

SELECTED NATURE POETRY

Environmental Studies 243 / English 243: Introduction to Nature Writing, fall 2014

David Barnhill

Wed Sept 3

LINES COMPOSED A FEW MILES ABOVE TINTERN ABBEY (Selections)

To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened:--that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,--
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

.....

For nature then

....

To me was all in all.--I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.--That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur, other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompence. For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.
--Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" (selections)

Mon Sept 8

THE WAY TO RAINY MOUNTAIN

A single knoll rises out of the plain in Oklahoma, north and west of the Wichita Range. For my people, the Kiowas, it is an old landmark, and they gave it the name Rainy Mountain. The hardest weather in the world is there. Winter brings blizzards, hot tornadic winds arise in the spring, and in the summer the prairie is an anvil's edge. The grass turn brittle and brown, and it cracks beneath your feet. There are green belts along the river and creeks, linear groves of hickory and pecan, willow and witch hazel. At a distance in July or August the steaming foliage seems almost to writhe in fire. Great green and yellow grasshoppers are everywhere in the tall grass, popping up like corn to sting the flesh, and tortoises crawl about on the red earth, going nowhere in the plenty of time. Loneliness is an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolated; there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but one hill or one tree or one man. To look upon that landscape in the morning, with the sun at your back, is to lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun.

--N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), 5.

PROLOGUE

Dypaloh. There was a house made of dawn. It was made of pollen and of rain, and the land was very old and everlasting. There were many colors on the hills, and the land was bright with different-colored clays and sands. Red and blue and spotted horses grazed in the plain, and there was a dark wilderness on the mountains beyond. The land was still and strong. It was beautiful all around.

Abel was running. He was alone and running, hard at first, heavily, but then easily and well. The road curved out in front of him and rose away in the distance. He could not see the town. The valley was gray with rain, and snow lay out upon the dunes. It was dawn. The first light had been deep and vague in the mist, and then the sun flashed and a great yellow glare fell under the cloud. The road verged upon clusters of juniper and mesquite, and he could see the black angles and twists of wood beneath the hard white crust; there was a shine and glitter on the ice. He was running, running. He could see the horses in the fields and the crooked line of the river below.

For a time the sun was whole beneath the cloud; then it rose into eclipse, and a dark and certain shadow came upon the land. And Abel was running. He was naked to the waist, and his arms and shoulders had slanted down upon him and left his skin mottled and streaked. The road curved out and lay into the bank of rain beyond, and Abel was running. Against the winter sky and the long, light landscape of the valley at dawn, he seemed almost to be stand still, very little and alone.

-- N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (New York: Signet, 1969), 7.

Wed Sept 10

ROCK AND HAWK

Here is a symbol in which
Many high tragic thoughts
Watch their own eyes.

This gray rock, standing tall
On the headland, where the seawind
Lets no tree grow,

Earthquake-proved, and signatored
By ages of storms: on its peak
A falcon has perched.

I think here is your emblem
To hang in the future sky;
Not the cross, not the hive,

But this; bright power, dark peace;
Fierce consciousness joined with final
Disinterestedness;

Life with calm death; the falcon's
Realist eyes and act
Married to the massive

Mysticism of stone,
Which failure cannot cast down
Nor success make proud.

--Robinson Jeffers, *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (New York: Random House, 1938), 563.

Mon Sept 15

THE ANSWER

Then what is the answer? – Not to be deluded by dreams.
To know that great civilizations have broken down into violence,
and their tyrants come, many times before.
When open violence appears, to avoid it with honor or choose
the least ugly faction; these evils are essential.
To keep one's own integrity, be merciful and uncorrupted and
not wish for evil; and not be duped
By dreams of universal or happiness. These dreams will
not be fulfilled.
To know this, and know that however ugly the parts appear the
whole remains beautiful. A severed hand
Is an ugly thing, and man dissevered from the earth and stars
and his history . . . for contemplation or in fact . . .
Often appears atrociously ugly. Integrity is wholeness, the
greatest beauty is
Organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine
beauty of the universe. Love that, not man
Apart from that, or else you will share man's pitiful confusions,
or drown in despair when his days darken.
--Robinson Jeffers, *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (New York: Random House, 1938), 594.

Wed Sept 17

THE DREAM

I dream an inescapable dream
in which I take away from the country
the bridges and roads, the fences, the strung wires,
ourselves, all we have built and dug and hollowed out,
our flocks and herds, our droves of machines.

