

POETRY

My Father in a Self- portrait

by Ranjiet



"Sonnenkind" by Rebecca Unz (illustration)

On a January wintry night,
ankle-deep in muddy water,
skin thrashed by coldness,
a body shivers to the feet,
 breathing, quick and shaky,
 intermittent gnashing,
my father waters mustard flowers
in a distant foggy field.

The mustard branches,
heavy with misty leaves,
bend and make a hook to
seize you in its chill,
shivering is your only company.

In his damask coat's rough fold
he struggles with his shovel,
 swash of mud on his face
mocking his every attempt.

In his ghostly appearance,
first human
digging in freezing mud
 for survival,
my ancestors with shovels
cut water
 into pieces,
and harvest grain
 for future mouths.

Standing on
 a wet edge,
afraid of ghosts,
I ask him irrelevant questions.
Most of his answers are
 unheard,
but in his watery voice,

I console myself of
 a companion.
His distant stammering utterance
is my only childhood memory.
The smell of mustard oil
 in your kitchen
takes me back to those fields
and I
run after my father.