

# *To the Music of Mid-November Rain & Snow*

"I love the obvious, creaking machinery by which the moon is hauled across the darkened cyclorama on invisible wires."

Norman Lock, as interviewed by Deron Bauman for *elimae*

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## Introduction

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*outside it's raining either water or stars. - Cesare Pavese*

Dear Kathryn,

It's grey on this coast today. Waves high, nor'easter impending. I think of you there on Puget Sound, this electronic medium linking us. Poetry links us. Somehow, Pavese, too. Right now, with the comfort of my books piled high, I'm in front of the screen reading poems by Pavese exiled from his wonderful book **Hard Labor**. The online mag *Slope* <http://www.slope.org/> has managed to locate a new translation of these rare poems. Death has a lot to say. It must. Often I've tracked the drive Freud found beyond pleasure. Pavese's anguish, his suicide sitting next to him like a shadow from a reading lamp. If death is this honest, why cower from it?

I really don't want to belabor the point here, but I just read the perfect poem, a prose poem by him, translated by Richard Jackson there in *Slope*, "Street Song" makes my point. It's "about" a man who appreciates life to the fullest because he's just gotten out of prison. Maybe prison's the closest thing to death in life, & not subtle like the death drive. Upside-your-head obvious, the deprivation prison orchestrates. The gates open, senses rejoice: "It's a joy to meet people on the street that talk to us and to speak with them alone, and grab some girl with a push. It's a joy to whistle while waiting in a doorway for girls and then walk arm in arm and take them to movies to smoke on the sly, and press against their beautiful knees. It's a joy to talk to them, to fondle them and laugh."

In between these previous paragraphs I ran outside, first splatterings of rain on the window urging me to gather some wood from the pile, split a few logs. Talk of Death got me thinking, appreciating, heightening senses. Death does that to me, for me. It's a big black Cadillac, Death, pretty obvious to us poets. Yet, it took Freud's thoroughly scientific genius to define it in **Beyond the Pleasure Principle**, that extremely difficult text proving the drive back toward inorganic matter. The joy of riding both drives at the same time. How? Writing. The sentence. "And at night, to feel yourself pulled onto the bed, and feel two arms pull you down; and to think of the day that you are out of prison and it's cool even in the sun. From morning till evening to circle around drunk, and to look laughing at the people who pass by and enjoy everyone - even the dumb ones - feeling alive on the streets."

You'll be drinking your Champagne today, I'll have red, the weather suits red. Talk, that's joy. Rain talked. The wood. Said, "I'm dead. But not unhappy."

## The Dying Leaf

*He who has kissed a leaf  
need look no further. - WCWilliams*

Focusing  
its tenuous hold  
on the natural world, the desire to return,  
Freud said, (Eros with dust  
on his tongue) to inorganic matter, the leaf  
captured by Man Ray  
in an act of transformation,  
substance to shadow.  
A state no less vibrant  
than before.  
Calyx to Vortex!

After the workout I went feminine, picking roses, pricking me the white & red roses yelling, "Take us, take us inside, inside your senses where Beauty resides." Quiet down roses, November roses, quiet in your sacrifice. No, an African daisy over there, orange, clamoring to join in the chorus. Choric. The sound Kristeva says gurgles in us before forming a syllable. It's African & Greek. When I think of her, too, I think of her great respect for Dostoevsky, the importance she lends to the oppressiveness of his father causing the utter sternness of his superego forcing him to speak, to write, & of course the last-minute word of reprieve from the Death sentence in prison.

When are we happier than jotting down the words, feeling the words rise up, putting our ears to the edge of the well of the unconscious? We prayed to write, right? Seven, eight years old, praying to write. Writing praise. "Street Song" is the perfect title! What Whitman, what Kerouac, what Rimbaud, what Max Jacob walking around Paris with Picasso, what James Wright around Venice? What we want! Songs, walking. Or paragraphs, lines. Breaking out of the prison of not talking. Not appreciating the grandness of life. Adding to the grandness of life by considering its alternative. I hear you're toasting me later today, across a continent, uttering a word or two of praise for someone you've never met, except on the page, on the screen. Thank you for that, thank you for recognizing my work. Work, joy, wine, death's reminder, wind, roses, oak, maple, rain, which is the perfection of seconds.

