EVIDENCE FOR RAINFALL

examination book

POEMS AND PROSE BY DANIEL HUDON

name _____

subject _____

class _____ section _____

instructor _____ date _____

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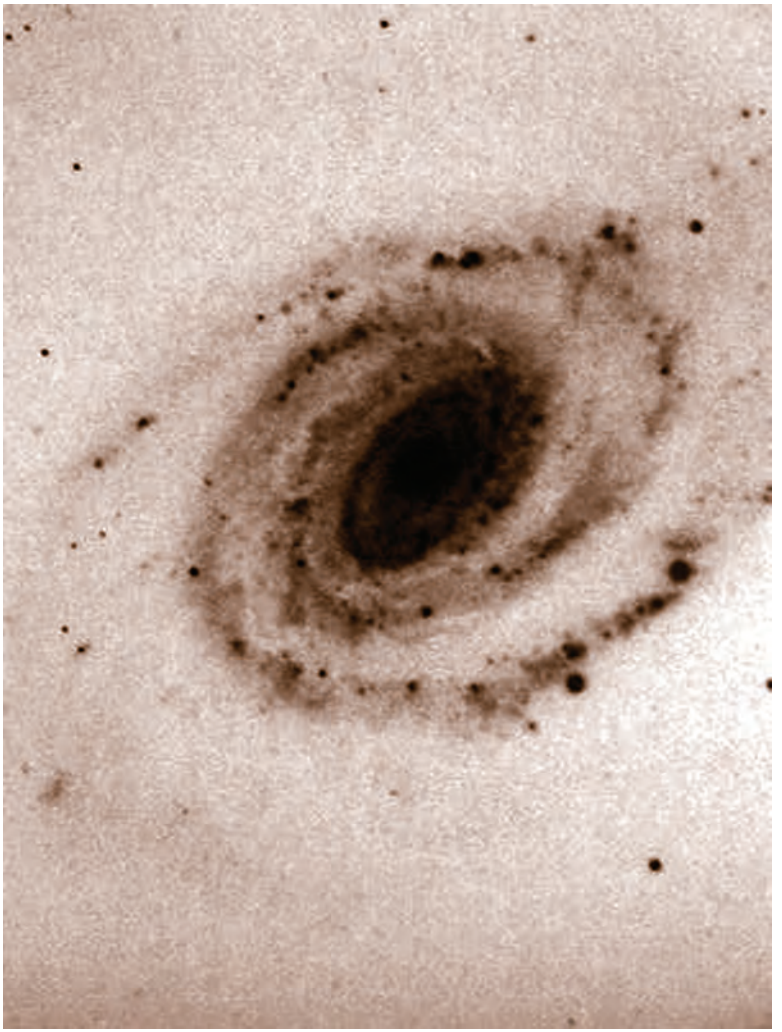
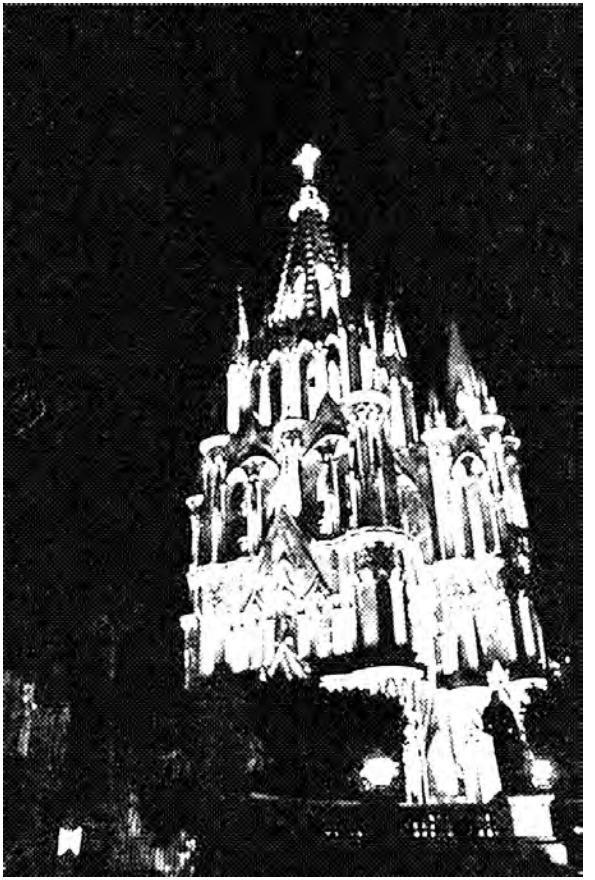


