldn't stop staring at them.

there, in the house where wild limbs
of tall pines blew in winter storms,
where baleful evergreens swayed and tossed
their arms in the wet yard,
we sat up until 3 a.m.

 talking about it,
pouring orange juice from a pitcher
unwashed in six weeks, the table littered
with 3-day-old newspapers –
underneath, older papers, and food stains,
Paul felt for the symbols that wrapped
their tendrils up his legs –

we pulled at them like roots,
vegetables dug under the moon,
and sent them back and forth
like skittles, testing each other,
 feeling their weight,

carefully aiming our shots,
trying to break one open.
 they felt heavy
like leaded stained glass
or iron molds, rough casts of ourselves.

 beneath our tread
 gulfs leapt
 away –

the black door of the kitchen began to swallow like a fish.
we wanted to talk only about what most frightened us
and piled popped and broken molds on the floor
when table space gave out.

Paul rented me a room with no
windows, where
all the strange language
i spoke to myself
gathered in the four corners of its ceiling
and came back, like a plunging sea, back
over the barrier walls
at me at night.

 there, where all the windows
opened into the interior,
we broke open a door one night–
the night air crept in
and our solitude bled out and ran away.

Paul's Refrigerator

Paul owned a refrigerator
with a door that wouldn't close.
The freezer iced over,
working double-time as it defrosted
and the runoff collected in the vegetable drawer.

Paul, I can't think of you
without the smell of rotting vegetables
pervading my memory.

Your mind was like that refrigerator –
unable to close the door
on something;
numbing yourself enough to forget it
made all the bright green things
about you
 go to hell.

These Things to be Transcended

I peer into myself.
What history untells itself tonight?
Pick up a dusk from the notes of last year;
leave dusk, and nothing solid, behind –
leave me no longer
 an oar
 on a rudderless night.

I look in the bathroom mirror.
As in a play, my character enters,
recognizes there many weird and grotesque
figures (yet does not recognize)
 distortions of himself.

He is introduced around:
 "I am the Jeremy Steve looks at."
 "I am the Jeremy Mother looks at."
All of them stare back, but draw back –
there is an apparition in the shadows
 an ally –
(these things to be transcended)
"I am the Jeremy Jeremy looks at."

Where She Is

there, in the bending
of her waist –

there again

is the movement of her hand –

she sways her hair in the long pine tops,

a thousand of her

on the hills surround this little lake of mine.
in the dark she merges in and out of the trees.

i fell over the edge of the boat where

gently rocking, i paddled

alone on a dusk-ridden lake.

i laughed

and she swayed-smiled down through me.

Half Smile

there, in the bending of eternity's disced hand

a monkey's-paw moon
touches a curious sky. . .

go and do it

there, in the bending.

trees with no waists bend to their knees –

where in the folds
are we to be found?

would you forget

the most important question of all?

Tracing Kerry

empty-headed 10 times
 beneath the bucketing stars
 i filled it up again.

with a finger to the pore
 of your womanhood
 and 3 quick thrusts,

painting with all my fingers –
a line like a brush-stroke
 down the center of your face

balancing the halves
 against each other,
brushing out lines of energy in thin air,
grasping your eyes
 in an hour's full pull

the pressure between our palms –
 a shock before our hands ever touched –
thought like a liquid ran away.
before i could begin to describe
the faintest traces of unfingered flesh,
 so did you.

stars in exploding cisterns fall;
why did i lose
 10 buckets full beneath
 the harkening moon?

The Semblance (for Doug)

(scream-back) the semblance
is that detailed, gut-painful
remembrance of how-to-
keep-from-falling-out-of-being
we fill notebooks with.

(what light is this that piercing
deepest shadow
dispels not one whit of gloom?)

deny existence

when you are
a lack-of-being, the mind
draws back from itself –
bewildered fleeing crying
questions analysis like crusts
of bread thrown out upon
the table –
until finally it stops

and begins
struggling
back.

(too wise for pain and too pained to be wise –
sympathies for Doug
his personal hell
elevating him in a way
above welladjustedSteve and
princelyAndy and outgoingDave)

amid his vast panorama of person and people,
human aloneness and fragile friendships,
deep-wrenching revelation misunderstood
through careful explication – all his
laborious self-twisting half-constructed
knife-in-the-back whywhywhy he screams

tap your rage, tap your rage
they said
and to tap upon this walking stick
he crowned him on his head.

beyond or in

how much of myself have i given away?
all my poems are questions
thrown out the kitchen door
beyond or in the patch of yellow
houselight (warmth and safety ringed by
unfathomable
black
that won't define itself at the edges)
to see if they will crawl back.

the halo of the moon
like a brother
owns half the sky.

