

margaret atwood

Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer

He stood, a point
on a sheet of green paper
proclaiming himself the centre

with no walls, no borders
anywhere; the sky no height
above him, totally un-
enclosed
and shouted:

Let me out!

ii
He dug the soil in rows,
imposed himself with shovels
He asserted
in to the furrows, I
am not random

The ground
replied with aphorisms:

a tree-sprout, a nameless
weed, words
he couldn't understand.

iii
The house pitched
the plot staked
in the middle of nowhere

At night the mind
inside, in the middle
of nowhere

The idea of an animal
patters across the roof

In the darkness the fields
defend themselves with fences
in vain:
everything
is getting in

iv
By daylight he resisted.
He said, disgusted
with the swamp's clamourings and the
outbursts
of rocks.
This is not order
but the absence
of order.

He was wrong, the unanswering
forest implied:

It was
an ordered absence

v
For many years
he fished for a great vision,
dangling the hooks of sown
roots under the surface
of the shallow earth.

It was like
enticing whales with a bent
pin. Besides he thought

in that country
only the worms were biting

vi
If he had known unstructured
space is a deluge
and stocked his log house-
boat with all the animals

even the wolves

he might have floated.

But obstinate he
stated, The land is solid
and stamped

watching his foot sink
down through stone
up to the knee.

vii
Things
refused to name themselves; refused
to let him name them.

The wolves hunted
outside.

On his beaches, his clearings,
by the surf of under-
growth breaking
at his feet, he foresaw
disintegration
and in the end

through eyes
made ragged by his
effort, the tension
between subject and object,

the green
vision, the unnamed
whale invaded