Ancient Rain

A long time ago, rain fell upon the barren earth. This was in the distant past, before people or dinosaurs or complex living things. There were no flowers to bloom or trees to grow. The poles had yet to be covered in ice and the continents, much smaller than they are now, roamed aimlessly over the surface of the Earth.

No one knows for how long it rained: an afternoon downpour, a summer thunderstorm, the proverbial forty days and forty nights. It's a story told by geologists. Evidence for rainfall three billion years ago. Rain pits, they marvel, in sedimentary rock. Given enough water vapor in the atmosphere, it would have rained before then – whether a steady drizzle or perpetual downpour – it just didn't leave a trace.

Still, I wonder about how the clouds cleared, how the sun came out and lit up a rainbow. And the sound of the falling rain: cleaning the air near some ancient lakeshore, or calming the dust down the slope of an old volcano, the pleasant sound fresh upon the treeless plain, falling for the first time, falling as it always has.



THE HISTORY OF GRAVITY

I One always falling for another:
specks of dust in the depths of a nebula,
planets tumbling around a sun, a pair
of galaxies whirling together never letting go.

II The ache of separation at last overcome
for even the atoms, gathered and compressed,
can one day spark into a star.

III An obsession, the way an orbit is a kind
of unhappy love; just look at the moon,
only a true lover could stay so faithful
while wearing such pain on her face.

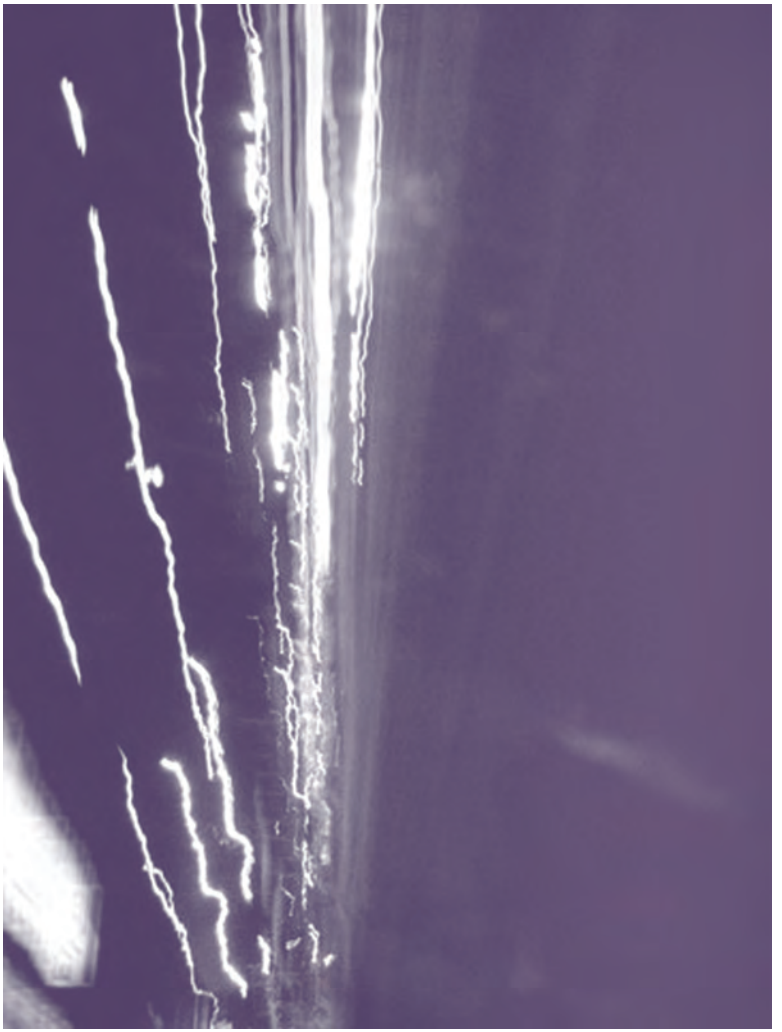
IV Perhaps it's an illusion that disappears
with a new perspective, like the flatness
of Earth or the space that separates us,
and yet

V raindrops
snowflakes
gently

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LIGHT

Unlike you and me,
a photon does not experience its own existence:
no pangs of hunger, no tears or lust, no joy.
The moment it is created
and the moment it is destroyed
are one, with nothing in between:
time is zero
all distances (along the line of sight)
vanish.

