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Issaquah in January

Daniel Walter Morris
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Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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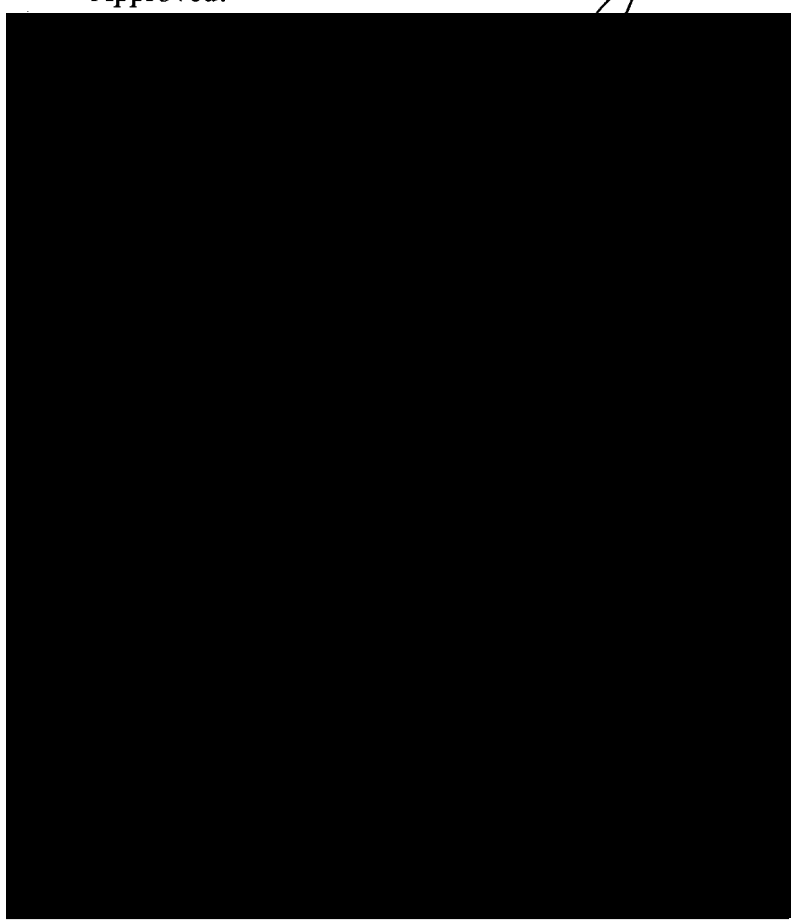

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ABSTRACT

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ISSAQUAH IN JANUARY is an original collection of fifty-one poems accompanied by a preface.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Angela Ball and Professor Julia Johnson for their astute attention given to these poems and the crafting of this collection as a whole. I would also like to thank the rest of my dissertation committee, Dr. Luis Iglesias, Dr. Martina Sciolino, and Dr. Kenneth Watson, for their advice and guidance through this process.

I would also like to thank the editors of *Red Rock Review*, *Clark Street Review*, and *Product* where a few of these poems first appeared.

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PREFACE

Quite often my poems concern landscape. I am taken by the physical elements that make up the natural and manmade world around me. Whether it is a robin pecking worms in the grass or people walking in a public market, these scenes talk to me and I look to language to capture these moments. My love for landscape is inspired from a number of poets: B.H. Fairchild for his strong personally historical Mid-Western scenes; Richard Hugo for his vivid and specific naming of Pacific Northwest locals; Gary Snyder for many of the same reasons as Hugo as well as his pared down imagery; James Wright for his imagistic Minnesota and Ohio; but ultimately and most recently I must give credit to Theodore Roethke with his managed landscapes of the greenhouse and his open landscapes ranging from his childhood Michigan to the Pacific Coast. The final lines of "The Rose" juxtapose the bookends of Roethke's life:

> And in this rose, this rose in the sea-wind,
> Rooted in stone, keeping the whole of light,
> Gathering to itself sound and silence—
> Mine and the sea-wind's. (197)

These lines might seem simple, but they get to the core of necessity for place. Additionally, they that the natural world is indefatigable, everlasting. "The Rose" is populated with straightforward language, like most of the poems that I find myself returning to for models. Perhaps what makes "The Rose" successful is Roethke's keen ability to intermingle landscape and place with self-revelation. Roethke's employment of landscape and his interaction with it provide him new understanding of self. Ultimately,

this is what I am striving to accomplish with my own work: to join the landscapes of the natural world to the landscapes of the mind.

As far back as I can remember my mother would read me poems, usually pieces from Robert Frost or Emily Dickinson. Though these readings did not directly inspire me to write my own verse, they did instill in me a sense of poetry as well as a respect for it. In other words, my earliest experiences with poetry settled inside me like a seed not truly nourished until my early college years. For the better part of my childhood and adolescence—despite these readings offered by my mother—I did not have a strong attraction to poetry.