Yours truly,  
Robert Gibbons

# **To The Music of mid-November Rain & Snow**

**Robert Gibbons**

## **A Calligraphy**

Birds circling the moon setting. Don't think they haven't desired it. I saw a snowy owl once in broad daylight brightening up a tree equal to this March 1<sup>st</sup> moon. Often it's what one hasn't one wants: darkness & blood over light & air. There's a huge difference between being in a black mood & in the mood for black. Not tenebrous, but the tensile nature of instinct, quicker & stronger than will. A calligraphy of bones under a choreography of dance. The brilliant black sheen of death illuminating the next second.

- Robert Gibbons

## **The Black Rock**

*For Kathleen*

A black rock woke me. Somnambulist up to that moment. Then the new moments burst, as if alder shrubs surrounded the pure lake water of each one, or single summer berried, blue rasp black, burst open in a mouth. Time visible, tactile. For variously, with her gone, out of town on business days on end, I zombied around the house, or neighborhood, or played dead in bed. But the black rock, shaped anthropomorphically, a shaman, emitted a violent, aurally eruptive cold stare at my waste of Time. I turned my life around! Internally, from that moment on, love each ray & refraction of light, as if it were her visage, her skin.

- Robert Gibbons

## How to Get it Out!

Take Euripides down to the sea. Horde of Bakkhai, wind swirling around waves & stones like a wild animal, choric utterance welling up with what it finds down there under the surface below the rational. That's just it: getting the words down. Down to where the blood is, the viscera, one must follow in the footsteps of the Maenads, follow Dionysos down to the *tenemos*, where Karoly Kerényi got it right, saying the god of the irrational will always do the one thing required of him when he sets foot on sacred ground: commit sacrilege! The only greater desire for her is desire to praise her.

First appeared in *Slow Trains*

- Robert Gibbons

## **That Face**

The cops won't let Eddie sell papers at the State Street stop for the store down on Washington. At his age he'll never bother getting a vendor's license. Told me he visited his wife for two years in the nursing home before taking her back for the final six months, bathing her twice a day. Wishes he bought a second black leather jacket like the one he wears for \$10 long ago. Worked at Suffolk Downs for years, with betting slips, not horses. Selling papers on the sly is as close to begging as a man can get. Today Eddie had his blue duffel bag, one paper out, hiding like a criminal at the back entrance. Still has regulars who give him a finner, not for the paper, (they don't read the *Herald*,) but for that face he's mastered, lugubrious, a word straight out of hard-scrabble, ancient Siciliy with roots in doleful & mournful, especially to a ludicrous degree. One could call Eddie an artist, a mime, more than con.

- Robert Gibbons



## **Pavese's *Diary*, the Effects of his Suicide?**

Again, the black water, & sudden realization that my aesthetic delight in it is for its rarity alone. Again, avoidance of fellow travelers. Walk out on deck twice to escape regurgitated breath of the dead inside the cabin. Bill, who stands out there in the worst weather wonders what is up? "This air is like that of Lazarus's," I respond with the cabin door still ajar, nodding back toward the dead totally unawares. Later, a shudder of apprehension, combined with a subtle paterfamilias with the author, when I toss my watch as a bookmark into Pavese's *Diary*. February, 1940. The self-analysis is excruciating. Does a man really need to know that much of himself? Haruspex examining entrails. His own. Writing to himself in the third person. My watchband suddenly turns into one of the leather reins driving the horses of the chariot of death. Timepiece itself, utter presence, connects to the end of February, when the writer wonders if thought leaves a trace on *things*, "for example, when the individual dies in the very act of thinking."

first appeared in *Gargoyle*

- Robert Gibbons

## **To the Music of mid-November Rain & Snow**

Waylaid this morning by a black locust, the early sun wrapping it in matted gauze. After lunch I rerouted back, this time sun directly behind it. Gold-black limbs visible inside sheer yellow dress of leaves, contorted, dancing.

Across the street, its back to the train station wall, an adolescent maple, shy, red, as if mustering up the courage to make its move toward the slightly older locust.

It will, this weekend, when predicted mid-November rain & snow blows through. Monday may well find them stark naked, still apart, shivering, slightly.

- Robert Gibbons

### **Written in End Papers of a Used Book on Li Po, Purchased for \$1 Long Ago**

Tenuous weather heading toward absolute demarcation of seasons. Confluences. A woman writes from Puget Sound, that somehow amid the turmoil swirling around her there, my work arrived on her desk like quiet eyes. In the midst of a project on Godard, I think of his comparison of the image of man to a blank sheet of paper. Desire & strife of my own recently called up a dream of a red zither, beautifully varnished, hovering in the air like music itself, while just now I read that Li Po placed his Chinese zither with Phoenix frets in the hands of a woman, professional courtesan and musician. This confluence reminds me of walking down St. Stephens Street last week, past Symphony Hall & all those apartments housing New England Conservatory students, when out of an open window a mournful Mahler practiced on violin emerged. Yet, here & there one could pick up Asian accents, isolated notes, as if plucked from pristine strings of the koto.