To a photon, the universe
is still infinitely
small like it was
when it was
created
and destroyed.
A second, a lifetime, an eon,
fourteen billion years
pass in a flash.



A SHORT COURSE ON CLOUD PHYSICS

Clouds have always existed, though their true nature is poorly understood. They roam over the Earth at the mercy of the wind. They obscure the sun, cluster around mountaintops and bring the rain. They have tenuous, ephemeral lives. That much is known.

Sometimes defined as assemblies of tiny water droplets, clouds are much more than that. They are the integrated total of unrequited love of the people below. Naturally, tears are involved. Tears evaporate from individual hearts until they saturate the air above – a cloud begins to form. These unexpressed tears are not categorized into anger, pain, joy or grief. They are simply evaporated tears, ferried up to the cloud by the wind.

Evaporation relieves the burden of carrying around so many tears. Humans are weighed down with tears accumulated over a lifetime of missed opportunities, mistakes and longings. In quiet moments, they look into the distance and think, "I should have…" and "If only…" and a tear is unexpressed. Most people don't think about it and shed their unexpressed tears subconsciously.

Inside the cloud, the tears coalesce into larger water droplets. They lose whatever identity they had. In a sense, they become communal.

Once a cloud begins to form above a village, it increases in

strength and is able to absorb more unexpressed tears. When a parent worries over his teenaged children who are out at night, his unease is absorbed by the cloud. When a woman frets over the honesty of her lover, her anxiety is absorbed by the cloud. Every soul who is lonely and longs for companionship, this longing is absorbed by the cloud. Finally, the cloud can hold these tears no longer, and bursts. Rain falls.

Because the tears are communal, the rain is always fresh. No one recognizes the tears as ones they used to own. The tears are free and fall of their own relief. They splash down to the Earth, redeeming all with their solvency. When the cloud is rained out, the wind pushes it along. Soon the process repeats all over again.

In this way, clouds look after all of us.