It was not until my sophomore year in college, when I enrolled in a poetry writing class that I came into any useful understanding of poetry and poets. Up to this point, my poetics had been superficial. I harbored the generic notions that poetry must rhyme, that one is "gifted" a poem and the first words on the page—whatever they were—were intended by the universe and it was not my place, nor anyone else's, to change them. Therefore, that class was monumental in my development as a serious student of the craft.

The class was structured around the anthology *Contemporary American Poetry*, fifth edition, edited by A Poulin Jr. Before this book, the most recent poet I had read was Frost. Poulin introduced me to four of the poets most influential for my work: Richard Hugo, William Matthews, Gary Snyder, and James Wright. I should also include Theodore Roethke, but in all fairness, I did not embrace his work until years later. From these four poets I was led to the few others whom I would add to the list of most

influential for my poetry, namely B.H. Fairchild, Jack Gilbert, Campbell McGrath, Robert Wrigley, and Joe Bolton.

During the course of the class, I learned how language within the small space of a poem could do tremendous work. Another poet from Poulin's anthology whose poems served as an early model for mine was Marvin Bell—particularly his poem, "To Dorothy." What drew me to this poem was its sharp, surprising language and Bell's ability to write a love poem without saying "love." Bell's concision and his seemingly circuitous ways of addressing a subject helped open my mind to the versatility of free verse and the power of the poetic image, thus preparing me for the imagery in poems by poets like Hugo, Snyder, and Wright. The employment of images by these three poets is the common thread that connects their works for me. And it was their imagistic detail that I first attempted to employ in my own poetry.

Hugo's syntax and straightforward, deliberate images continue to engage me. In Hugo's work, I learned that poetry does not have to be prolix or florid, that it can be the spoken word of a man down on his luck or enjoying the loneliness of the northwest highways. Because I knew his landscape very well, Hugo's poetry struck me personally, as though he intended his work for me alone. However, what makes Hugo's work truly successful—and what makes me a continued fan—is that it transcends its regional sensibilities and taps into a universal understanding of the human condition. Definitions of "the human condition" are often troublesome and subjective, but I consider it to be the universal loneliness—the existential revelation that we are trapped within our own lives and eventual deaths. Hugo's poetry serves as a beautiful anodyne to this problem since his work looks *outward* to help define his own humanity. This quality in his work

remains the central reason I love it and continue to use it as a source from which my own poetry might spring.

His poem "The House on 15th South West" serves as a good example of these qualities. The language and syntax of the first stanza combines both a harmoniousness of vision and staccato execution of language:

> Cruelty and rain could be expected.
> Any Season. The talk was often German
> and we cried at the death of strangers.
> Potatoes mattered and neighbors who came
> to marvel at our garden. I never helped
> with the planting. I hid in woods these houses
> built on either side replaced. Ponds
> duplicated sky. I watched my face
> play out dreams of going north with clouds. (224)

Hugo's syntax is unique to his work. Slightly convoluted, it fashions images diamond-hard and clear, and what first attracted me to this poem was the beautifully enjambed "Ponds / duplicated sky." These three simple words do so much work. The sentence is pared down to the bone elements of subject, verb, and object. Not only does the reader see a pond, but reflected in the pond, the sky—a dynamic sky of moving clouds. The starkness of Hugo's sentences allows that kind of reading, the kind I work to produce in my own work. I also look to Hugo as a model for tight, succinct lines. An example from my own work that reflects this is "October":

> Green blankets

the large boulder forty

years kept from sun.

Fir and maple boughs

cross—needles and leaves

clatter with rain. Crass

salamanders rest under

remnants of trees,

soaked in used moisture.

Though these lines do not achieve Hugo's imagistic brevity, my poem aspires to call to consciousness an understanding of the natural world.

The haikus of Issa, Buson, and Basho are other models from which I draw. A particular haiku that I often return to is one by Buson, translated by Robert Hass. It reads "Autumn evening— / there's joy also / in loneliness" (91). This piece is charged with a subtle undertone of sublimity, or rather, the speaker realizes that through the loneliness there is a possibility for art and enlightenment. I hope to recreate sublimity in my own work. What I like about this piece is the abstract image of an autumn evening: its concreteness relies entirely on the reader's understanding.

What originally drew me to the haiku masters were the early poems of Gary Snyder, namely those from his first collection, *Rip Rap*. Snyder is like Hugo in his use of brevity and stark images; however, I turn to Snyder because of his engagement with nature that reflects the stoic sensibilities often found in haiku. "Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout" illustrates this well:

Down valley a smoke haze

Three days heat, after five days rain.
Pitch glows on the fir-cones
Across rocks and meadows
Swarms of new flies.