- Robert Gibbons

## **Columbia River Gorge**

The moss covered monoliths.

We are on our way to The Dalles.  
I am the passenger this time.

Where the old highway parallels the freeway  
it runs along the ridgeline higher up.  
Sometimes we see antique bridges  
made of white concrete.

The snow is melting.

Waterfalls cascade down a cliff face.  
The rain is coming down too.

We see five rainbows.

Within its pale bands  
along its narrow length  
there is such stillness  
in a rainbow,

and so much motion,  
such an absence of color  
in a waterfall.

As we move along  
the long black highway  
I drift into sleep

and everything changes.

- Harold Bowes

## **A Conspiracy of Water**

Imagine that you do not have a tightrope beneath your feet and that your shoes are not made of ice. Here, balance is not an abstraction, but a matter for the inner ear where repose is as smooth as a seashell. Beneath your gliding feet, there is not so much a circus of furious machines in wait to grind your caution to a fault, as a fragrant expanse of clay, which can be molded in an instant by a word. These days are not a frozen display among trees, so you are almost out of the woods. You are not a prisoner confined foot by foot above a factory of murderous intent. You are on a beach, beneath a hat made of shells and seaweed. Here the lookout seems infinite. Every path is a conspiracy of water. You could swim here.

- Bryson Newhart

## **The Mill**

The grinding wheel  
resolves your wheat to flour.  
Water from the mill stream  
flows across the disks  
to power the wheel.  
A paper birch grows  
on the gentle banks  
the roots diverting the flow  
to trickle through  
shallow alleys of moss and cress.  
Miles before, the snow caps  
cry themselves off the mountain  
to feed the stream.

You only thought of flour,  
not of the seasons behind it.

- Lynn Shipley

## To Be Given, To Be Broken, To Be Shared

I remembered the campanile in Rome. The bats in teams swaying magnetically around it as my husband and I watched, drunk on wine, and outlaw on the rooftop of Hotel Maxim. Expounding on why the next pope should be a woman, like Giovanna, the legend who revealed her sex as she gave birth during her papal procession. My grandmother, after my grandfather's wake says to us, *You must travel. Because the world opens, intensifies, creates new ideas as you cross, mix its material. Stories. Because you remember everything when you travel.*

The cities' lights are strewn pearls of frogspawn. Highways, suburbs a phosphorescent plankton floating on the dark indeterminable land as I fly from Pittsburgh to Dallas to attend the morning's funeral.

In a car on a road in the forest on a mountain, my dream begins. Over the backseat, I touch my grandfather's tentative hand, ivory and childlike. Such a different hand. I have no organizing principle except that I want, I'm tired, and afraid. Hoping that he will guide me in the posture of his powerful years of leadership, but all he says in his gallant and tremulous voice are the words he repeated in his last years, days: *What can I do? I try not to want. What do I need to do?*

Large blank spaces, white pages left in my notebook between writing the past few days are Fear and Courage, blinding light. And like that, in an instant of traversing incredible space, everything changes.

- Claire Cowan-Barbetti

## **Atlas**

To hold the sky and the god's shifting  
freight in place requires brute resolution,

not feats of balance. To stand implacable,  
haunches bunched, shoulders straining,

the sky ostensibly clenched  
in calloused palms—

this is the trick of my still-  
life. Self supporting,

the folds of the heavens droop  
well below my locked knees, the aerial

weight resting on stolid earth,  
deep valleys, sleeping eyelids, breaking

waves. My post is an effort  
to maintain character, the suffering

engraved on my face the burden  
of knowing the world's misplaced reliance

on my being, and my own refusal to let go  
and be released from this same delusion.

- Tobias Seamon



## **Rapture, Raptor**

After dinner the conversation turned  
as it often does to the major hens  
and how they recognize their own eggs  
from those placed in the communal nest  
by the minor ones. I can't remember  
when you slipped your dress off  
but I think it was when the discussion  
moved to Mute Swans and the ceremony  
of swan-upping. Your breasts sang  
through the lights of the flickering candles  
and the feverish way you moved your body  
against the music's ethereal glow drew  
a note of interest from among the shadows  
on the patio as the host reminded me  
that the New World vulture is voiceless  
and that there is very little difference  
in plumage between the sexes,  
which I thought was a heavy price  
to pay for the ability to fly  
and suffer one's desire in silence.

