

**RAIN DRIPS FROM THE TREES**

Trans-continental haiku

and other poems

Tom Lynch

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## Rain Drips from the Trees

"Aloof and light-hearted I take to the open road."

Preface

W. Whittier

## Rain Drips from the Trees

Haibun along the trans-Canadian Highway

Tom Lynch

by Tom Lynch



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"Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,"

--W. Whitman





## Rain Drips from the Trees

### Preface

Typical desk clutter, books, envelopes, papers,  
a cup of tea, nearly empty and cold.

I cast my curtains apart,  
light falls out the window onto a tree, stripped of leaves.

The luscent rain descends.

The wind trembles on the glass.

I wipe away the moisture.

Tonight the rain permeates everything.

Tonight it could be a symbol of a deeper reality,  
but I'd rather it weren't

--perhaps better not to have said this at all--

simply rain on the roof,

separate drops with a separate clatter to each  
beyond meaning.

When I switch off the light my reflection vanishes from the window.

I would like to go out there, beyond the glass.

I would like to walk over to that tree

unlike anything else, to

where the rain falls through branches

like rain falling through branches, to

where the leaves scatter, wholly leaves, to

where the rain strikes my face just like rain,

and lie down,

spread against wet grass,

and steep

in the suffusion of leaves.





i.

"More peaches grow in Pennsylvania than Georgia," he says, handing me three. Hitching by a fruit stand, a couple for the road and one, juicy, now.

Pennsylvania roadside--coal trucks rumble past, but don't pick me up. I'm heading through Canada to Oregon. They aren't. I'm not sure what's there, but sure what's not here.

After several rides:

Headwaters Allegheny River, Salamanca Indian reservation. Someone else camped here once, plucked berries by the river in the evening, tasted this same sweetness.

hitched all day--  
pick a strawberry  
under roadside weeds

As I sleep, the sound of traffic on nearby road seeps into my dream. I wake to the morning birds before sunrise. Walk to the river to wash yesterday's dust. Lift cool water to my face when suddenly, from weeds, a heron bursts dismayed in feathers and water, struggles up the air, useless legs dangling. Once up, he pulls head back, legs in, stretches wings and glides downstream. Each flap a firm exhaling breath. Turns round a bend and lost through the trees. Ripples on the river slowly quiet.

Into Buffalo and mist grey sky. Walk four miles through industrial traffic. Boxes, cans, Bud bottles, a throw-away diaper in a bush. Queen Anne's lace and wild yellow mustard sprout through the cinders. Then a ride. Out at the border and my pack searched--camping gear, clothes, food, books, laid on the counter. "Where you headed with all this stuff, ay?" she asks. "Vancouver."

Sit in the Toronto subway with the junior executives and the secretaries. My pack against my knees sways with the turns. Cold beer, salad, then walk out of town north to the woods.

a robin  
sings again in the evening--  
clear sky after rain

Pick up a jeep ride into dark. A school teacher, no work in south Ontario, moving north to the bush. "You heard about the mosquitos up here?" she asks. "No. Why?" "Up north it gets so bad folks go nuts--mosquito fever. Bush plane has to come in, fly 'em to a town, a doctor. Some don't live through." "How do the Indians cope?" I ask. "Sit patiently and smoke cigars." Talk and ride till midnight. She pulls off, red lights vanish into



III IV  
spruce forest. Leaves me slapping all night by the roadside with no  
cigars. In ears, eyes, down collar, up pant legs, the crazy buzzing and  
sting. Mosquitos lift at dawn.

dawn mist--  
mosquito bitten face  
cools in the breeze

almost asleep  
a breeze wakes me--  
northern lights

Slowest hitching in Canada, Sault St. Marie to Thunder Bay. At mid-morning a car pulls over, me bumpy, bloody with mosquito welts. "Spent four fucking days under the goose at Sault once," he says, "waiting for a ride. Hopped a freight."

Drive the north shore of Superior  
All day through pines into darkness  
Fifty miles no light along the road  
So late now, no other cars  
Highway above the lake  
Full moon above the water  
Rocks glisten between black pine shadows  
Moonlight breaks on the shore

a robin  
sings again in the evening—  
clear sky after rain

Pick up a jeep ride into dark. A school teacher, no work in south Ontario, moving north to the bush. "You heard about the mosquitoes up here?" she asks. "No. Why?" "Up north it gets so bad folks go nuts—mosquito fever. Bush plane has to come in, fly 'em to a town, a doctor. Some don't live through." "How do the Indians cope?" I ask. "Sit patiently and smoke cigars." Talk and ride till midnight. She pulls off, red lights vanish into



Through dawn grey the woods fade behind. Ahead the flatness of Manitoba. "I'm turning off ahead here. Going north to Thompson, 500 miles. Wanna ride along, ay?" "No, I'm heading west." Watch him drive off on the long road north. Five minutes later he fades from sight.