Waking Before Five

(for Sue Headlee)

waking before five
i lie alone
beneath memories
and rain
on the roof.

i measure again
the distance to Eugene;
my shoulders curve clean
against a field of sheets.

outside, little frogs
and the first cars of morning.

the rain catches
and steadies
like a breath. i lay
an apple half-eaten
by thoughts of you.

Walk Before Seven

Up all night, went for a walk.
Pine trees black and stalwart,
and the gray distance.

Marshes stand in cold water;
drops hang
from the ends of twigs.

The road leaps with little frogs;
raindrops occasional, unobtrusive
like a modest girl.

Walking home, mist low
I hang my head back –
sky white and too big to say.

Leaves cling, hope to
hopeless branches
black against the sky.

Eyes charred open during
the night vigil –
who did the walking?

Poem to a Girl Reading Yeats

*bending over our neighboring study carousels
The Evergreen State College Library, December 1973*

climb the guilty as a stair
and on their shoulders ponder there.
the scene shifts too quickly
and things change as we use them.

the 10-thousand pick-axes of rain,
no less the nameless stabs of ant-letters
endlessly drum sodden their
disregarded message into our bent heads.

if we breathing share
could, breathing, share one kiss?
a chamber within
should not be a vault without.

flowers to me

my eyes hurt in my head
like stringed instruments
tuned too tight and abandoned in the grass.
i said they seem like
flowers to me –
you plucked
bright fields from wild
March and light blue ground-flowers
from April, and they look
like flowers to me.
but no, you denied it
even as you showed me sprays
cast irregular as daisies,
with the red-pink-white
thin people ringing the cup-yellow center,
and i leaned back and sucked
the honey of the sun;
but no, again the plaintive
strings of your zither
hidden in the trees
brought me up short –
though if ever i saw them swaying
in meadow bunches
they were flowers,
washed in a teasing light
rainfall
thrown out from her fingers
as she lumped heavy
and ugly back against the white-barked
pine, with little pine cones
strewn all around and the zither in her lap,
crying thickly under her sunglasses.

across the meadow a banjo
started up,
growing seedlings fast as the picker
could slide them into the cup
of his frailing hand;
they quick presst round
to drown the inchoate rain
clapping on cement steps
high in my skull –
but i wouldn't think of it.

"you flowers" i started again
"Jesus i can feel beautiful"
and then smiled
but she picked up and left, against the howling
headwind of the banjo.
"you flowers" i said
"its damn disappointing
if you haven't seen your friends
for a while, and they
don't call you
and they don't
stop by to see you "
and i watched her go.
then all around – the square and the grass
and the planted trees,
the clock tower cut like an etching
against the sky –
no one was left but me
and the sky,
and i spread laughing falling
back on my back
and we pressed against each other,
just happy to have someone to love
for a while.

Came Liberation for the Faint Wordy Half-Hearted

came liberation for the faint wordy half-hearted;
feared interested; desperate to ignore
came loaded with brain-strung pianos
wanting cause without caused; braincold
came distant with grief and guilt – liberation for
disinterested men crying interest

feigning disinterest
pained disinterest
revolt at a distance
came shedding pennies shiny with no face.

came meek to lay unheld, infed cherished conversation
frozen in beds.

came crippled with translations from the
unheard halved revolution;
came unshouted with goddamned and goddamned
words of their feet-sore-on-this-ground;
cluttering voiceless
plungered, shoved, body-armless
farced and swallowed disguted
on the plain of the table-endless

with publications of random
disinterest covering their hands.
disincested came floating brain-sterile
disinfected discomplexed
disundercompleted
disconnected dismentioned disrespected
adjusted –
disselfed.

came fused and wanted a blow, wanted a
pot – WANTED A FUCK; and so
wanted impotence in two operations. wanted
an undifferential
sexual lobotomy with side-bets
and drinking privileges.

came stinking of mud-assed slides and apologized.
wanted a cyanide shower to prove it.
came cynical-fat; came sick and responded (when appropriate)
with a drag of cheeks toward ears
passing for untold
hate when comments disguising failed,

and they bent over

when some fathead pissed on all the tomato plant's
green tomatoes and said

"shove it up your ass;"

came;

LEARN TO GO.