- Thomas Wooten

## **Synovia**

I craved your words  
And when they would not come  
I looked for you everywhere  
And when you did not come  
I tried everything I tried  
And when you will not come  
I die for you a death unlike any other.

- Marcy Jarvis

from **Natalia**

As I open the *Tristia*, evening spreads its nets,  
and a woman I love runs from a parking lot

--she attacks with passion, lifts her hand  
and puts it in my hair. Between my neck  
and my shoulder, she begins the inventory of surrender:  
*in this invisible light I have no self.*

I tell her to leave me alone, inside my childhood  
where the men carry flags across the street.  
“You will run away,” she says, “I already  
see it: a train station, a slippery floor, a seat.”

She departs again and again into the waiting room of airports,  
a bride of departure, the bride of a bride.  
I see a valley of her tongue, her face of rain, of earth.  
On her cheek: a drop of sweat.

But Natalia beside me, turns the pages,  
what happened and did not happen  
must speak and sing by turns.  
My chronicler, Natalia, I offer you two cups of air  
in which you dip your little finger, lick it dry.

- Ily Kaminsky, from Musica Humana

## **Moonlight**

*Su Tung-P'o, did the peasants ever get  
those aqueducts you lobbied for  
from the mandarin dogs at the top,  
with their long & curling nails?*

What is reality? I do not know,  
And--for reasons Gautama knows--  
I do not care.

Forced by some Inquisitor to answer,  
I would be simply derivative--  
Mutter some pangloss gibberish,  
Hold up a lily or a rose.

Early this morning I drove the Military Highway  
The wrong way around the City of the Sun.  
The sun was spreading in circles and waves  
As I registered at the Terra Cotta Institute.

Neruda's shade was lecturing on poetry and metaphysics--  
On why the smell of barbershops in Chile  
Had made him sad to be a man.

There were other seminars as well:  
In smiling and foot massage.  
In dreaming in peasant patois.  
In how to emulate the penguin's  
Oily baldness of success.

*Su Tung-P'o, we are a motley rank, a sinuous retinue.  
Ghosts staggering along in moonlight spilling wine.*

- Jim McCurry

## **The Occasion of a Table**

The occasion of a table is not to use it for design, modern furniture eschews both pendants and towels, one moment launders the next, and the next, a pale regret clings together in damp strands and below, with a squeak, the lid of the hamper opens slightly, sucks in a cuff a sock two pant legs, then squeaks closed.

There are such a lot of little noises in every house in time, such a lot of little apertures and vents and soffits full of unquiet secrets, to eavesdrop in the afternoon does no harm to wind chimes, wind chimes make a circular sound a sound of delicate shells, of sheer metal dreams touching uniquely deflecting also turning in the air, the air is almost on fire, light peels off and light peels on and light serves no purpose no vision lasts forever the world without is a luminous skin.

- Marc Kipniss

## Natural Conditions

The mourning dove's natural condition  
is presuming it's in trouble.  
It is afflicted by the demons of outcome,  
of how can it be sure.  
The quick neck telescopes to no avail,  
the pea brain is shaken in its cage,  
a wet martini, and something announces:  
these are your origins.  
Do you really want to see this through.  
Are we not deep enough already.

At the center the heart is a hard seed.  
It can pass through  
a gut unchanged despite the intimate  
caress of enzymes.  
We learn early sex is one of the ways  
to say admire as well as crave.  
There are days like this in October  
where we begin to hear  
boats sensually chafe in their lifting straps.  
Even this reminds us  
sex is the imitation no one minds, and then  
milkweed bursts into fluff.

- Allan Peterson

## **What is Fair**

December announces itself when winter's brown is pink, rouging the wet silk that mists up from the ice. The way we make the poem of the beloved says the whole shebang about the world we have.

Unblushing, I meet my husband at night. He drives through my body like a speeding car raising parched leaves on asphalt. I hear them land and scrape under his sighs. Is this fair?

I want to move to a warm world where I sing and you listen. When a woman forgets to make her own pictures, the light leaves her skin. I cannot recall being fair. Where will the next wet road fling us?

