The Quivering of the Rocky Moon

Carl Leiden*

*Iowa State College

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Abstract

Life, like the silvered illusion of the castle’s pawn...
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Rocky Moon

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Prologue

Life, like the silvered illusion of the castle’s pawn,
Begins with the ebb tide, and absorbs
The mistiness of creation . . . the wet hollyhock,
Prickly and waiting for dawn . . . the embraces
Of evening, like the body of a man,
Dissolved in chloroform . . . summer effervescences,
Creeping in wild grape, trailing at the end of years,
Expiring in wet earth . . .
Miasmal soundings, guttural seething dissonances
Of the nebulous earth . . . and life begins
With the tide,
Washed up on the beach, the debris
Of centuries, filtered with the sighs of men . . .
Life begins. . .

The East wind, washed free from the earth’s gravity,
Comes in along the tidal boulders,
Across the tempered coast
And strews in among the rocks its one-celled creatures,
And leaves in the crevices the talk of yesterday,
The uncertainty of tomorrow.
The wind is empty,
But without reason there are other thoughts,
Companions of the dust in the air,
Sharp and fragile as the dust
Like incisions in the earth’s brain:
Caustic thoughts whipped into a frenzy of moments
In the foliage of space.
The wind is empty but emptiness is not nothing.
Capricious vacuity if anything,
And humble to the ancient rocks, the strains
Of ethnic disquietude . . . each day as
Dead as the day before,
Yet still alive in the frothing tomorrow's dawn.
Empty they call it, yet the enigma
Of wind-stains lies across the mountain,
Though huge, unwieldly to a blow,
The terse fashion of prophecy.

The empty wind . . . its unanswerable laughter
Assails the lonely hawk in a frozen sky
And parades like colloidal particles of rainwater
Through legions of white daisies . . . white petals
For the hawk's myopic tendencies . . .
Browned petals floating in a dead wind.

Dead though the wind was,
Its leaden conscience distilled into a fashionable density,
It stirs youth. And the young,
Like globules from the sun, harden rapidly
And harden to a crust . . . the sodden bubbles, seething in the
mass,
The old crust cracks and dead air escapes,
Malodorous atoms into pollution:
And the empty wind: symmetry of
Blackened handrails and windows of misshapen glass
Fibrous while living to a blind understanding
And beckoning to alien faithfulness: pagan,
A house of vacant souls, forgotten in oblivion.

Pressed close to the earth's blister
The years quench their thirst in retrospect,
The California big sticks look well in a jacket of tan smoke,
The spark flown from Maine by the sea wind
Is still alive, still fertile with fractious discontent.
The canorous riddle is there: cacophonic uselessness,
Bristling with impatience and anxious
For sardonic forgetfulness . . . the monotony of Euclid's books
Stretches beyond the primer of conic projections,
Stretches into Freudian nightmares: Palagyi,  
*Wahrnehmungslehre* and the tongue-dipped Parmenides  
Rough wetted, studded to entice the empty wind.

But shredded from a limpid somnolence are bits  
Of honeyed seeds, mixed with the dust of the air  
And scattered, even in the withered leaves of Spencer,  
Prolegomena to all future silliness,  
A noumenon of human extravagances, the specialty  
Of scepticism . . . a miscellaneous growth of metaphysics . . .  
But the seeds are there: beneath each mountain  
There lies the molten interior,  
And once, every thousand decades  
The summit disappears into the fluid below . . .  
And the seed lives.

The elixir of the stone-wood is waiting lonely  
Beside the black-broken silence of the dawn . . .  
Turned from sticky waste by the fallen . . .  
The slanderer speaks to the forest,  
To the frost-tipped moss on Northern bark,  
And asks in slippery whisper the name of heaven.  
But the moss does not know; the sun never touches there.  
And like some Socratic cycle, the wind answers him,  
Answers him with a burst of life,  
And heaven speaks to the wind, and the earth joins.  
Sweet rain is there,  
Everywhere, and evenly upon all.

The uneven plow unfurls the moist seed,  
And sparkling disturbances under a lurid snow,  
A lupine eagerness of the slit seed, along the  
Blacked furrow of soil, along the rain sodden  
Sand of mankind . . . the seed sprouts,  
Carbon rings and magnesium bonds of the sun  
Appears bubbling on the surface,  
And the frozen hawk sights prey and dives,  
A lone Cooper's hawk in a warm surface of seedlings,  
New blood for past efforts . . . from the empty wind,  
Swept in across an Eastern coastline and the settling dust  
Of forgotten seeds made moist by a forgiving sky . . .
Epilogue

Up along the snow capped crags of *Sierra Madre*
Feathered between the last of the Rocky chains,
Lies an old boulder, wind smoothed . . . never touched by the sea.
Each year young eagles spatter its sides with ugliness,
And always it accepts from the wandering wind
Its share of the earth's dust . . . a mountain goat
Scrambles across its face in spring.
After it is gone the face is not the same . . .
But always the rains from the Pacific come,
In the heat of night the water soaks into the lime,
The face is new, washed clean,
Like the myriad shapes of snowflakes,
Each new face is there, smoothed by the rain . . .
Like cloud-washed stars.

* * *

The Fall Before

Ruth Midgorden

*ARTH A snapped the radio off, yawned and closed her economics book. It was twenty minutes past midnight.

“Clear,” she observed, pressing her nose against the cold window pane. Wrapping the blue housecoat around her feet, she curled up in her father's old Morris chair and unfolded the paper.

“Haskins named ball chairman,” announced a headline halfway down the page. “Geneva Haskins, art major, was chosen chairman of this year's Home Economics Ball at a meeting of the Home Economics Club Council last night. The dance will be held Nov. 7 in—.”

Martha tossed the paper to the desk.

“Remember last year's ball?” she asked, leaning against the cushioned back and closing her eyes. “Do I remember!” she murmured. “I don’t suppose I'll ever forget that ball or that autumn.”

She sighed and kicked a slipper off. It fell to the carpet softly.