I restore then the wide-branching trees.
I see growing over the land and shading it
the great turnks and crowns of the first forest.
I am aware of the rattling of their branches,
the lichened channels of their bark, the saps
of the ground flowing upward to their darkness.
Like the afterimage of a light that only by not
looking can be seen, I glimpse the country as it was.
All its beings belong wholly to it. They flourish
in dying as in being born. It is the life of its death.

I must end, always, by replacing
our beginning there, ourselves and our blades,
the flowing in of history, putting back what I took away,
trying always with the same pain of foreknowledge
to build all that we have built, but destroy nothing.

My hands weakening, I feel on all sides blindness
growing in the land on its peering bulbous stalks.
I see that my mind is not good enough.
I see that I am eager to own the earth and to own men.
I find in my mouth the bitter taste of money,
a gaping syllable I can neither swallow nor spit out.
I see all that we have ruined in order to have, all
that was owned for a lifetime to be destroyed forever.

Where are the sleeps that escape such dreams?
--Wendell Berry, *Collected Poems, 1957-1982* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), 64-65.

Mon Sept 22
FOR THE CHILDREN

The rising hills, the slopes,
of statistics
lie before us.
the steep climb
of everything, going up,
up, as we all
go down.

In the next century
or the one beyond that,
they say,
are valleys, pastures,
we can meet there in peace
if we make it.

To climb these coming crests
one word to you, to
you and your children:

stay together
learn the flowers
go light

--Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island*. (New York: New Directions, 1974), 86

Wed Sept 24
THE MAN BORN TO FARMING

The grower of trees, the gardener, the man born to farming,
whose hands reach into the ground and sprout,
to him the soil is a divine drug. He enters into death
yearly, and comes back rejoicing. He has seen the light lie down
in the dung heap, and rise again in the corn.
His though passes along the row ends like a mole.
What miraculous seed has he swallowed
that the unending sentence of his love flows out of his mouth
like vine clinging in the sunlight, and like water
descending in the dark?

--Wendell Berry, *Collected Poems, 1957-1982* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), 103.

Mon Sept 29
ANOTHER SPRING

The seasons revolve and the years change
With no assistance or supervision.
The moon, without taking thought,
Moves in its cycle, full, crescent, and full.

The white moon enters the heart of the river;
The air is drugged with azalea blossoms;
Deep in the night a pine cone falls;
Our campfire dies out in the empty mountains.

The sharp stars flicker in the tremulous branches;
The lake is black, bottomless in the crystalline night;

High in the sky the Northern Crown
Is cut in half by the dim summit of a snow peak.

O heart, heart, so singularly
Intransigent and corruptible,
Here we lie entranced by the starlit water,
And moments that should each last forever

Slide unconsciously by us like water.

--Kenneth Rexroth. *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2003), 211.

Wed Oct 1

THE HEART OF HERAKLES

Lying under the stars,
In the summer night,
Late, while the autumn
Constellations climb the sky,
As the Cluster of Hercules
Falls down the west
I put the telescope by
And watch Deneb
Move towards the zenith.
My body is asleep. Only
My eyes and brain are awake.
The stars stand around me
Like gold eyes. I can no longer
Tell where I begin and leave off.
The faint breeze in the dark pines,
And the invisible glass,
The tipping earth, the swarming stars
Have an eye that sees itself.

--Kenneth Rexroth. *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2003), 535-6.

NIGHT BELOW ZERO

3 A.M. the night is absolutely still;
Snow squeals beneath my skis, plumes on the turns.
I stop at the canyon's edge, stand looking out
Over the Great Valley, over the millions --
In bed, drunk, loving, tending mills, furnaces,
Alone, wakeful, as the world rolls in chaos.
The quarter moon rises in the black heavens --
Over the sharp constellations of the cities
The cold lies, crystalline and silent,
Locked between the mountains.

--Rexroth. *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2003), 211.

Mon Oct 6

SNOW STORM

Tumult, weeping, many new ghosts.
Heartbroken, aging, alone, I sing
To myself. Ragged mist settles
In the spreading dusk. Snow skurries
In the coiling wind. The wineglass
Is spilled. The bottle is empty.
The fire has gone out in the stove.
Everywhere men speak in whispers.
I brood on the uselessness of letters.

