

# The Poet in Advanced Old Age

Marcel Duclos

## Epigrams

*The look of the world withdraws  
into the vein of memory.*

Wendell Berry in *The Porch Over the River*

*We must walk a long way in the world  
to know the truth of certain things.*

Pablo Neruda in *Muchas Gracias*



## Unless the Seed

I stretch beneath a sugar maple as a child.  
Dream I taste the boundless amber syrup  
in every spiraling seed. Old now,  
I dream myself to be a seed  
within a body-envelope  
from swollen feet to balding pate.  
Hard to believe a blade of grass will rise  
out of this parchment shell—  
the seed planted before the birth of time  
a logos  
sailing space  
swimming in a galactic soup of  
breathing blueprint siblings  
programmed to land on a nameless speck  
at the edge of a numberless universe  
to course the return journey to its timeless core

## Regrets

When we meet again—  
dear ant, curious spider, annoying fly—  
will you forgive me for killing you?

As for you,  
little green frog,  
do you remember?

I am the one  
who hammered you  
lifeless

in the back yard  
behind the garage  
at age five.

I wanted to see you jump  
again and again  
and again.

I overdid it.  
And you,  
you lay flat    bloodied.

Will you  
forgive me  
if we meet again?

## Under Snow

When the robin  
tugged on the first worm  
silly enough to seek the warmth  
in a blanket of leaves  
crying the winter  
the boy—now a living memory—  
thought of nothing else but  
hungry brook trout

## By the River

Now galloping winds  
strip my bark  
leave me naked

I face the flames  
coursing up the canyons  
of my pleading heart

I seek escape from despair  
while drinking my last drops of hope

## cup of juice this morning

for W. S. Merwin

I find these lines by Rumi  
in the skylight shadow of my study  
in the bamboo hutch  
in a drawer  
in a book  
sleeping a dream long ago quenched  
deprived of today's parched ground that strangles  
my thirst to know  
to make sense of what I will never understand  
that bends me  
hurls me to my knees before the cup  
brimming with *the juice that leaves the intellect in ruin\**

\* from *The Big Red Book*, Tr. Coleman Banks

## the one and only task

to come into the moment  
no longer in the past  
not yet in the future

## Last Night's Dream

The path from the cottage  
at the edge of the village  
soon rises to the east

After morning gruel  
frock beret cane in right hand  
*le viellard* wearing his years

no loner delights in  
*l'hirondelle's* chirp song  
He swallows meals of grief

Bent forward he walks up the hill  
rounds the corner to the woods  
hears not the other's trodding steps

Poor eyesight disguises  
a lifelong friend on foot  
the direction of his coming

Soon enough cold wet winds  
will shiver leaves to the ground  
Two old companions will join them

breathe the morning air  
escape the old churchyard  
welcome the rising

## After the Book Is Printed

After the book is printed,  
he speaks of sitting in the waiting room,  
of having his furtive step slowed down,  
of needing to caress the last budding rose,  
that there is always time for love songs and sorrows—  
all an invitation to reach calm.