

The New Criterion

Poems June 1985

At Greg's

by Brad Leithauser

Colder than snow

is how it feels, the year's first rain,
falling on a dark afternoon
the last week of January.

The neon signs

downtown already are blinking,
probably, patchily tinting
the hoods of cars, the ample crowns

of umbrellas

afloat on a washed-in clamor
of honks, whistles, shouts; but here,
upstairs in an old wooden house

five miles away

on the abrupt edge of Kyoto's eastern
line of hills, the darkness and the rain
alike come peacefully down.

It's an old house

that seems older as the rain falls,
rooting out from the walls
a resin whose power it is

to dim all signs—

the strings of dental floss, books
and sweat pants, empty donut box,
stubby pot-bellied hash pipe,

maps and wayworn

backpack—of the current
American tenant,
as if to restore this room to those

whose once it was ...

This salvaging illusion (that it's
only time which separates
past from present, and the links still there

by which we might,

stooping, enter yet-simpler houses in
this former capital, old even then,
of a castled nation whose moat

was the salt sea

itself) is unshaken
by the click-clatter, as of wooden
shoes, of a tall schoolgirl, scooting

along, holding

an opened magazine over her hair,
or by sounds of a distant car,
groaning, as any horse would,

at the steepness

of the hill. The city's
fading, or falling, or folding inwards as,
moonlessly, the cold outspreads itself;

those streams running

freely in the streets will be locked
in ice tonight. It's difficult
not to view this weather

as anything

other than a deepening
tightening, a fiercer colder gripping
of the ground by winter Only if

you close your eyes

as though about to sleep,
or in truth to sleep,
will the new year's first rain

perhaps summon

that long-gone and looked-for season
for which so many subterranean
spring-wound clocks are set; probably

only to those,

if any, at the shivering limit
of consciousness is it
evident how a colossal, exquisite

mathematical

accounting even now s in preparation,
a one-to-one correlation
whereby each raindrop's knocking shall

have its answer —

together when, then, under
some newly exploded sun, each tight blossom
opens like a door.

Brad Leithauser's most recent book is *The Oldest Word for Dawn: New and Selected Poems* (Knopf).

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