

# LANDINGS

*Poems from Iceland*



Harold Rhenisch

## The Breath

*Kópasker*

When they ask for wisdom,  
I have only questions.

When they give me answers,  
I walk out laughing into stone.

If they follow, I show them ancient cliffs,  
but do not say "Listen now."

Listening is a path a name walks  
on dry sand after rain

that bent the grasses  
down and left them there in music, and those

who question answers, discuss, and counter  
question, are ghosts

without shirts to give them  
shape in light or masks

to give them faces or  
gloves to give them hands.

I used to have a wardrobe of such men.  
I put them on,

I posed, I found some pleasure  
in the moments I forgot myself

and was the mask,  
the shirt, the dark hole

that "Let in light,"  
but, really, let it out.

**Note 2-syllable nouns  
working like rhymes**

**Note pattern of 3's**

**Look at the "O"s and "T"s  
that change direction.**

## **Bound**

*Eiðar*

A fire burns, the words insist,  
meaning it consumes

houses, tree and books,  
which press words

tightly against each other and open  
like flames to catch,

if we are to speak  
as we did when we were young,

the eyes of men, or women,  
who might chance to pass by

on their way from this, or that  
which held them in its thrall.

There was a sister way.  
Men bound straw with threads

of grass until it stood tall and shook,  
nodding its heads

together in a human shape.  
Young women with eyes set on distance

still bind horses with a single cord  
looped around a field between

the rhubarb covering  
their grandmothers' crofts

and the village graves. Today's horses  
accept this tie of fate and strain

against it just enough to, lightly,  
test it.

**Note the “T”-“S” setup for the end**



**Let's go to You Tube...but we can peek at the next page first**

## Planet Earth

P. K. PAGE

*It has to be spread out, the skin of this planet,  
has to be ironed, the sea in its whiteness;  
and the hands keep on moving,  
smoothing the holy surfaces.*

*'In Praise of Ironing', Pablo Neruda*

It has to be loved the way a laundress loves her linens,  
the way she moves her hands caressing the fine muslins  
knowing their warp and woof,  
like a lover coaxing, or a mother praising.  
It has to be loved as if it were embroidered  
with flowers and birds and two joined hearts upon it.  
It has to be stretched and stroked.  
It has to be celebrated.  
O this great beloved world and all the creatures in it.  
It has to be spread out, the skin of this planet.

The trees must be washed, and the grasses and mosses.  
They have to be polished as if made of green brass.  
The rivers and little streams with their hidden cresses  
and pale-coloured pebbles  
and their fool's gold  
must be washed and starched or shined into brightness,  
the sheets of lake water  
smoothed with the hand  
and the foam of the oceans pressed into neatness.  
It has to be ironed, the sea in its whiteness

and pleated and goffered, the flower-blue sea  
the protean, wine-dark, grey, green, sea  
with its meters of satin and bolts of brocade.  
And sky – such an O! overhead – night and day  
must be burnished and rubbed

by hands that are loving  
so the blue blazons forth  
and the stars keep on shining  
within and above  
and the hands keep on moving.

It has to be made bright, the skin of this planet  
till it shines in the sun like gold leaf.  
Archangels then will attend to its metals  
and polish the rods of its rain.  
Seraphim will stop singing hosannas  
to shower it with blessings and blisses and praises  
and, newly in love,  
we must draw it and paint it  
our pencils and brushes and loving caresses  
smoothing the holy surfaces.

## E Lo Soleils Plovil Shantie

The rain that strikes the mock orange splats on the skin, too.  
Its hollows and drizzles pool in the ear's whorl and within the thumb's nail.

Philosophy is magicked, but the moon that is rising over the mind's knuckle  
rises into the black earth you grub while digging stars, with all

their blind eyes growing: a window. You knew this even  
when you first left the sea. It is a planet of water that lifts into the sky and falls.

There is always rain raining and the sound of the sea knocking on the corrugated  
rapids of tin roofs shivering with salmon.

In the desert, this rain is the shout of its absence, and the taste of goat from a sack,  
but there is the brittle prickly pear opening into yellow clouds.

