Looking for a Trail

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Looking for a Trail

I.
When the rain comes we let out a sigh not knowing
we'd held our breaths, not realizing the chest
was tight, the skin was parched, tendons taut,
and now an ease, a forgiveness, an understanding,
a surcease of dryness and of drought—.

The quality of air smells different when rains come,
a slight sharpness or tartness, a green slice
of something, a touch of the earth carried aloft in sky,
in air, as the dirt yields something, gives up
what it had gripped, just lets the arid go.

Sighing, the rain comes across miles of hills and oaks,
across the highway, the margins, the roads and roofs,
skimming the flat roofs, touching lightly the fothergilla,
leaving hydrangeas, hyssop, hammocks between trees,
tussocks and hillocks of grass, misting the tallest crowns.

II.
I'm looking for a trail that starts without fanfare,
that winds its way into the Michigan woods, downhill, or up,
where the path scuffs to roots and there are smudged footprints,
yet cobwebs strung across ensure solitude—no one
has yet been this way today. Gradually the ears fill
with silence, then birdsong, and a comforting peace descends.

On days when nothing is known, come here. On days
when words are uttered but too little said or answered,
wake here. And the oak leaves, notice the center keel,
the ribs marked in parallel on either side. Boats on the air—
skiffs that go sailing and drifting, not a one losing its way,
every single leaf adding its weight back to the earth.

Written for the 2006 investiture of GVSU President Thomas Haas.