TRACKS

three toes a prominent middle my palm
with larger than

like hands graffiti
in wet cement

era a road construction crew
from another exposed by

decades before I was
ago born

long or standing still
strides for a moment

on their way toward the old
uphill volcano

long dormant əɯoɔ
though a few
uʍop

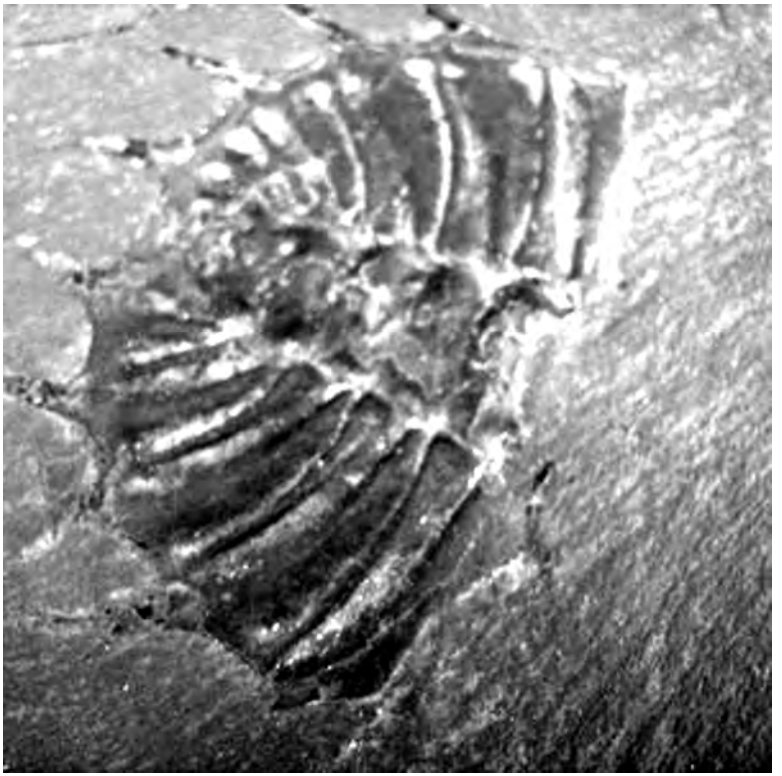
emblems fading
of time in a few

more years they will be
the ranger says
gone

WHALE MIGRATION

This year, the annual whale migration caught everyone off guard. Instead of taking their usual north-south route, they migrated out of the ocean altogether and into the clouds. No one knew how they could stay aloft like that and some scientists argued they did it out of sheer determination, something that humans have not been able to duplicate.

At first, whale sightings were few, but with practice and knowing when to look, you could see them jumping from cloud to cloud, gracefully, as if they'd done it their whole lives.



THE BURGESS SHALE

If you can see the reef under the surface near the shore
lapped by the waves,
and the life it brings, swimming;
if you can see the lamp shells cupped to the bottom,
and the sponges with their tines and spicules, some
branched
like miniature saguaro, and the fronds of the sea pens steadfast
but waving
below the jellyfish, luminously translucent,
floating
above the dozens of *marrellas*
scuttling
like trilobites
or five-eyed *opabinia* – subject of laughter when described at a conference –
with its long proboscis ending in a Venus Fly Trap mouth,
shuffling
by the bizarre *hallucigenia* whose seven pairs of spikes and tentacles make you wonder
which side of its long
body is up,
or the unusual Canadian shrimp, *anomalocaris canadensis*,
whose pineapple-ring shaped mouth probably took a bite
out of the eel-like *pikaia*, who had a hollow dorsal nerve cord

and so is an ancient relative of whales, dinosaurs and humans;
if you can see these weird wonders thriving in the shallows of the continental shelf
under the tropical sun
five hundred million years ago,
then you can see that time is a medusa who has turned
them all to stone
and lifted them seven thousand feet to near the summit of Mount Field
opposite Mount Burgess
high above Emerald Lake
where they lie hidden until you can climb one of time's old roads past
glacier lilies
blooming,
and over scree slopes steep enough to give you vertigo.
See for yourself the mute testimony to evolution's tinkering in this cache of fossils
imprinted onto thin
slabs of shale.

Pass them around. Eye them up close,
and know what Darwin meant when he wrote:
There is grandeur in this view of life… from so simple
a beginning endless forms most beautiful have been,
and are being,
evolved.

AUGUST NIGHT

Clouds soared over the sky
glowing orange, lit by city lights,
inflating as they went.

They soared like sprites set free,
exorcised by a distant fire,
like dreams taking their leave,

flying on their own
free of the wind that frenzied the trees,
the crickets that sang, the distant sirens.

They changed through fantasy shapes
and cartoon characters with hollow eyes and big heads
masquerading their urgent mission

to escape something, to arrive somewhere
on the other side of the world
sometime before dawn.

Perhaps there was no mystery here,
they were just clouds in a strange light
blown by a soundless wind,
marking no calamity, foretelling nothing.

Suddenly the sky cleared and I saw stars –
the entire universe opened dark above me –
and I thought I would never again see those clouds,
but soon they returned, soaring, soaring.

THE WAVE

Since its installation two months ago, The Wave has become the museum's most popular exhibit. It's not hard to see why. Rearing up to the 18-foot ceiling like an aquatic Pegasus, the Wave spreads across the vast end wall of its hastily-vacated gallery, striations of foam stretching across its blue-green belly and a crest breaking on the sides such that you think the whole thing might crash down upon you at any moment. Reminiscent of Hokusai's "Great Wave off Kanagawa" (that dwarfs even Mt. Fuji in the background), the Wave is Maximum Art.