There is always this rain. The whitefish of the fast runs of the Similkameen River  
are the colour of the gravel that is the colour of cirrus. You dive to grasp them,

but the bullheads on the bars are the hues of quartz  
gravel that caught iron from earth's core and now sun's radiance

and burn in the ripples of light wind makes of its dalliance with peach leaf willows:  
pebble-eyed forges, wearing reflection as skin and skin as reflection.

Everywhere on the plume's shoulder and in its turquoise knock knock who's there,  
heart, heart who, there is water — and owls; and woodpeckers.

Stone is an atmosphere. I stand on its clods. They blow out to the Pacific.  
Sharks rise to its contours: bird's of the river's mouth — old words. Fords.

The whitefish of the molten glacier awash in heat's splish at Paradise  
have mouths the size of fresh peas on chicken wire: Little Marvels.

You fish for them in November when the water leaps to the stars  
and summer swimmers shed glaciers for wine bars: mango voodoo.

A good companion on the wind's point with the fish out there is a Lutheran pastor  
who lepered up in Brazil. He knows the jungle. He is a bread juggler. An up and  
becomer.

A good companion is his son, a man who stopped guarding the border.  
It doesn't matter which one. The border. That he is soaked with rain is what matters.

~~Everywhere is rain, even the salt lakes that catch snow in winter  
and let only its water slip away, not its white colour, splash.~~

~~On this blue earth,~~ even the sun is a raindrop.  
Its wind-trembled tear keeps rolling in on the beach at Antler.

~~Men prepared for the Great War there by shooting  
deer in the hills in the day and wrestling with cases of whiskey at night~~

~~as the ponderosas caught influenza. Now women bring their families to swim  
in the roar of cars cars cars trucks cars truck cars cars cars bumper to bumper~~

~~going north to the Kekuli Cafe and its "Don't panic, we have bannock!" billboard.  
Like the sun's droplets and waves, rain flows over every thing and flows through it, like  
that.~~

It strikes gloves of bone time builds around hands of marrow.  
You who carry them, it's not that you are blood walking

or that rivers are blood flowing, but it's also exactly  
that the rain is walking through dry grass, rustling.

It bundles itself together into a pheasant and flies.  
There is no part of the body the rain doesn't touch.

Even today, when we have barometers, and rain gauges  
made of old pork and bean tins nailed to old cedar fenceposts,

there is no place in the mind not soaked with the moment  
rain strikes blue-bunch wheatgrass and hot sand.

~~When I ran my finger along Earth's rim the moon was rising:  
ten moons at once as the mind sees it, reaching; none if it wears the world as a glove.~~

Everything is rain. ~~Time is rain.~~ The moment of climbing  
to the turtles at Peshastin soaks through the skin,

flows down through the bones into the mind's rivers  
and pool's in the heart's trout, before flowing

out when you dip your arms of blood into the beach at Warrenton,  
with a herring boat far out, on the rim of the Pacific,

catching rain's daughters, ~~in day's ash fall.~~  
Before there was a roil there was water turning over.

There was thought rising to the surface before descending.  
Then there was one word for both at once, considered separately.

Then there was the body standing between two windows  
down which the rain ran ~~and runs~~. When I was beginning

I traced my fingers down its runnels. I didn't know what I was doing,  
but I did it. I still don't. I still do.

There is no place in this willow's net of salmon that is not rain,  
not the cheat grass of Teanaway nor the wetlands of Selah,

~~squashed between the Freeway to Fort Lewis and the Firing Range at Moxie,  
nor the memorials to murder above the chert quarries, where the moon's milk~~

~~was buried in stone and cut through the earth's leather and bled it.~~

~~Only ceremony can stitch the gap between rain and the names for it~~

~~to open the cloud that is not the closing of awareness, nor its opening.~~

Rain has neither agency nor narrative. I begin there. Like rain, I do not end ever.

~~E lo soleils plovil, said Ezra the Harness.~~

~~And the cricket. And the toad in the grass. And the fly's unless.~~

**The red is the part that came from draft 1. The black was added later.**

**We will look at this briefly and then explore its structure lower down.**

**Snass Shanty**

**Note the PK echoes.**

Death might have us all in her crosshairs,  
but I'm holding my head up as I walk into her range.

I am standing barefoot in the water's turning and its turning again  
and the wind's unwinding into skeins of tundra swans.