I cannot remember things I once read
A few friends, but they are in cities.
Drinking cold snow-water from a tin cup
Looking down for miles
Through high still air. (4)

Snyder's simplicity is epitomized by "cold snow-water from a tin cup." Not only is the image simple, but the physical elements are as well. That Snyder is drinking melt water, as opposed to anything else, suggests simplicity of poetic vision but also a love for simplicity of life.

Along the lines of subtle language and simple images, Jack Gilbert is a poet whose work I greatly admire. Gilbert's voice is almost always quiet, his language deliberate and unassuming. "Highlights and Interstices" reflects an understated dynamism:

We think of lifetimes as mostly the exceptional
and sorrows. Marriage we remember as the children,
vacations, and emergencies. The uncommon parts.
But the best is often when nothing is happening.
The way a mother picks up the child almost without

noticing and carries her across Waller Street
while talking with the other woman. What if she
could keep all of that? Our lives happen between
the memorable. I have lost two thousand habitual
breakfasts with Michiko. What I miss most about
her is that commonplace I can no longer remember. (56)

In my work as a whole, my voice has not yet achieved the consistency and steadiness of Gilbert's. But if I were to hold up one of my poems next to Gilbert's as perhaps a distant cousin, "Frequencies and Propagation," part of this collection, suffices. The subject and speaker are different from Gilbert's but the tone falls within the same realm. I include it here in its entirety:

Inside a cabin, a silver haired man
sits next to a pine table,
shortwave radio. Voices bounce
across the ionosphere. He listens.
News of events that will not matter
to his life. In the cupboard, potatoes
form eyes and will not be eaten.
Outside, pine needles mulch
the ground soft. Wisteria drapes
like silk, rises and falls in night's
conversation. Static spills into the room
as the man tunes for a clearer song.

When I wrote this poem I was very much cognizant of Gilbert's work as a mark that I was trying to hit. However, even before I was introduced to Gilbert's work I was attempting to achieve a voice like his.

To continue thinking about Gilbert, Buson, Snyder, and Hugo, the examples that I have presented by all four of these poets possess the poetic resonance that I hope my poems will achieve. When I speak of resonance in a poem, I am referring to the ability f language to instill residual rumination. In other words, the poems that I admire most are the ones that cause me to sit back, nod my head, and say "yes." Ultimately a poem must be more than the sum of its parts. It must demand a pause upon completion of its reading.

Another one of my poems that exhibits a like tone and understated sensibility is "Golden Gardens, Ballard." What this poem wants to capture is the quiet ineffableness of night, one of the primary focuses in my work. Nevertheless, "Golden Gardens, Ballard" implies a longing implied through images of calm sound, silhouettes against black, and a train rolling south:

> Low clouds mean no stars tonight
> and dim back light from Seattle. This beach
> is as black as the lake-calm water
> of this sound resting before it re-floods
> the tide pools and damp rocks, the small crabs
> underneath waiting for something new
> to float by when all is restored. The leftovers
> of a pier are silhouettes above sand in the black air.
> And what we thought was a stump of a piling

is actually moving and a couple holding close

in the dark walking back to dim fires and cars.

The only thing not calm is the air,

but it is not telling much. Everything is silent

except a freight train rolling south on its track.

Though this is an earlier poem, it still represents what I strive for in my poetry. Throughout my life as a poet, the poems that are most successful are the ones that engage landscape or have a strong sense of place established through the employment of images taken from the physical world.

I was born and raised sixteen miles east of Seattle on the western slopes of the Cascade Mountains. Growing up, I spent a fair amount of time in the natural landscapes around Seattle, terrestrial and aquatic. I did not understand the influence of the Pacific Northwest on my psyche until I removed myself from it for college and work. These relocations illuminated my original landscape by contrast. Whatever my current landscape has been, from the West Coast to southern Mississippi, my work has continued its conversation with origins.

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There are those to whom place is unimportant
but this place, where sea and fresh water meet
is important—

-Theodore Roethke

Meanwhile the world goes on.

-Mary Oliver

FREQUENCIES AND PROPAGATION

Inside a cabin, a silver haired man
sits next to a pine table,
shortwave radio. Voices bounce
across the ionosphere. He listens.
News of events that will not matter
to his life. In the cupboard, potatoes
form eyes and will not be eaten.
Outside, pine needles mulch
the ground soft. Wisteria drapes
like silk, rises and falls in night's
conversation. Static spills into the room
as the man tunes for a clearer song.