Hot soup, cold Molson Ale, and rain--crowded Winnipeg, big city on the fringe. Off the bus at the edge of town. I notice the few passengers watch me through the windows as I walk away in rain.

Hitching with back to the wind, a ride straight into Saskatchewan. A grain elevator always in sight, the same elevator all day, on the Trans-Canada two-lane. At last the prairie dry grass. Wet clothes in my pack from Ontario rain spread to dry in Saskatchewan night air. Shed the eastern damp.

almost asleep  
a breeze wakes me--  
northern lights

In the morning I walk through dry hills, rest in sun. Find in grass and dust: crow feathers and a crow's head. Search, no sign of coyote tracks. Black feathers brush in the dust, catch in tall grass. I stick one in my pack.

dust clings  
to the crow's eyes--  
doesn't blink

The prairie's only the place we hurry through, but hitching and stuck, walking back and forth, crouching, standing, the same knoll on the same horizon all afternoon. The prairie at a standstill--Trans-Canada two-lane.

A lake across the road. Even in this quiet, can barely hear the gulls on the far shore. Three houses, a gas station-restaurant, grain silo by the tracks, and an old three-sided wooden shed: Morse, Saskatchewan. I eat dinner in the restaurant. A bell rings, car pulls up outside, then quiet as gas gets pumped. On the walls hang prairie primitive landscapes. Between bites, as I chew, look at them: "Wheat Field with Crows," "The Return of the Hunters," "Mother with Child." Maybe painted by the guy outside pumping gas. \$25.00 each. I could bargain down, but no room to carry. Buy a loaf of bread, rye. Think about his hands taking my money as I carry it back to the road.

Sunset and still no ride. White gulls, struck from the saturated solution of purple sky, crystalize onto the lake. The wind stops. No traffic for the last hour.



prairie evening--  
in a roadside shed  
moonlight smells of horseshit

Finally out of Morse after sun-up, on to Medicine Hat. Along the road, dust and blackbirds scatter. Further off, beyond the traffic's wake, grasses don't move. Mid-morning I get a ride in a pick-up, a middle-aged farmer--his whole life just back and forth this road. He's picking up every hitch hiker with a loud "Hop in!" Soon there's fifteen of us crowded in the back, streaming through the warming air, shouting to be heard, drinking beer for breakfast. A can thrown back bounces silently down the center line. Suddenly he slows, stops, drops off 15 hitch hikers at Gull Lake, Saskatchewan--home. Leans out the window, "See ya folks, ay," and rumbles in dust up a side road. Who'll ever get a ride? They line up every hundred feet along the highway. I walk into town for lunch and a few cold beers in a cool, dark tavern.

farmers in the fields

I'm alone at the bar--

summer silence

Calgary at stampede time. Too broke to see the show, I hitch quickly through. Ride in the back of another pick-up, climbing, climbing, Calgary to Banff. The great plain's dry grass falls away.

Drive beside a rugged stream through fir tree shade. Tourists and locals abound in big, round, fat, black inner tubes, carried up roadside gravel and floated down the torrent.

roar of water--

even louder, a stellar jay

screeches



Hike up a hill by the road to camp. Two hours after sunset, sky and forest still twilit in the far northern night. It rained here before I arrived.

the sky clears--

fir needles

dry in the wind

Off through the night, yarrow stalks scattered apart, gathered together, then scattered again. More slender than the fingers that hold them. Creative and receptive . . .



I wake, start a small fire with fallen needles. Lean back against a tree.

warm in my hands  
 steam rises from a cup of tea--  
 haze around the mountain peaks

All day hitching from Banff to Jasper, seven hours at Sunwapta Falls. Sit by the road and watch clouds, embodied one by one out of empty air, coalesce and slide beyond the ridge. Get out my stove and fire it up to make tea. Read a book. Curse at the passing Winnebagos.