--Tu Fu (Chinese poet), translated by Kenneth Rexroth, *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese* (New York: New Directions, 1956), 6

OVERLOOKING THE DESERT

Clear Autumn. I gaze out into
Endless spaces. The horizon
Wavers in bands of haze. Far off
The river flows into the sky.
The lone city is blurred with smoke.
The wind blows the last leaves away.
The hills grow dim as the sun sets.
A single crane flies late to roost.
The twilight trees are full of crows.
--Tu Fu, translated by Kenneth Rexroth, *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese*, 18.

NIGHT THOUGHTS WHILE TRAVELLING

A light breeze rustles the reeds
Along the river banks. The
Mast of my lonely boat soars
Into the night. Stars blossom
Over the vast desert of
Waters. Moonlight flows on the
Surging river. My poems have
Made me famous but I grow
Old, ill and tired, blown hither
And yon; I am like a gull
Lost between heaven and earth.
--Tu Fu, translated by Kenneth Rexroth, *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese*, 33.

Mon Oct 18

AIX EN PROVENCE: SPRING

There are no images here
In the solitude, only
The night and its stars which are
Relationships rather than
Images. Shifting darkness,
Strains of feeling, lines of force,
Webs of thoughts, no images,
Only night and time aging
The night in its darkness, just
Motion in space in the dark.
It is a night full of darkness,
And space, and stars, and the hours
Going by, and time going by,
And the night growing old, and all
The webs, and nets, of relationships
Changing, and it is Spring night
In Provence, here where I am,
And under the half moon the almond
Buds are ready to burst. Before noon
The blossoms will open, here by
This peach colored house amongst
The steel gray pines and the gray
Limestone cliffs. Now the buds
Are round and tight in the dim
Moonlight, in the night that
Stretches on forever, that had
No beginning, and that will

Never end, and it doesn't mean
Anything. It isn't an image of
Something. It isn't a symbol of
Something else. It is just an
Almond tree, in the night, by
The house, in the woods, by
A vineyard, under the setting
Half moon, in Provence, in the
Beginning of another Spring.
--Rexroth. "Aix en Provence: Spring," *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper
Canyon, 2002), 610-611.

JAMES AGEE. "PREAMBLE."

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. New York: Ballantine Books, 11.

For in the immediate world, everything is to be discerned, for him who can discern it, and centrally and simply, without either dissection into science, or digestion into art, but with the whole of consciousness, seeking to perceive it as it stands: so that the aspect of a street in sunlight can roar in the heart of itself as a symphony, perhaps as no symphony can: and all of consciousness is shifted from the imagined, the revisive, to the effort to perceive simply the cruel radiance of what is.

This is why the camera seems to me, next to unassisted and weaponless consciousness, the central instrument of our time. . . .

* * *

If I had explained myself clearly you would realize by now that through this non-"artistic" view, this effort to suspend or destroy imagination, there opens before consciousness, and within it, a universe luminous, spacious, incalculably rich and wonderful in each detail, as relaxed and natural to the human swimmer, and as full of glory, as his breathing....

Wed Oct 15

RETURN

A little too abstract, a little too wise,
It is time for us to kiss the earth again,
It is time to let the leaves rain from the skies,
Let the rich life run to the roots again.
I will go to the lovely Sur Rivers
And dip my arms in them up to the shoulders.
I will find my accounting where the alder leaf quivers
In the ocean wind over the river boulders.
I will touch things and things and no more thoughts,
That breed like mouthless May-flies darkening the sky,
The insect clouds that blind our passionate hawks
So that they cannot strike, hardly can fly.
Things are the hawk's food and noble is the mountain, Oh noble
Pico Blanco, steep sea-wave of marble.
--Robinson Jeffers, *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers* (New York: Random House, 1938), 576.

Mon Oct 20

REQUIEM FOR THE SPANISH DEAD

The great geometrical winter constellations
Lift up over the Sierra Nevada,
I walk under the stars, my feet on the known round earth.
My eyes following the lights of an airplane,
Red and green, growling deep into the Hyades.
The note of the engine rises, shrill, faint,
Finally inaudible, and the lights go out
In the southeast haze beneath the feet of Orion.
As the sound departs I am chilled and grow sick
With the thought that has come over me. I see Spain