LAKE BYRON

A killdeer, in hysterics, paces
the shoreline. Turtles submerge,
abandoning a stump. I walk closer

to the bank. The sun, like the turtles,
veiled by water. I point at the dragonfly
in a holding pattern above a ripple

on the surface. If my finger
were a line it would pass
through the dragonfly and intersect

the egret standing in the shallows
on the opposite bank and I say
ecocritical. The cars on Hardy Street,

beside this pond, start to move. Clouds
dissipate. And here on the bank
bubbles rise from those uncertain turtles.

The killdeer still screams. A car honks
as traffic pauses. The egret stares.
Sweat beads on my face.

A WARBLER CONSIDERS ITS REFLECTION

From on top of the Buick's
side-view mirror, a warbler leaps
off the edge, hovers, stares
at the other bird that appears
below it. Re-perches
on the black plastic. Twitches.
Hops two inches to the left,
back two inches. Checks
the other side; only black.
Jumps again and reconfirms.
Nothing can explain to this bird
what it sees, its mirror image,
the ideal self, wings stretched wide
open for embrace.

ATUMUNALISA AURA

Stepping out
this morning

I'm not addressed
with the same

thickness that usually
envelopes the body,

reaching around
like a plump,

eager aunt who holds
too long, the weighty

air that idled all night—
Slight brushes of cool

graze my arms.
I wonder, briefly,

if this short-sleeve shirt
will do.

DURING THESE SLIM TIMES

Rain sounds faintly on the aluminum
table. Water pools in micron-deep
wells made from resting elbows,
blue sparkled paint glints through.
Geckos remain concealed
under eaves, next to brick,
certainly hoping this afternoon's rain
won't keep insects from their nightly
journeys and attractions to false day.

CULMINATION

To the left of the bed, on the night stand,
sits a letter from her, but he is not
in the bed, nor even in the room.
10:27 a.m., sun passes through
the window and sits on the comforter
where she had sat attempting to give him the letter
that she had written the night before
and he, wanting none of it, departed
into the 7:00 a.m. air, stepped over the morning
paper—the one he reads without missing—early fog
filling in behind him.

CREPUSCULAR DIRGE

Clatter of water keeps
poplars company

while clouds stall in front
of the moon, interrupting

nocturnal discourse.
A cicada falls silent, its motor

seized. Tomorrow the husk
of what is left will drop

to the ground, mingle
with brown cones. Now

the rain has begun, dunting
leaves, moistening dirt.

WINTER, HATTIESBURG, MISSISSIPPI

Tonight the air feels cool
as we walk out of the Wal-Mart
on Highway 49. Cool like late
August in Seattle, 9 O'clock,
sun set at 8, stars yet to appear
in the cobalt over the Olympics. Ferries
still arriving and departing the water
front. Lights in windows of buildings
shine over the streets and the moon
is a rind skewered by the radio towers
on Capitol Hill. But I'm in this parking
lot, late February, 6:15 PM. I can't see
the moon through the yellow pines. Frogs
chirp in the distance answering one another.
Cars pause at the ends of rows
and then rev their engines for other places.

WATER FILLS THE GROUND

Eleven robins bounce
in the brown grass. Remnants
of summer blew away moons
ago. Five birds hedge

February gusts behind
the oak. The rest continue
their search for the unperceivable
bits of food only they can see.

DUSK COMES TO MISSISSIPPI

Over long leaf pines sun
singes the horizon red
and jar flies increase their revolutions.
Contrasts fade as day darkens.
In the mall parking lot, a space
sits empty, freshly stripped of day.
All that remains is a single used diaper.

The breeze picks up
and pine boughs wave.
The mocking bird continues
to clinch, holding on
until the sun rises again.

THE MEDICAL STUDENT

When I left her on the sidewalk
in Salt Lake City and drove away, my car
filled for Seattle, I thought she was it.
Seven months later, when I returned
on my spring break, she told me
she wasn't. I imagine her now, in Omaha,
coming and going from the ER, feeling
the loss for those she couldn't save
balanced with gratitude for those
she could or didn't need to.

Every weekday I rise
and dress in the Mississippi dawn,
my wife sleeps late. The brush of denim
echoes on her fingertips from when
she held my leg, briefly, as I leaned
to kiss her and start my day.

THE NATURE OF THINGS

I threw out the apple
into the back yard
thinking it would diversify
the squirrels' menu.
It had been ignored on the top shelf
of the refrigerator door for the past
four months. Still sound,
its skin red, but slightly dulled.
I thought myself noble, returning
this fruit to the natural order of things.

Now it's been two weeks
and I have rediscovered my gift
in the midst
of a tuft of grass, ignored
once again. The red has deepened,
the skin smooth as before
save a single black hole.

