

## THE AFTERTHOUGHT



*Andrew Zawacki*

What mattered was where it happened  
And not necessarily whom it involved: a balcony  
Where the rain came late, or the room in which,  
Like an afterthought, morning arrived only minutes before  
The darkness had gathered its coat and seen itself out.  
Or how, later that morning, the advances of daylight  
Were less about why they were coming than how  
They appeared and where they would fit—  
As the end of a performance, when the earliest act  
Suddenly comes back into focus again, and falls into  
Its tragic, appointed place, which had not been pictured  
The moment it split from other conceivable plots,  
And was not now exactly where suspicion had hinted  
It might be resolved, but not outside the limits either  
Of what seemed remotely probable, given what happened.  
—Though the minds of the actors, engaged in the scenes  
That required them, couldn't envision the movement that far  
And it was only much later, when their thoughts cornered  
Other events—the rain, say, or the slushy streets below—  
That they could look back at what was initially hidden  
And watch it already unwinding as if for the first time.  
The nonchalance of basic introductions, even if misconstrued,  
Would come to be viewed as enclosures effecting disclosure,  
Returns on investments made without planning  
But not without prior knowledge of possible pain,  
Yet now and then turning out all right after all:  
The way one's impatience while waiting for a traffic light  
To change, in a hurry to get where he's going by dark,  
Might save him from an accident, which could have  
Occured and involved him, had he kept waiting.  
—Such reliances may be written off as insufficient seclusion  
For those who preserve an outline's existence  
Simply by being there; or as too baroque or not dignified  
enough,  
Like sidewalks that have to be shovelled each day

To make room for the consolations that summer might bring.  
But when *overcast* means a column of clouds but no rain,  
Only *temperatures under* or *feeling under the weather*,  
It might be more than a term one merely rehearses  
And does away with after the climate is gone:  
Not as something greater than what was intended,  
But several gradations darker than that, or at least more  
resolute  
Than was implied. —As when one, involved as an actor,  
First promised another that *separate* would never mean  
*From you*, and in so promising, lied, or might have lied,  
But instead looked out at the buildup of wind  
From a balcony over the street, as if he and the other  
Were no longer part of what once had concerned them so  
deeply,  
And pretending not to notice the rain—like an accident,  
So unexpected—thought to himself *the days are getting shorter*  
When he meant to recite they were *longer and fewer*  
But kept on performing them anyway, despite their hesitant  
hue,  
If only to prove to himself, and the other, the years they'd  
added up to,  
The rooms they'd taken their coats off inside.