The first voice is the true voice. Trust the first voice. Thrust it far. Let the tongue out. Lick the adjectives hissing at the margins. Cross them out. Tell the ebon verb that lines the exposure.

Last, shine a bright light so a stanza culls my new face. Home is bloodied over now. The ice I thought I saw is melted. Even the crystals, rime. How to find a place where blue can be a warm color? Drive over here.

- Deborah S. Greenhut

## **Itemized, Suburban & Astronomical**

I endeavored to make this a poem of purely syllabic verse, four stanzas of seven lines apiece, each line having seven syllables. But I did not wish to divide this into seemingly existent divisions that separated the inseparable words, lovers, and galaxies. As we were lovers then and still love now, we pulled into a random county subdivision to steal more time from our adolescent curfews. With the headlights off and the radio muted, the only light shone from the peering moon. And so she and I kissed to playfully christen this automobile. We felt and touched one another so even every particular pore on our skins bumped with chill and acquiescence. Our bodies' heat steamed the windows and our whispers quieted the insects' banter. But as our paranoia would have it, her blouse went back down along with excitement when we thought we saw oncoming headlights into this private place. Still, another intimacy followed as she told me to look at the moon. All of the moon's peaceful seas rolled amidst its crateral shadows. The cabbage thief spilled his latticed bullion in fleeing to the longitudinally-jutting Arzachel. Everything spills because of some satiety. No refuge goes uninhabited or unobserved. Then it became time to return, still holding hands as the key ignited the engine and time began to rotate again. The intonation of pesky mosquitoes rose, and the dash-clock flashed our belated hour. Like the cabbage thief. Like that one time I fell asleep on her shoulder and drooled on her blouse and she described it as "cute." How I love her more than the canopied nothing on which galaxies rest lazily.

- Paul Felsch



## **The Day I Pretended I Was a Tailor**

The day I pretended I was a tailor  
was an interesting day, to be sure.  
My wife yelled down to ask what the clatter  
was all about, and I did not answer.

The day I pretended I was a tailor  
began as a sunny and pleasant Saturday  
but soon dwindled into a commotion-filled Saturday  
with short, corpulent people dancing here and there.

The day I pretended I was a tailor  
was the first day the U.S. bombed Iraq.  
It was nighttime there, a hundred mortars flashing,  
but from where I sat life look practically normal.

The day I pretended I was a tailor  
ended up being similar to the day I pretended to be a jailer.  
Both days involved a dinner of sliced duck and Dijonnaise,  
both days made my "list of all-time greatest days,"

both included broad variances in both behavior and mood,  
both days ended with a series of questions asked  
by a policeman who "just happened to be in the neighborhood,"  
both of them ended with going to bed.

- Aaron Belz

## **My Lover, My Entomologist**

You remind me of the moment an organism marked by denial comes into question, the way you hold your hair pencil, stabbing into parasitic bundles. Like the white of an egg beneath a needle you suffer, oh ravager of living entrails. Life is fun with you, for the attainment of sexual maturity at the larval state has shown us a language induced by punctures, whose prolonged cries give reason to the innerworkings of those slim and elegant imps, whose bronzed backs and pale legs veil the mystery of certain truths we will never discover. I cook your mushroom omelet this morning and ponder why, for example, as you orgasmed last night, you cried: "Divine law is just!" But then you changed your mind, and as I slept you inscribed the following words on my belly: "Divine law is negotiated through a certain set of ritual pacts and treaties by which certain ideas are said to cancel out their opposites." But now, as you explore the sturdy armor of pupae, and busy yourself with the poison of scorpions, you tell me that life is not so simple, and who I am to argue, for through you I have come to understand the cunning laws of the embryo, the extrageometrical raptures to be found in tentacles, and the similarities between a maggot and a little flower. And as we walk together, from the known to the unknown, the dance of an insect who has just been injected by your hypodermic syringe, the convulsions and contractions, remind you to wave at your neighbors, to smile at strangers, to kiss me in secret places.

- Daniel Borzutzky

***Fin***

The censors came from the Balkans,  
from Kenya, from Cuernavaca  
and Japan, in the springtime  
to try to cover up the private parts of the largest tree  
in the world.

On the other hand,  
postmasters were still in love with their wives  
after all those years  
and a boy named Marty followed the planet Jupiter  
across the clear night sky with his telescope.

To die in somebody else's sleep remained  
stylish with everyone,  
and what was important was still  
all the stuff that would never be written down.

- Joshua Edwards