Finally into Jasper after dark. Stock up on water at a gas station. Looking for a place to camp, roam the shrubs and grass in the shadows beyond the station lights. Above the tall grass a bull elk lifts his head. Rack, stretching into the trees, glimmers in the mercury light--then the crackle through underbrush. I bed down in the tall grass. As I lie awake his image hangs in the air.

dream under stars--  
 an elk's breath  
 mists the darkness

Walk out to the Jasper "free camp." Set up by the town to deal with all the summer transients and unemployed hippiedom--the sort of folks who bed down in the tall grass behind the gas station. An uneasy truce between the townsfolk and the travellers. No Mounties raid the camp for drugs, nobody shoplifts in town.

A mountain lily nods across the trail. I lift it aside to pass.

Walk into a summer encampment of plastic teepees, lean-tos. Flutes and guitars under the trees, under the mountains, under the stars, all night. Sit the evening around a fire with a fellow named Gamal. "I meditate here, by the river," he says, "all day sometimes. I can journey through space, my spirit that is. The rest of me just sits here. Mostly I like Jupiter. Been there many times, very colorful. Giant peaceful creatures like whales drift in the clouds."

Off through the night, around another campfire, loud screaming, drunken laughter, shouting, cursing. He gets up, takes a thin stick from the pile and wales it through the dark in their direction. Sits. This has happened before. They quiet. "I like it there, and I like it here too--here too, maybe even better." He lives in a plastic lean-to beside the Athabasca River, holds an engineering doctorate from the University of Texas.

Around the fire, yarrow stalks scattered apart, gathered together, then scattered again. More slender than the fingers that hold them. Creative and receptive . . .



A separation:

Li: The Clinging Fire

Kên: Keeping Still, Mountain

A gathering:

Lü: The Wanderer.

A mountain fire, hard to start but small fir twigs burn hot. Sit still, look at the stars, hear nothing.

talk around campfire--

cold smoke

merges into stars

Grizzly and Cougar roam the night landscape among the wild rose bushes. The mountain presses down. Smoke rises.

Decide to use the free camp as a base for a few days of roaming in the high country. Hike up the 20-mile loop trail. Hard rain all day and cool, low 40's. No rain now but water drips down from the trees. A vestige of the storm.

As I walk along the muddy trail, just ahead and filling with water--wolf tracks. A separate swirl in the print of each pad. A branch sways in the still air. I pass around a turn. Up the trail the wolf swings its head around and smoothly disappears. A glimpse, and I don't see it again. Mud splattered grey confluence descends through the trees. Afternoon settles in the blue lupine.

The evening gathers. Once more I sit beside a fire. The center of the fire, simple. But reveals in complexity. Flame swirls from an explosion, a falling apart, away, flickering stars in gas, dust, a multitude of divergences, diversity. Then a coming together, coalescence, unity, repetition. Breath of the universe hisses in fire, stars, sand.

Rain drips. A lake gathers to the northeast and a stream flows by to the south. I'm here. Evening mist descends the slopes, glistens from the leaves and from the spruce needles. The fire hangs reflected in each drop, falls and bursts a splash of flame all night, in every direction, over and over.

the fire smokes  
as I sleep  
the wolf exhales



x.

A few blue patches in the clouds of morning quickly cover over again. I drink a cup of tea, time to be moving soon. Wildflowers-- purple, yellow--bloom all around. As I pack my tent, the clouds begin to lift above mountains of new snow across the lake. A jay darts from one tree to another.

Stop walking mid-day at Caledonia Lake. Eat lunch as two loons echo their calls across the water into the canyons. In the distance, beyond the spruce-lined shore, again the higher mountains are clearing, revealing a yet fresher settle of snow.

Distant loon dives--  
the first ripple  
nears the shore

Climb all day to just below timberline at Signal Peak camp. Sky darkens with a storm's passage to the north. The Athabasca valleys between the base of the mountains--five miles wide. Rain slants from the clouds across the mountains to the valley floor. The river shivers with the falling water on its back. Drops fall here, but a strip of blue along the horizon and brief hope for a clearing--the rain falls harder. I move into my tent. Hiked 20 miles today: two marten, one coyote, 15 or 20 elk, and one storm. The tent against the wind.

firs bend in the wind--  
 stones around the campfire  
 don't move



In the high country, morning clouds of white far below obscure the river. Busy with breakfast and details of breaking camp, stuffing sleeping bag, scrubbing pots, I forget where I am. Swing my pack on, look up to--the rediscovery of range beyond range of mountains.

