

5. The Baptism of the Neophytes

(Acts 2:37-41)

He knelt because the others knelt. And
nothing was odd about that except,
unlike the others, he seemed to know

nothing of shame. Which quite astonished
me. Not brazened-it-out, or
wrapped-himself-in-pridefulness (the surest

sign of struggle), simply free, by what
conjunction of insight or
ignorance I am still at a loss to imagine,

from the universal misery of fitting-in-
the-body. We were many
on the hillside, the waters ran shallow

for him as for everyone else, we thought
this meant nothing to hide.
And it was then I knew the messenger.

For some of us, the treachery's half the
getting there, we have to be
flayed by our own bad faith. And hence

the scene of washing. You'll remember
we still thought it had no
limit, that the water and the air it came

from came unendingly, and clean.

We thought we had fouled
ourselves alone. And then the young one

came and knelt and I could see
the whole equation, what
we'd gained by it and what we had agreed

to lose. We'd meant to do better by
those who came after,
that was both the pity and the point.