

Tom Wayman / THREE POEMS

THE COUNTRY OF EVERYDAY: TALK

Conversation I love to share, the gossip
of literature: why Creeley builds
his line, what occurs in the clefts of Bly's brain.
Also the detail that turns a printed name
into a man: Vachel Lindsay
drinking a bottle of Lysol to die, and the night
Edwin Arlington Robinson
refused to be seduced by Isadora Duncan.

Horror tales about the scientists of art:
the senior literature course announced on "The Book as Object:
the Printed Book Considered as an Artifact, Irrespective of Content."
Yvor Winters' choice
of the three greatest American poets of the last century:
Emily Dickinson, Jones Very and F. G. Tuckerman.
And the professor of English who writes: "There will be little scope
for the teaching of writing in *this* department."

And the inside of jobs: where you hang up your coat
in the morning, and exactly what happens after that.
Newsom's stories about fighting forest fires up north:
"After the copter dropped us, we found the fire all right
but by then it was pretty well a few patches of flame
and a lot of smoke. Since we wouldn't get picked up for a week
in the evenings we'd go out and throw a few logs on
just to keep warm."

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And his friend off fishing
tied up one night south of Alert Bay. Two drunks
making a racket all evening down at the wharf.
Finally about midnight, they wake everybody on board
tearing around the bay in their outboards, yelling.
Then, a silence. One man in the water, after his boat tipped
when the other drunk leaped from his own boat to his friend's.
An outboard roaring away into the channel, and a body
bumping along the dock. "I got a pike pole on it
but I couldn't lift the stiff out of the water.
I yelled for the guy who ran the wharf to help
but he said he had to go radio the RCMP. Shit,
if it had drifted away down the inlet
people would have been days looking for it. The cops
couldn't have got there for hours anyway.
Finally, somebody gave me a hand and we hauled it out."

And the hows of hitchhiking: Dennis sleeping
under an overpass outside Winnipeg
where there was already a ring of black stones for a fire.
A guy I picked up near Kenora, who'd spent
two days in the bush by the road, saying
"If I was in a hurry . . ."

Thunder Bay to the Sault the worst part of the Trans-Canada for
rides.

Steve hitching across the continent twice:
L.A. to Texas to Toronto (though some of it he did
in Georgia's sportscar).

More stories of travel. A good place to camp
in southern Oregon.

ALLIGATOR POEM

*arrest of the poet Heberto Padilla: March 20,
1971; Law On Loafing decreed from the
Palace of the Revolution: April 1, 1971*

So the day is not as beautiful as the dawn.
In the new sun, the guerilla faces sharpen
become distinct — this one now appears like a desk
crowded with papers, here an ear suddenly seems
a factory chimney, this eye is a cemetery.

Somewhere a can opener tears at a jagged lid of metal.
A hand spins the top away: something is discovering
a person is not a cartridge, everyone
does not slip neatly into bullet clips
and then into oiled magazines.

But *forward guerillas!* Here is a man to whom the Revolution
is a cement floor, another to whom it is a book that can speak . . .

For me the Revolution is lies. Lies no one asked me to tell
but lies that I told. The first lie
was that what was eaten in the Palace had something to do with me.

I ate at my kitchen table, meal after meal
between lies, mumbling more lies between mouthfuls.
They continually asked me on the loudspeaker-radio
didn't I believe that what I had to eat
was what they ate at the Palace?
What could I do but agree?

The second lie had to do with the country.
I was supposed to say that my country did not exist.
No one told me to say this. But I was supposed to say it.
Now I tell you it is a lie: the land
has to live here too. Even my uncle
and the man who delivers milk.

Tom Wayman

The third and fourth lies you know.
The fifth lie, which is entirely my own invention
and I confess this freely, is this poem.
This poem particularly denounces the Law On Loafing
because it has nothing to do with the earth.
This poem denounces the arrest of Heberto Padilla, because
while a guerilla can make history, only a poet
can make justice, which is love, which can be made by anybody.

The poem is a lie. It is a rock, hurled at the heart
of Jorge Risquet Valdes, whom I name, minister of labor
and every member of the executive board
of the Central Organization of Trade Unions. There are many
hands
on this rock, this crowbar digging at the bricks that divide us
and some of these hands are filthy with blood and you will see
only these hands. But my hands are here too:
hands that have swollen with work and gone soft and worked again.

And my hand says: though you legislate against the rainbow
I am laughing, though you imprison the butterfly
I am laughing, though you come for me with a stick or
let me live forever out on the sidewalk, I am laughing

In the night of nothing to eat but an onion
In the night of the new model Cadillac
I am laughing, I am crying
and have no slogan to end this poem

MIDWEST RAIN

The rain falls into Michigan.
On an ordinary Tuesday afternoon in the autumn
I sit reading in a house built of stone.

Jones' house: rain splashes through the full leaves.
Water runs down the stone.

But an entire floor of this place was constructed under the ground.
The bathroom, kitchen and dining corner
loom in the dull green light of windows opening at the top of the
walls.

A root cellar down here, already damp with rain
holds shelves of preserves, barrels
and tubs of the first white shoots of fall-budding
poems.

The same rain later arrives in Minnesota.
I sit in my foreign car on a green-shaded street
lined with St. Paul's mansions, watching out through the downpour.
Everywhere I have driven this year I have found old friends again.
Every city or town I have stopped in I have been made welcome.