There's no future if men stop bringing the salmon home by offering them water:  
smoke blown on the breath and caught by the air.

We are one substance. **There is always rain's drift  
and the sound of the sea knocking on the corrugated**

**rapids of tin roofs shivering with salmon. There is always this rain.  
Everywhere on the plume's shoulder and in its turquoise**

**knock knock who's there, where the heart is soaked with splatter  
is what matters. Even the sun is a raindrop.**

**Its wind-trembled tear keeps rolling onto the beach at Antlers.  
The rain strikes the gloves of bone time**

**builds around hands of marrow keeping the water water.  
We who carry them, it's not that we are blood**

**walking; it's not that we're not. It's that the rain  
is walking through dry grass, rustling.**

**It bundles itself together into a grouse and flies: a spirit's house; the antlers  
we hold before us, this dry, grasping brush; these alders;**

**these drinking fingers; this blooming Labrador tea.  
There is no part of the body the rain doesn't reach.**

**Even today, with barometers, and rain gauges**

made of old pork and bean tins nailed to fenceposts,

there is no place in the mind not soaked with the moment  
the sea falls onto blue-bunch wheatgrass and hot sand.

Everything is rain. Everything is falling and then rising back up.  
The moment of climbing to the Pillar soaks through the skin,

flows down through the bones into the mind's rivers  
and pools in the heart's trout, before flowing out

when you dip your arms of blood into the beach at Chinook,  
with a herring boat far out, on the rim of the Pacific,

catching rain's daughters. Before there was the roil  
of a whale there was water turning over. There was thought

rising to the surface before descending on a line as stone.  
Then there was one word for both at once,

between two windows down which the rain ran.  
When I was beginning I traced my fingers along its runnels.

I didn't know what I was doing, but I did it. I still don't. I still do.  
There is no place in this willow's net of salmon

that is not the *snass*. It has neither agency nor narrative.  
I begin there. Like *snass*, I do not end ever.

**First, the lines are all the same length in TIME: 3.5 seconds.**

**Because of the stresses they put on certain phrases, each pair takes 11 seconds.**

**Let's look more closely:**

Death might have us all in **her** crosshairs,  
but I'm holding my head up as I walk into **her** range.

I am standing barefoot in the water's turning and its **turning** again  
and the wind's unwinding into skeins of **tundra** swans.

There's no future if men stop bringing the salmon home by **offering** them water:  
smoke blown on the breath and caught by the **air**.

**Notice the ah/R/AYE patterns anchored by this pattern. Notice how they turn and then are resolved. We are so used to poetry resolving ideas, that we often forget that this aural motion is the meaning of poems.**

**Now, imagine this in a different form:**

Death might have us  
all in her crosshairs, but

I'm holding my  
head up as I

walk into her range.  
I am standing

barefoot in the water's  
turning and its

turning again and the wind's  
unwinding into

skeins of tundra swans.  
There's no future

if men stop  
bringing the salmon

home by offering  
them water:

smoke blown on the breath  
and caught by the air.

**The music has gone out of it. Can we put it back in? I spent a decade trying, but maybe we can manage today.**

Death might have us all  
in her crosshairs, but

I'm holding my head  
up as I walk

into her range. I am standing  
barefoot

in the water's turning and  
its turning again

and the wind's  
unwinding into skeins of

tundra swans. There's no  
future if men

stop bringing the salmon  
home by offering

them water: smoke  
blown on the breath

and caught,  
by the air.

**Still a bit flat! Let's try something else:**

Death might  
    have us all in her crosshairs,  
        but I'm holding  
  
my head up as I walk  
    into her range.  
        I am standing barefoot  
  
in the water's turning  
    and its turning again  
        and the wind's unwinding  
  
into skeins of tundra swans.  
    There's no future if men  
        stop  
  
bringing the salmon home  
    by offering them water:  
        smoke  
  
blown on the breath  
    and caught  
        by the air.



**In this case, you can see why I used the long lines.**

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the sea falls onto blue-bunch wheatgrass and hot sand.

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when you dip your arms of blood into the beach at Chinook,  
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of a whale there was water turning over. There was thought

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When I was beginning I traced my fingers along its runnels.

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