

# THE PREY

By PAUL WEST

If you had only seen the flanks of him  
where the coward rain had washed and beaded him,  
insulting him by rinsing them,  
you might have known a sympathy  
you could not name, the gathering of you there  
on the wind-lashed ridge, huddled anxiety  
in the lamps' glare.

His browns were streaming black that dawn,  
cold bunch of the muscle clenched like pain,  
while the cowed rain, as all have said,  
threw down his challenge  
with a turning face, and pelted home.  
You might usefully have prayed,  
the poor gathering of you fixed inside  
the light's orbit, motionless in capes  
and wondering. If as I have said, the group of you  
had only seen the once warm rounded belly  
pumping to the reckless wind  
his journey's legend, bending and turned  
willy-nilly from the south now to the sun's place,  
vacant since the sullen capture,  
you might have yearned for sudden revocations,  
cancelling the wind's words  
or the nailing rain. If you had seen, if only,  
but you had gone away, fumbling your feet  
across his grudging earth.

You had not seen, safe under larches,  
wrapped in dark, and none of us felt right  
and none of us felt wrong. And yet,  
to which of us belonged  
the rains, the yelling wind and wolves  
that worked upon his body in the night?