COWS IN NOVEMBER

A wasp dozes on the sill. Outside
the window, beyond a swale,
eight cows and three calves gnaw
November grass.

They stand and stare
in their bovine crowd,
ruminating. And when I walk

to the door and step out
on the front porch to announce
myself to them, telling them
what they are, *cows*,
my voice denting the cold,
all I hear in response
is the ripping of roots.

THE FIRST OF DECEMBER

Drops of water droop
from naked branches
like jewelry. Leaves recently
sloughed, brown
on the ground. Squirrels'
minds whirl with the new
robust economy of acorns
scattered over grass, amidst
more leaves and needles
from longleaf pines. Dusk
settles over the yard
as clouds push farther
west, clearing the sky
for the moon to glint
in the water drops when
the evening starts to move.

MCLARD FARM, JACKSON, MISSOURI

For Kat

The thickness of the day is now set.
And we walk in the dry creek
walled with trees. The cows
are up the hill now, beyond your mother's
childhood home. Where the creek
bends to the north, butterflies have flocked
to a pile of fresh manure, burst and fill
the air around us, then beat blue wings
to green leaves.

IN THE NIGHT

A woman sits beside
a window, waiting. She wants
the sun to rise, to burn off
every angry thought that holds
her to the sill. She looks out
at leaves blown from up the street.
She knows in a month the trees
will expose themselves.

IN CADES COVE, GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

Mid-autumn sun dries five yellow
poplar leaves plastered
to my truck. Stands of yellow
and red leaves block horizon
every direction you look. Ten
minutes ago we stood in the graveyard
of the Primitive Baptist Church.
One grave is of a man whose coffin
my grandfather, as a young boy, sat
on in the back of the truck when
it came to this cove 80 years ago.
This he told my mother weeks before
he died. Now, my grandfather, buried
on a hillside outside of Maryville, Tennessee, lies
next to my grandmother, his brother
next to them. Everyone else I love
still breathes. And in Monrovia, California,
your father is buried next to where your mother
will be. But, enough about departure. We are here
in the Cove rolling through fall
trees, three days free
of our lives.

THE LAST WALKER SISTER, 1964

She sits alone whittling a willow
branch. Poplar burns in the stone
fireplace, soot thickening. Mold blooms
in the churn on the porch and the loom
catches leaves from gusts. Four vacant
beds remain made, their hand-stitched
coverlets spread smooth. Her sisters' hat
boxes stacked in neat lines under each
bed. In the yard, beyond the corn
crib, two deer nose the fall grass,
steam rising from their snouts.
In the fireplace, a log collapses
from its own charred weight. Burning
wood and the knife's blade portioning
slices of willow to the flames are
her only conversation.

HAIKUS FROM THE SMOKY MOUNTAINS

Yellow poplar leaves
stuck to rocks by creek water
Tonight will be cool

A sow and her cubs
show no interest to people
who gawk from the road

Rain drips from branches
beating rhythms on the tent
five hours no sleep

Damp wood makes slow heat
Sunset two hours ago
The rice will be raw

BLACK BEAR

Beyond the swale that separates
our truck from the bear, the poplars,
in two uniform rows, that once signified
a driveway to where the Shield's
place stood, fade into the meadow.
As a girl, my mother visited this place
when it contained a home. But now there's nothing
but tall grass, scattered stones
and the bear lumbering farther
into the field, away from the shaded day.

AFTER SUNRISE, CADES COVE

A rafter of turkeys crosses the single-lane
road in front of the Jeep Liberty,
of which we are behind.
Snoods sway like limp flags in the midst
of their earnest march to a stand of poplars.
Kat and I have been behind
this Liberty for fifteen minutes
now as it inches forward— two tenths of mile—
so slow my engine almost stalled twice
up the last rise. It stopped for every single
distant deer grazing in the middle of a meadow.
And we assume the occupants exclaimed at the event
of each sighting, *hey look, there's a deer!* But here,
the turkeys give reason for the pause. Five more pass
from meadow over pavement to trees, the morning
moisture glinting off their feathers. Though focused
on their destination, the closeness breaks
the fourth wall. Unlike the deer, the turkeys allowed
their path to intersect ours, to confuse
the natural for a moment. And for this
moment we fall back into a world that matters.

THE END OF THE E.H. HITCH FARM, MARYVILLE, TENNESSEE

On the day before the papers
will be signed my mother
kneels in the front yard on the edge
of Centennial Church Road and digs
shoots of new oaks from the grass.
Rain pours steadily, sifting through
leaved branches. She will take
the shoots home to Washington and pot
them on the back porch,
holding on to something
alive from her past.

Now northwest rain falls from clouds
stretching out east over the Cascades,
soaking roots that began
in East Tennessee.