Under the black windy sky, the snow stirring faintly,
 Glittering and moving over the pallid upland,
 And men waiting, clutched with cold and huddled together,
 As an unknown plane goes over them. It flies southeast
 Into the haze above the lines of the enemy,
 Sparks appear near the horizon under it.
 After they have gone out the earth quivers
 And the sound comes faintly. The men relax for a moment
 And grow tense again as their own thoughts return to them.
 I see the unwritten books, the unrecorded experiments,
 The unpainted pictures, the interrupted lives,
 Lowered into the graves with the red flags over them.
 I see the quick gray brains broken and clotted with blood,
 Lowered each in its own darkness, useless in the earth.
 Alone on a hilltop in San Francisco suddenly
 I am caught in a nightmare, the dead flesh
 Mounting over half the world presses against me.
 Then quietly at first and then rich and full-bodied,
 I hear the voice of a young woman singing.
 The emigrants on the corner are holding
 A wake for their oldest child, a driverless truck
 Broke away on the steep hill and killed him,
 Voice after voice adds itself to the singing.
 Orion moves westward across the meridian,
 Rigel, Bellatrix, Betelgeuse, marching in order,
 The great nebula glimmering in his loins.
 --Rexroth. *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2003), 148-149.

Wed Oct 22

REVOLUTION IN THE REVOLUTION IN THE REVOLUTION

The country surrounds the city
 The back country surrounds the country

“From the masses to the masses” the most
 Revolutionary consciousness is to be found
 Among the most ruthlessly exploited classes:
 Animals, trees, water, air, grasses

We must pass through the stage of the
 “Dictatorship of the Unconscious” before we can
 Hope for the withering-away of the states
 And finally arrive at true Communionism.

If the capitalists and imperialists
 are the exploiters, the masses are the workers.
 and the party
 is the communist.

If civilization
 is the exploiter, the masses is nature.
 and the party
 is the poets.

If the abstract rational intellect
 is the exploiter, the masses is the unconscious.
 and the party
 is the yogins.

A handsome smokey-colored brown bear standing on his hind legs, showing that he is aroused and watchful.

Bearing in his right paw the Shovel that digs to the truth beneath appearances; cuts the roots of useless attachments, and flings damp sand on the fires of greed and war;

His left paw in the mudra of Comradely Display-indicating that all creatures have the full right to live to their limits and that of deer, rabbits, chipmunks, snakes, dandelions, and lizards all grow in the realm of the Dharma;

Wearing the blue work overalls symbolic of slaves and laborers, the countless men oppressed by a civilization that claims to save but often destroys;

Wearing the broad-brimmed hat of the west, symbolic of the forces that guard the wilderness, which is the Natural State of the Dharma and the true path of man on Earth – all true paths lead through mountains-

With a halo of smoke and flame behind, the forest fires of the kali-yuga, fires caused by the stupidity of those who think things can be gained and lost whereas in truth all is contained vast and free in the Blue Sky and Green Earth of One Mind;

Round-bellied to show his kind nature and that the great earth has food enough for evryone who loves her and trusts her;

Trampling underfoot wasteful freeways and needless suburbs, smashing the worms of capitalism and totalitarianism;

Indicating the task: his followers, becoming free of cars, houses, canned foods, universities, and shoes, master the Three Mysteries of their own Body, Speech, and Mind; and fearlessly chop down the rotten trees and prune out the sick limbs of this country America and then burn the leftover trash.

Wrathful but calm. Austere but Comic. Smokey the Bear will Illuminate those who would help him; but for those who would hinder or slander him,

HE WILL PUT THEM OUT.

Thus his great Mantra:

*Namah samanta vajranam chanda maharoshana
Sphataya hum traks ham mam*

"I DEDICATE MYSELF TO THE UNIVERSAL DIAMOND –
BE THIS RAGING FURY BE DESTROYED"

And he will protect those who love the woods and rivers, Gods and animals, hobos and madmen, prisoners and sick people, musicians, playful women, and hopeful children:

And if anyone is threatened by advertising, air pollution, television, or the police, they should chant SMOKEY THE BEAR'S WAR SPELL:

DROWN THEIR BUTTS
CRUSH THEIR BUTTS
DROWN THEIR BUTTS
CRUSH THEIR BUTTS

And SMOKEY THE BEAR will surly appear to put the enemy out with his vajra shovel.

Now those who recite this Sutra and then try to put it
in practice will accumulate merit as countless as the
sands of Arizona and Nevada,
Will help save the planet Earth from total oil slick,

Will enter the age of harmony of humans and nature,
Will win the tender love and caresses of men, women,
and beasts,
Will always have ripened blackberries to eat and a sunny
spot under a pine tree to sit at,

AND IN THE END WILL WIN HIGHEST PERFECT
ENLIGHTENMENT

Thus have we heard.