Like any masterpiece, museum-goers report a range of responses to the Wave. Most viewers are literally wowed by it and after coming forward to assess its reality, they step back again, uttering only that single exclamation, *Wow!* Young couples love its large-as-life feel that encapsulates the rising potential of their burgeoning romance while adults long-married with children reminisce with fondness about the first time they went to the seashore and saw the towering waves of the mighty ocean and heard its thunderous surf for themselves, wondering simultaneously how long it has been since they've seen such a wave and where does the time go anyway? Some have said that they see in it the primordial soup origins of all life on Earth when the first organic molecules took their first clumsy steps of self-replication, to be followed eventually by the tides of natural selection and evolution; others, more apocalyptically, have said that it foretells environmental catastrophe when over-population

will have meant that even the oceans are covered over with new suburban subdivisions and our only experience of the beach will be in museums. Not surprisingly, the few surfers who have seen it have dreamed of riding it to shore.

However, not everyone is impressed. Many stare at it blankly, unsure of what to think, trying in vain to resist the nagging feeling that they don't get what the fuss is all about and absently wondering if there is some inherent meaning in the Wave that they are missing. Some see it as frightful as the recent tsunami that wreaked so much havoc in the Indian Ocean or they find it too big, too vast, a too-potent reminder of the ever-rising flood waters that made such a calamitous mess of New Orleans. Then there's the 12-year-old boy who, perhaps buoyed by the salty tears of commiseration shed by the fourteen-year-old girls around him for the Wave's ephemeral predicament, has begun a letter-writing campaign to return the Wave to its natural habitat. Thus far, the curator has ignored the petitions.

For his part, the curator of the exhibit is pleased by the fuss the Wave has created, yet, some of the stories that surround it have baffled him. For example, he doesn't know where the Wave came from. It appeared one morning in the parking lot of the museum, encased in a waterproof wooden crate. He consolidated the 20th century abstract galleries and put the Minimalists in storage to give the Wave its own space, and to strategically give museum-goers one last thrill before filing into the cafeteria. Even so, for the first few days, no one seemed to notice it, or if they did they didn't say much about it. Then a Japanese tourist who had somehow gotten separated from his tour group reported getting drenched

by the Wave – with digital self-portraits as evidence (one of which wound up on the front of the Arts section of the newspaper). Now everyone is talking about the Wave. The two scientists who have studied the Wave have declared its authenticity, though neither offered a explanation for its gravity-defying suspension. Adding to the mystique, the janitor, still devoted to the museum after thirty-two years on the job and as laconic as the day he started, has reported that some mornings he has to mop up puddles on the floor of the gallery.

Everyone wants to know where the Wave came from and the most common reaction on the audience survey card is, "Who is the artist?" because the sign simply says *Wave*, *Anonymous Donation*.

The curator remains hopeful that the artist will come forward with another masterpiece, such as Mountain or Wind. He has already begun making room.

LEGEND OF THE GOLDEN TOAD

Rain pool fills
cloud forest floor,
golden toad waits.

Still as stone,
throat bulging,
cloud forest floor.

Rain fills
wide black eyes,
golden toad waits.

Water drips,
splashes,
black eyes stare.

Golden toad listens
still as stone,
mountain mists pass.

Cloud forest floor
lone toad waits,
rain pool fills.

INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO BUILD A CLOUD

No one has successfully built a cloud, so this is your chance to make history. Apart from bringing rain and providing shade, clouds have myriad uses that have yet to be explored. You will be doing imaginative souls and humanity a favor. You have no reason not to build one.

Before you start, make sure your mind is still. Clouds are ephemeral and if you're not prepared to concentrate you won't grasp their true nature. Drink a tall glass of water. Meditate. Go on vacation. Take early retirement. Do what it takes to clear your mind, otherwise your cloud will fail.

Now think about the possibilities of your cloud. You must endow it with potential. Bashō praised clouds for allowing moon-viewers to relax. Kalidasa used a cloud to carry messages between distant lovers. A Hindu myth says clouds used to be the wings of mountains, which is why they still gather around mountaintops. Magritte painted clouds into the outstretched wings of a dove. Don't shortchange your cloud by thinking small. In that case, save yourself the trouble and just build a stone. Imagine great things for your cloud.