PAOLI, INDIANA

No matter how many times
you circumnavigate the square,
the court house is always on your left

and the girls you see sitting on hoods
tonight were the same
you saw last Friday night.

Dirt from the fields settles
where tires don't roll, revealing
paths of repetition.

Less than fifty miles
to Bloomington, but your life
is still left to this: swimming

in clouds of saw dust, screeching
Main, and balking at the turn north
on highway Thirty Seven.

ON SOLO IN THE DESERT

I lost my rational compass
when the sun went down

and now the sound of drums spreads
over the sage and Manzanita.

I lie in my sleeping bag,
stare at the full moon. Hundreds of miles

away it pulls water closer to land.
Drum beats hit sandstone, dribble

to the dirt. Any slumberous hope fled

when what I thought I heard
confirmed itself. Coyotes stammer

in the breaks. The moon pulls
my blood with a slow cadence

in my ears. The drumming
continues for what seems

like an hour, filling the dark
and I find, actually, there's

comfort in the rhythms
that gouge the night.

LOVE AMONG DUCKS

-Standing on a Bridge at River Front Park, Spokane, WA

In sludge, remnants of rain two days old
and leaves that had let go four months ago,
a drake and hen slurp through. Spending
their day the way they had hoped. Slow
steady waddle, hen in front, bills dipping.
This is aged love. Quacks aren't needed.
They've done this many times before.

I would like to think this all true. This drake
and hen, together, enduring life. I would like
to think there is love among ducks
and that we, people and ducks, can be
sympathetic to the other.

And later, he stands in grass
on the edge of water, considering
distance swum, spreading feathers just right
to encourage those last two drops of water
to shed, a hope steady as breath that she
will stay happy in leafy puddles.

ON SQUAK MOUNTAIN, ISSAQUAH, WASHINGTON

A jittering chickadee stands
in the birdbath's leafy water.
It authors ripples. Clouds
above the cedars
and firs move towards Tiger
Mountain and beyond
to shade the evening commute
of eastbound 90. The chickadee
puffs its breast
feathers, splashing water
against its slender skin.

WATER SKIING, LAKE SAMMAMISH, ISSAQUAH, WASHINGTON 9/11/01

The lake is calm. It's 7:30 AM.
The sun already above
Tiger Mountain. It feels like mid-
August in this green

lake surrounded
by evergreens.
My body bobs
in the water

waiting for the boat
to come around
with the rope for one
more run. On the other

end of the country people
are screaming.
The towers are on fire.
We heard this news

before heading out,
but what were we to do?
The rope rubs my back
as the boat closes the arch.

In houses on the shore, and every
house in town, people
are watching televisions,
listening to radios, talking

on phones. The rope slowly
goes taut. I say go.

ISLAND PARK, IDAHO

Rain pats leaves
that have sheltered
the vole for the past
hour. The stream carries
away foliage that couldn't hold
on. Green reflects

in the black of the vole's eyes
as it waits for the final drops
to come so that it can, once
again, follow the scent
of birdseed and peanut
butter from the biologists' trap.

One mile away we enter
the Texaco on Highway 20.
Rain rattles the awning,
spills to a mix of gas
and oil drops, the concrete
slick.

CARNATION, WASHINGTON

The merganser's feet parts
green as it slides away
from the bank. Two fir cones,
encouraged by a breeze

from the south, fall to the lily pads.
A stellar jay confers with its mate
five boughs up the Douglas fir.
The merganser is now in open water.

AUTUMN HERE

Gray and wet trade off
with brisk and crisp. Despite retreating
chlorophyll, green still reigns,
but now green with yellow
and red. The hills–
they send the artist out for more paint.

Then comes more rain. Solid
for a day and a night. Gray
seals in the morning; the tops of hills
cut off by clouds. Some think
it a sentence. But I see it
as beautiful, as something that smacks you
and leaves a sting
that you cherish. The kind of
sensation you know is significant.
And here is more rain.

Thirty-three years
and I've never owned
an umbrella. Rain soaks in.
This is what I miss
when the sun is burning my skin.

EVENING, ISSAQUAH, WASHINGTON

This damp day shines under lamps
snapping on for dusk, static of tires
rolling over tiny rivulets as cars drive
south towards Hobart Road
and on to an imaginary Rainier.
I see this from the train tracks that cross
Front Street. Tracks that appear to go on,
parallel, out into Hobart too. And north
towards the lake, up to Redmond.
But now, they are cut off, south
at Sunset Way, north at Gilman Boulevard,
not even a mile left. These tracks allowed
this town to be. I turn and look south
and watch the rails as they fade away.