(may be reproduced free forever)

--Gary Snyder, *A Place in Space: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Watersheds* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint Press, 1995), 25-28.

Mon Nov 10

CONTROL BURN

What the Indians
here
used to do, was,
to burn out the brush every year.
in the woods, up the gorges,
keeping the oak and the pine stands
tall and clear
with grasses
and kitkitdizze under them,
never enough fuel there
that a fire could crown.

Now, manzanita,
(a fine bush in its right)
crowds up under the new trees
mixed up with logging slash
and a fire can wipe out all.

Fire is an old story.
I would like,
with a sense of helpful order,
with respect for laws
of nature,
to help my land
with a burn, a hot clean
burn.

(manzanita seeds will only open
after a fire passes over
or once passed through a bear)

And then
it would be more
like,
when it belonged to the Indians

Before.

--Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island*. (New York: New Directions, 1974), 19.

Wed Nov 15

A SWORD IN A CLOUD OF LIGHT

Your hand in mine, we walk out
To watch the Christmas Eve crowds
On Fillmore Street, the Negro

District. The night is thick with
Frost. The people hurry, wreathed
In their smoky breaths. Before
The shop windows the children
Jump up and down with spangled
Eyes. Santa Clauses ring bells.
Cars stall and honk. Street cars clang.
Loud speakers on the lampposts
Sing carols, on juke boxes
In the bars Louis Armstrong
Plays *White Christmas*. In the joints
The girls strip and grind and bump
To *Jingle Bells*. Overhead
The neon signs scribble and
Erase and scribble again
Messages of avarice,
joy, fear, hygiene, and the proud
Names of the middle classes.
The moon beams like a pudding.
We stop at the main corner
And look up, diagonally
Across, at the rising moon,
And the solemn, orderly
Vast winter constellations.
You say, "There's Orion!"
The most beautiful object
Either of us will ever
Know in the world or in life
Stands in the moonlit empty
Heavens, over the swarming
Men, women, and children, black
And white, joyous and greedy,
Evil and good, buyer and
Seller, master and victim,
Like some immense theorem,
Which, if once solved would forever
Solve the mystery and pain
Under the bells and spangles.
There he is, the man of the
Night before Christmas, spread out
On the sky like a true god
In whom it would only be
Necessary to believe
A little. I am fifty
And you are five. It would do
No good to say this and it
May do no good to write it.
Believe in Orion. Believe
In the night, the moon, the crowded
Earth. Believe in Christmas and
Birthdays and Easter rabbits.
Believe in all those fugitive
Compounds of nature, all doomed
To waste away and go out.
Always be true to these things.
They are all there is. Never
Give up this savage religion
For the blood-drenched civilized
Abstractions of the rascals
Who live by killing you and me.

--Kenneth Rexroth. *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon, 2002), 536-538.

Mon Nov 17

THE BAD OLD DAYS

The summer of nineteen eighteen
I read *The Jungle* and *The
Research Magnificent*. That fall
My father died and my aunt
Took me to Chicago to live.
The first thing I did was to take
A streetcar to the stockyards.
In the winter afternoon,
Gritty and fetid, I walked
Through the filthy snow, through the
Squalid streets, looking shyly
Into the people's faces,
Those who were home in the daytime.
Debauched and exhausted faces,
Starved and looted brains, faces
Like the faces in the senile
And insane wards of charity
Hospitals. Predatory
Faces of little children.
Then as the soiled twilight darkened,
Under the green gas lamps, and the
Sputtering purple arc lamps,
The faces of the men coming
Home from work, some still alive with
The last pulse of hope or courage,
Some sly and bitter, some smart and
Silly, most of them already
Broken and empty, no life,
Only blinding tiredness, worse
Than any tired animal.
The sour smells of a thousand
Suppers of fried potatoes and
Fried cabbage bled into the street.
I was giddy and sick, and out
Of my misery I felt rising
A terrible anger and out
Of the anger, an absolute vow.
Today the evil is clean
And prosperous, but it is
Everywhere, you don't have to
Take a streetcar to find it,
And it is the same evil.
And the misery, and the
Anger, and the vow are the same.

--Kenneth Rexroth. *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2003), 555-556.

Wed Nov 19

SOWING

In the stilled place that once was a road going down
from the town to the river, and where the lives of marriages grew
a house, cistern and barn, flowers, the tilted stone of borders,
and the deeds of their lives ran to neglect, and honeysuckle
and then the fire overgrew it all, I walk heavy
with seed, spreading on the cleared hill the beginnings
of green, clover and grass to be pasture. Between
history's death upon the place and the trees that would have come
I claim, and act, and am mingled in the fate of the world.
--Wendell Berry, *Collected Poems, 1957-1982* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), 104-5.