Give some thought to the type of cloud you want; if you don't plan it out, you'll just get an amorphous blob. Your best bet is a

standard cumulus cloud that has a wispy bottom and cauliflower top. This form has a good aesthetic and endless possible variations – you've got room to maneuver. Stratus, a thin, gray sheet, is also recommended, despite its lack of individuality, because you can build one right in your kitchen. Rain clouds, such as cumulonimbus, are also worth considering particularly because of their lovely-sounding name. You could probably seduce someone just by whispering the word "cumulonimbus" into his or her ear. But be aware that they require the most material, and, tread carefully because having the power to bring rain is likely to go to your head.

Other cloud types to be aware of, though considerably more challenging, are lenticulars, which look like flying saucers and require nearby mountain ranges (plus their attendant winds) for their ultimate shape, or night-glowing noctilucent clouds that require a good quantity of meteoric dust to freeze water onto (so that they glow) and an altitude of fifty miles. Good luck with the scaffolding.

Once you have your mind clear and some idea of your cloud's potential and shape, you're ready to start building. Here you have two convenient options. The first option is the Mayan *chuc*, a clay sauna barely big enough to sit in, commonly found in the mountain villages of Guatemala. Pour water over the rocks and collect steam in a large plastic bag. Better yet, use a parachute (so long as you can close the end). You may need to stay in the *chuc* for several days to collect enough steam so eat well beforehand and stay hydrated. Also, be sure your container is properly lined or you'll come out with a condensed cloud suitable only for

watering plants or making coffee. Time spent getting the lining right is time saved. Remember to concentrate on your cloud's potential and shape while you collect. Similar results could be obtained from Laotian saunas or Turkish baths. Don't forget to tip the attendant if you do this in Istanbul.

The second option is the Murakami method in which you create your cloud by boiling up some spaghetti. Use a big pot and start early in the morning. Again, capture the steam in a properly-lined plastic bag with your properly-calmed mind. Take deep breaths. Keep filling the bag until the spaghetti is al dente. You need to really pack the steam in if you want to build a respectable cloud so be prepared to make several pots of spaghetti, maybe a few

weeks' worth. The noodles freeze well. Or, invite the neighbors for dinner – when's the last time you did that? Perhaps even make it like a church supper and invite the whole block. It's for a good cause.

Once you have your bag of steam, keep it warm with aluminum reflectors and redirected sunlight or you'll have a watery mess. You can do some initial shaping but most of that will be done onsite before you release your cloud.

Spend some time investigating good release sites. You want a reliable updraft of warm air. If you release your cloud and it falls to the ground, you've made fog. Not what you were aiming for. One good location is the ramparts of the fort at Jodhpur, India – the sounds of the entire city, from the clang of hammer on metal to the gossip of the washing women, well up from below so you know there's a good updraft. Other places may be suitable too. Try Mongolia, for example, in the summer time. Those steppes must be good for something.

When you're ready to release your cloud, remember all the possibilities you conjured for it, and your thoughts about shape. This is the moment of truth. Be still your mind, and heart. Open the bag and let the cloud out. Don't force it. Patience is key. (Here is where a parachute comes in handy because of the much larger opening.) Whisper to it about seeing great palaces, glittering cities, palm trees swaying on tropical isles. Clouds are often reluctant to be solitary sojourners, so coax gently. Be sincere. In an uncertain world, you only want the best for your cloud.

EXCERPTS FROM THE ASTRONOMICAL REVOLUTION

Copernicus Moves the Earth

Earth's revolutions explain the retrogradations,
A little commentary on the loftiness of the firmament
Ensures highest heaven remains unaltered;
The sun in the centre like a lamp in the temple.

*

Tycho Observes a New Star

Shine forth, nova, I stand still and mark thee
With sextant's eye, high in the firmament
And fixed in place. The heaven's change.
Know this: thy light hath not died in vain.

*

Kepler On the Verge of Ordering the Heavens

Mars at opposition and Tycho's gone to bed
Drunk with Earth and circles. War sweeps the world,
All is in error. I will persevere. God only knows
This torment of numbers, eight arc-minutes from harmony.

*

Galileo Through the Looking Glass

The light tube is the messenger of a rational vessel
In a world inclined to ignorance and unbelief,
It opens the senses, turns the tides to reason
And begins a new dialogue with the divine.

*

Newton Writes a Book

These are the principles and these the laws of Nature.
This is the action and this the agent of understanding
Like gears of a clock producing incremental variations,
Truths and inverses are mere reflections of the force of faith.

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