OCTOBER

Green blankets
the large boulder forty
years kept from sun.
Fir and maple boughs
cross—needles and leaves
clatter with rain. Crass
salamanders rest under
remnants of trees,
soaked in used moisture.

ASLEEP IN A LIBRARY CHAIR

This morning I could not sleep
past 5:47. At 7:33 I could see
chunks of clouds out my window

coming up over the ridge of Tiger Mt.
slightly illuminated by dawn,
the rest of the sky turning bluer

as the morning aged. On my way
to lunch, the gray
was back. I sat in this chair

in the library, next to the big
windows to read. I slept
from 11:56 to 1:28. My jaw

is stiff, my arm numb. I wonder if I snored.
And outside it is raining, raining like it has
for the past 27 days,

raining like it did
in my dream as I slumped in this chair.

EAST OF ISSAQUAH

And east of Squak and Tiger, more mountains.
All as green. Filled with ferns, firs and cedars.
Mosses embrace tall trunks and large forgotten
boulders, ferns growing from them. These stones
shaded for forty years but drenched
with rain often. One hundred years ago
these trees were seeds just starting. Train
tracks held trains that took the old trees
to Seattle. Now most likely houses there,
or Ellensburg, Tacoma or Everett.

TUESDAY AT THE FRYE

In the first gallery *Sin* hangs alone.
Surrounded by a web of golden Mylar

against a green wall. Eve's
face, shaded in green too, stares

out over the empty room—
brand new knowing. The snake,

like an old friend's arm,
hangs on her shoulders, looking,

his black skin seeping into the background,
his mouth in the midst of breathing, *yes*.

CROSSING FOOTHILL BOULEVARD

The light is green and I'm a pedestrian
and this is a cross walk. In the midst
of my passage, a white GMC truck lays
on its horn because the driver
feels it's his turn to turn left, not mine
to cross. He blows as he passes through
the crosswalk in my wake. I turn to see
him staring hard. I yell the *light is green,*
yield the right-of-way. To this he responds,
like a thousand flippant rebellious youths,
with his middle finger. It's meaty and stout
matching the rest of his thick hand, which,
at this point I assume is as thick as his head.
He then speeds off, leaving me to fume
and feel the sting of injustice
as I step to the curb.

ISSAQUAH IN JANUARY

Cars line up at the light waiting
to cross Sunset Way and continue
home. It has been raining all day.
I wish you were here instead
of California. Our vague plans
rest in my mind as I watch
these cars, Tiger Mountain
in the background
cut off by low clouds. Green grows
to black in the late dusk
of your voice. I see this from the window
of the library on the corner
of Front and Sunset.

NORTHWEST WINTER

Far from the conifers and green undergrowth
on western Cascade faces,

water and land

confuse in the constant
lunar pull. Seagulls

congregate on the Sound like teenagers breaking the day
with incessant banter, while Starfish
and anemones embrace

pilings and rocks. The distant

Cascades converge with gray sky, precipitation
filling the void
between cloud and earth.

And westward, beyond
the open Sound, the Olympics follow suit.

THE HOUSE AT BIG BEAR PL. N.W.

Sun seeps over Tiger Mountain
as chickadees and juncos bounce
in the half-dead plum tree just
off the back deck. Up the hill, hidden
in cedar boughs, two stellar jays
squawk the morning in.
My mother stands at the kitchen sink looking
out the window at the plum tree.
My father's oatmeal warms on the stove.

WALKING AT 9 AM

Clouds move away from morning sun. Frost
disappears, and steam rises like praise
off the wet fence. Down the alley, a cat,
averse to the day, crosses from rhododendron
to fern tuft, trading places with a squirrel.
Slowly, these back yards of former miners'
homes are wiped away by new apartments.
Soon, concrete will stand instead of these
green refuges. And now the sun starts to fade
behind gray; water drips from eaves.

LAKE SAMMAMISH, ISSAQUAH, WASHINGTON

Three mallards and a gaggleless goose
drift in lily pads. Underneath, Chinook
rest before the final push—up the creek—
of their lives. Sammamish is calm, reflecting
gray sky, tinted green. The only ripples
are from fowl dips and smooth glides.
Issaquah Creek blends into this lake
like histories: cool waters interlaced.
The ducks and goose follow the shoreline
towards the creek, a breeze pushing their tails.

STANDING IN LINE AT DISNEYLAND I SEE A COCKROACH

Everything is intentional, even
the cracks in Main Street.
But what about this Cockroach? It climbs
steadily up this column, which was placed
here to make guests feel
they were standing somewhere
in London—not Anaheim—
at night waiting
to fly on a pirate ship
over the lighted city, and then off
to Neverland. If this is the happiest place
on Earth, then this must be the happiest
cockroach. The line moves forward,
and still it climbs,
with a shell like thunder.