Mon Dec 1

FOR ELI JACOBSON

December, 1952

There are few of us now, soon
There will be none. We were comrades
Together, we believed we
Would see with our own eyes the new
World where man was no longer
Wolf to man, but men and women
Were all brothers and lovers
Together. We will not see it.
We will not see it, none of us.
It is farther off than we thought.
In our young days we believed
That as we grew old and fell
Out of rank, new recruits, young
And with the wisdom of youth,
Would take our places and they
Surely would grow old in the
Golden Age. They have not come.
They will not come. There are not
Many of us left. Once we
Marched in closed ranks, today each
Of us fights off the enemy,
A lonely isolated guerrilla.
All this has happened before,
Many times. It does not matter.
We were comrades together.
Life was good for us. It is
Good to be brave — nothing is
Better. Food tastes better. Wine
Is more brilliant. Girls are more
Beautiful. The sky is bluer
For the brave — for the brave and
Happy comrades and for the
Lonely brave retreating warriors.
You had a good life. Even all
Its sorrows and defeats and
Disillusionments were good,
Met with courage and a gay heart.
You are gone and we are that
Much more alone. We are one fewer,
Soon we shall be none. We know now
We have failed for a long time.

And we do not care. We few will
Remember as long as we can,
Our children may remember,
Some day the world will remember.
Then they will say, "They lived in
The days of the good comrades.
It must have been wonderful
To have been alive then, though it
Is very beautiful now."
We will be remembered, all
Of us, always, by all men,
In the good days now so far away.
If the good days never come,
We will not know. We will not care.
Our lives were the best. We were the
Happiest men alive in our day.

--Kenneth Rexroth. *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2003), 541-542.

Wed Dec 3

INVERSELY, AS THE SQUARE OF THEIR DISTANCES APART (second section)

It is warm tonight and very still.
The stars are hazy and the river —
Vague and monstrous under the fireflies —
Is hardly audible, resonant
And profound at the edge of hearing.
I can just see your eyes and wet lips.
Invisible, solemn, and fragrant,
Your flesh opens to me in secret.
We shall know no further enigma.
After all the years there is nothing
Stranger than this. We who know ourselves
As one doubled thing, and move our limbs
As deft implements of one fused lust,
Are mysteries in each other's arms.

--Kenneth Rexroth. *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2003), 215.

Mon Dec 8

MARY AND THE SEASONS: SNOW

Low clouds hang on the mountain.
The forest is filled with fog.
A short distance away the
Giant trees recede and grow
Dim. Two hundred paces and
They are invisible. All
Day the fog curdles and drifts.
The cries of the birds are loud.
They sound frightened and cold. Hour
By hour it grows colder.
just before sunset the clouds
Drop down the mountainside. Long
Shreds and tatters of fog flow
Swiftly away between the
Trees. Now the valley below
Is filled with clouds like clotted
Cream and over them the sun
Sets, yellow in a sky full

Of purple feathers. After dark
A wind rises and breaks branches
From the trees and howls in the
Treetops and then suddenly
Is still. Late at night I wake
And look out of the tent. The
Clouds are rushing across the
Sky and through them is tumbling
The thin waning moon. Later
All is quiet except for
A faint whispering. I look
Out. Great flakes of wet snow are
Falling. Snowflakes are falling
Into the dark flames of the
Dying fire. In the morning the
Pine boughs are sagging with snow,
And the dogwood blossoms are
Frozen, and the tender young
Purple and citron oak leaves.

--Rexroth. *The Complete Poems of Kenneth Rexroth* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2003), 562-563.

Wed Dec 15

FOR ALL

Ah to be alive
 on a mid-September morn
 fording a stream
 barefoot, pants rolled up,
 holding boots, pack on,
 sunshine, ice in the shallows,
 northern rockies.

Rustle and shimmer of icy creek waters
stones turn underfoot, small and hard as toes
 cold nose dripping
 singing inside
 creek music, heart music,
 smell of sun on gravel

I pledge allegiance

I pledge allegiance to the soil
 of Turtle Island
and to the beings who thereon dwell
 one ecosystem
 in diversity
 under the sun

With joyful interpenetration for all.

--Gary Snyder, *Axe Handles* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983), 113.