The Iowa Review

Volume 7
Issue 1 Winter

1976

Ricky

Philip Levine

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview
Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.1983

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Review by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.
on the road, moving with, moving
counter to water. Stars
pale like dog howls in dawn.
Where our road ends, people
from the woods ask the way home.
Our road moves with the water.
Both carry stars to our lawn.

Ricky / Philip Levine

I go into the back yard
and arrange some twigs
and a few flowers. I go alone
and speak to you as I never could
when you lived, when you
smiled back at me shyly.
Now I can talk to you as I talked
to a star when I was a boy,
effecting no answer, as I talked
to my father who had become
the wind, particles of rain
and fire, these few twigs
and flowers that have no name.

·

Last night they said a rosary
and my boys went, awkward
in slacks and sport shirts,
and later sitting under the hidden
stars they were attacked and beaten.
You are dead, and a nameless rage
is loose. It is 105,
the young and the old burn
in the fields, and though they cry
enough the sun hangs on
bloodying the dust above the aisles
of cotton and grape.
This morning they will say a mass and then the mile-long line of cars. Teddy and John, their faces swollen, and four others will let you slowly down into the fresh earth where you go on. Scared now, they will understand some of it. Not the mass or the rosary or the funeral, but the rage. Not you falling through the dark moving underwater like a flower no one could find until it was too late and you had gone out, your breath passing through dark water never to return to the young man, pigeon-breasted, who rode his brother’s Harley up the driveway.

Wet grass sticks to my feet, bright marigold and daisy burst in the new day. The bees move at the clumps of clover, the carrots—almost as tall as I—have flowered, pale lacework. Hard dark buds of next year’s oranges, new green of slick leaves, yellow grass tall and blowing by the fence. The grapes are slow, climbing the arbor, but some day there will be shade here where the morning sun whitens everything and punishes my eyes.

Your people worked so hard
for some small piece of earth, 
for a home, adding a room
a boy might want. Butchie said
you could have the Harley
if only you would come back,
anything that was his.

A dog barks down the block
and it is another day. I hear
the soft call of the dove,
screech of mockingbird and jay.
A small dog picks up the tune,
and then tow-weet tow-weet
of hidden birds, and two finches
darting over the low trees—
there is no end.

* 
What can I say to this mound
of twigs and dry flowers, what
can I say now that I would speak
to you? Ask the wind, ask
the absence or the rose burned
at the edges and still blood red.
And the answer is you
falling through black water
into the stillness that fathers
the moon, the bees ramming into
the soft cups, the eucalyptus
swaying like grass under water.
My John told me your cousin
punched holes in the wall
the night you died and was afraid
to be alone. Your brother
walks staring at the earth.
I am afraid of water.

And the earth goes on
in blinding sunlight.
I hold your image
a moment, the long
Indian face
the brown almond eyes
your dark skin full
and glowing as you grew
into the hard body
of a young man.

And now it is bird screech
and a tree rat suddenly
parting the tall grass
by the fence, lumbering
off, and in the distance
the crashing of waves
against some shore
maybe only in memory.

We lived by the sea.
Remember, my boys wrote
postcards and missed you
and your brother. I slept
and wakened to the sea,
I remember in my dreams
water pounded the windows
and walls, it seeped
through everything,
and like your spirit,
Ricky, like your breath,
nothing could contain it.