TUESDAY AFTERNOON

She fingers the rasp of the music
box's cylinder, likes the feel
of "Beethoven's 5th" on her skin.
From the bathroom window,
she surveys the front yard. She often
performs this upon arriving home
from school, before evening sets in.
Accumulated leaves mottle the lawn
in yellow and red. A breeze redistributes
the color. And then she notices her cat,
Alice, a mound of gray fur, motionless,
next to the flagstone walk
that leads to the house.

WHILE THE SKY IS GRAY

Pollock's *Sea Change* hangs
in the Seattle Art Museum.

The flicks of black stick to my mind
Like the 24 foot *Hammering Man*

on the corner of First and University.
Black like the eyes of seagulls

on the waterfront by Ivor's seafood bar
performing for fish 'n' chips,

their greasy crap mixing with
the rainbowed black water of the bay.

ON MYRTLE STREET

Monrovia, California
12/23/2006

The San Gabriels fence off the north
and give a destination for Myrtle Street.
Cars move north towards the mountains,
some turning east or west like arteries
splitting to extremities. A company
of parrots alight three palms
near the library. Squawks and engines merge.
The foothills, minutes ago, were smooth
green. But now, the sun skimming the Pacific
lights every crevice deep, every tree bold
in the last minutes before the sky drains.

ON THE WAY TO PUERTO PEÑASCO

In college, Idaho, 1990, we did it for Social Distortion
and Jane's Addiction, pushing through the night in Christian's
Accord, hoping for three hours of sleep before class,
clothes stiff with dry sweat from slam dancing
and the pit, drinking quarts of Dr. Pepper, fighting
nods the half hour before pulling into the potato
town that felt like a kind of home.

But now, instead of the Idaho desert, 3 a.m.,
it's southern Arizona, 1999, and we're heading
for Mexico, because we can. Christian's
in the passenger seat and I'm behind the wheel
of his white CRX, windows down because the AC
is out. The July night heat puts sweat across our heads,
down our arms and when the moon hits us we shine.
The stereo is out too, so it's the wind, our nostalgia, and the whispered
scampers of every lizard we pass.

Immigration officers stand around low fires on the sides
of the road every 50 miles. Saguaros give the sense of walls
as we speed past. Then, in the midst, a shirtless Mexican,
fresh over the border, stands on the shoulder, between two
cacti, looking confused and alone.

FISHING ISSAQUAH CREEK

It was the summer before sixth grade
and we knew nothing practical
of fishing. Robbie Glasgow and I,

each morning for the better part
of a week, walked
down the hill with yellow
marshmallows and a box
of hooks, to the bridge
on Newport Way
over the Issaquah Creek.

There, under the steel supports,
shaded from the growing day,
among rounded stones and alders,
we held our lines against the current,
waited for any sign of a fooled fish.
Nothing ever came, save twigs.

And like the dumb kid I was,
told my mother not to worry
about dinner.

RAIN

People who do not like rain, I will argue,
do not like this world. How much
more can you be in the day
than when rain is spilling down,
hitting you, then dripping
into earth where it sits
until it's made back into a cloud?
In these moments the world is caressing
you, with each drop exchanging
a little bit wetness for a little bit of you.

WORKING WITH WOOD

He leans over his workbench,
scores a line in maple.
A scrim of sawdust rests

on everything. Florescent lights cancel
out the day. His chisel gouges
dovetails: board ends join together

like hands. On the wall behind him: generations
of tools: his life translates to crosscut,
back, and miter saws, mallets,

awls, chisels, squares, block and jack plains.
Wood curls settle on the tops of his shoes, snag
the arms and stomach of his shirt.

THE DAY WE SAW KENNY G. AT PIKE PLACE MARKET

The artichokes were a dollar each,
bouquets of flowers ten. Down the hill
at El Puerco Lloron the fish tacos
made sweat congregate on my scalp
in lieu of rain.
Then, we see him,
alone, walking towards us,
hands in his pockets, brown leather
jacket unzipped. He smiles,
maybe at us.
Thick ringlets rest
on his shoulders, the very ones
that bear up his sax.
Kat and I witness this.
Like seeing a deer
walking down 1st Avenue, beautiful,
awkward and out of place.

THIMBLE

On the edge of the porch,
a woman sits, darning. And in
the yard, chickens peck the dirt
for seed and grit, going about
their daily tasks. In the midst
of rethreading the needle,
after finishing the elbow
of her husband's shirt, the tin thimble
releases from her left thumb, falls down
each subsequent step until it comes to rest
in the yard. A white bantam picks it
and eats it. Down from the porch,
the woman grabs the bantam's neck,
its plumed tail passing in front,
the final vision of its life.