

Ghostly Voices Dancing in the Rain

By [Edward Curtin](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

Global Research, September 06, 2017

“In the other room Rateau was looking at the canvas, completely blank, in the center of which Jonas had merely written in very small letters a word that could be made out, but without any certainty as to whether it should be read solitary or solidary.” – Albert Camus, “The Artist at Work”

A solitary, early Sunday morning walk in the rain. As I like it, my only walking companion was the soothing sound of rain in the trees and on the lake. From the shallow water at the lake’s swampy edge, a blue heron, perched on one leg, froze my gaze as I stopped and stared. As I turned to walk on, it rose with blue beating wings and soared up through the raindrops, alighting high above out on a limb. The road was flooding as I walked, water streaming down the hill, creating eddies as it met the water backing up from the over-filled lake. The eddies formed whirling patterns, artistic visions running counter to the main current.

My mind swirled with thoughts as I walked and talked to all my ghosts, dead and living, who accompany me everywhere, but whose presence is so palpable in the rain. Their voices seemed to descend with the drops, bouncing off the water and echoing in my mind.

I heard my mother say to me, “Eddy, you were always a contrarian. I worry about you.” Yes, I answered, I am, but you named me, and Eddy is the correct spelling. I’m an eddy, a whirlpool, a contrarian, one who runs counter to the mainstream. But, dear mother, the mainstream is flowing fast toward destruction, carrying everyone and everything with it. We have to reverse course and resist. Please, mother, worry only if I wasn’t walking against the wind.

Through the weeping trees I heard Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk, whisper,

“I told you that someday they will sell us the rain. Everyone and everything is for sale. ‘They’ are the people who don’t understand that rain is a free and useless festival, and because it is gift they wish to control it. The weather modifiers and geo-engineers are working overtime now. Together with the nuclear madmen, they will rain poisonous death upon us all unless we stop them. Remember: to be a contemplative is to be an outlaw. Don’t divorce resistance from contemplation; they are married for life. Joy and suffering are their children.”

I didn’t reply, just kept walking, sloshing and slamming through the puddles. Merton has an eerie way of insinuating himself into odd private moments, and I didn’t want an extended conversation. I just wanted to enjoy the rain.

The sloshing brought voices from my children’s young years, the exultation as we romped

streaming-wet through the wild beating storm, singing at the top of our voices, "If all the raindrops were lemon drops and gum drops/Oh what a rain it would be/I would stand outside with my mouth open wide/ Ah ah ah ah..." I opened my mouth wide, tongue out, and tilted my head back. Ah, the sweet taste of love and joy. I heard my children scream ecstatically, "Yippee!" and whirl and twirl with mouths agape.

On I walked, listening and watching. The rain fell harder, so hard it was difficult to see and all other sounds were completely obliterated. Bubbling up from somewhere came the rhythm of Jacques Prévert's poem, "Barbara":

Remember Barbara

It rained all day on Brest that day

And you walked smiling

Flushed enraptured streaming wet

In the rain

...

That good and happy rain

On your happy face

On that happy town

...

Oh Barbara

What shitstupidity the war

Now what's become of you

Under this iron rain

Of fire and steel and blood

And he who held you in his arms

Amorously

Is he dead or gone or still so much alive

Oh Barbara

It's rained all day on Brest today

...

Of which there's nothing left

And here I was walking and wondering in the rain about Barbara and her lover and all the dead and lost in Brest in the "Good War" and whether we will have a sequel or has it already

started. I called out to Barbara, but only the wild rain hammered its reply: resist resist resist the warmakers.

The soaking I was getting refreshed me, but now the beating of the rain and the ghostly voices seemed to ping-pong my mind between joy and sorrow, solitude and solidarity, resistance and contemplation, enjoyment and commitment. Did I have the right to enjoy the rain when thousands were dead in South Asian flooding and Houston was under water?

Then my old lugubrious friend Fred surprised me with something he said to me years ago:

We do not belong to those who have ideas only among books, when stimulated by books. It is our habit to think outdoors – walking, leaping, climbing, dancing, preferably on lonely mountains or near the sea where even the trails become thoughtful. Our first questions about the value of a book, of a human being, or a musical composition are: Can they walk? Even more, can they dance?

Surprised me because Nietzsche wasn't exactly a barrel of laughs and I couldn't imagine him moon-walking with Michael Jackson. Anyway, I was walking, and why was he bothering me about books? I was alone in the rain, trying to enjoy myself.

Then Willie Yeats popped out of the lapping lake, book in hand, and blocked my path. Standing ghostlike in the mist, the crazy Irishman read these words from a poem I had tried to remember to forget:

Seventy years have I lived
No ragged beggar-man
Seventy years have I lived,
Seventy years man and boy,
And never have I danced for joy.

My ghosts were getting on my nerves and Yeats depressed me, so I pushed through him and moved on. Just then, in this melancholy pensive mood, I was startled, not by a voice but by the sight of a mother raccoon, bedraggled by the heavy rain, scurrying past me with a sidelong glance, her baby hanging from her mouth, as she took her kit to a higher, drier home up the hill. My heart quivered. I remembered having read in a book that raccoons take their young out in their mouths for what are called "adventures," and perhaps this mother had been doing that when the rains came down. It was a beautiful sight, and my mother's voice came back to me: "Beauty is as Beauty does." Action, not words. And yet...Weren't words actions? Or were they useless. Wasn't Ionesco right?

"If one does not understand the usefulness of the useless and the uselessness of the useful, one cannot understand art. And a country where art is not understood is a country of slaves and robots."

So I too turned and headed home, my ghostly voices melding into a chorus of song that I can't fully explain, nor do I want to. Like that blue heron, they were balancing on one leg out

on a limb, and I was happy. The rain was still beautiful, and I rejoiced in its baptism, but I knew with Bob Dylan that “[a hard rain’s-a-gonna fall,](#)” and that there are children to be saved from those intent on raining destruction on their heads. But on my way back, I was still going to kick up the puddles and join Gene Kelly in [singing in the rain](#). And no Puritan cop, haunted by the fear that someone somewhere was happily enjoying himself, however briefly, was going to stop me, even if one stopped Kelly.

Camus was right: the solitary artist works in solidarity with everyone, when he tells the truth.

And to think I thought I walked alone. How funny.

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