Above tree-line all day, old snowdrifts from winter storms melt on the trail, trickle through granite chips. By late afternoon I prepare to descend as the rain begins. Cold water hits the rocks all around, soaks through my sleeves. Trudge through knee-deep crusted snow. Water streams across the frozen surface of rock, across ice-sheathed snow pack, across my face, down from the pass. A circle of snow melt lake water so blue below. Above it a rainbow hangs projected against the far ridge. I stop to look, rest, still no words for it. Put some granite flakes in my pocket. The timberline we walk in language, a stuttered breath in thin air.

no stars--  
looking out the tent  
splash of drizzle on my face

Downward all day from the high country rocks. Forested trail walked with a mind full of green and shadows. Between tree tops cumulous drift in blue sky.

horse tracks--  
distant clouds smell of  
mud and horseshit

I trudge back into free camp near dark.



After a deep sleep all night, mist hisses as I eat breakfast. On mountains rain falls every day, and the mind's river fills. As I leave the free camp, in the rain, the lily nods lower across the trail. Lifting it aside a few drops fall on my hand.

Hitched out of Jasper, west and south. Friday night in Valemount. Along all highways, in pencil, in marking pen, on the backs of signs, on guardrails, poems and curses of the road, but in this place, a warning: "Don't get stuck here at night." All the traffic headed to the bars in town. Down the road, two teen-age French-Canadians, no luck hitching either. "Where to?" I ask. "Okanagan, to pick apples." All they have stuffed in two gym bags. "It's getting dark, how about I buy you guys a cup of coffee, and call it a day." "Thanks, sure." Not much talk. We drink coffee and wash up in the restroom, then move into trees back from the road. A restless sleep disturbed by rain. At first light I leave them huddled against a tree in soaked sleeping bags.

I also will pass these two,  
left by the road on my face  
under pines

Shaggy green Cascades, hunched asleep, Sasquatch.

Vancouver in the early evening, lights coming on. Into a bar, chaos of smoke and ale. Can't afford another, someone I don't know buys it. Not out until after two a.m. Now I remember, oh yes, "Unrelieved sobriety is itself an excess." Heavy pack, wander the night streets, nowhere to go. Sleep in an alley behind weeds under tall concrete. Find a park at first light. Stretch out on a bench. Catch the morning ferry to Nanaimo.

ferry surges--  
in the sea wind  
slowly sober



White houses flicker in the water as the ferry turns into the bay. Behind the docks, a hilltop park. Walk up the narrow street. A few picnic tables on the grass, a few large stones beneath the trees. Petroglyphs by those who've been here before chipped into the stones: A coiled snake unwinding clockwise, beside it, another, curling back to sleep. Beneath my hand, more recent carvings in the picnic table. Typical latrine scrawl, a penis entering a vagina. "For a good time . . ." etc.

Out in the distance warm sunlight settles on the waves. I eat a basket of strawberries, an avocado, and a quart of buttermilk beneath blue sunlit sky.

Hitch out past the city's spread. Camp at the island's center beneath clear purple air. I had not expected them and the island mountains startle me.

A cold night. I wake before dawn, needing to pee. Stand naked in the moonlight.

as I pee  
 steam rises--  
 the moonlit forest

Anxious for the sea, no breakfast in damp early light. Two loggers take me cross island to the coast. A cup of coffee from large silver thermos spills on the sharp turns. We disagree on clear-cutting, but bid each other honest farewell.

Pacific Rim, smooth shore curve. Light mist blows in from the sea, up the beach, into the forest. Dense, dark, silent fir and the open, light, roaring churn of the sea. On the upper beach, huge cut and seaworn logs, tossed in inextricable piles, loosed from the rivers, blown by surf here in storm to roll up beach.

Walk all day to the camp site. Many other tents but few people visible. I step up from the beach into trees. After pitching my tent, I sit facing the ocean from beneath the trees and wait for the fire to catch brightly.

High tide ebbing. A few clues to what lies out there strewn on the beach. Pick up a crab pincher that still swivels in its hinge. Put it in my pack. Sleep with the sound of the waves--nothing, all, nothing, all.

water swirls up sand  
sifts back  
again



Breakfast oatmeal and tea beside small fire. Then I stash my gear in the tent, fill daypack with food and water, and strike north up the coast.

Around the first turn, black lava rock flows into hissing ocean foam, cold cliffs of ragged stone tear the sea. Above the roar, along cliffs by finger and toe grasp, mile after mile, the essence of cliff--hold on. I climb down the rock edge to caves worn by high tide, bottomed arm-deep in broken shells and storm-polished stone. Churned back and forth for centuries. In a handful, tiny moist stones glimmer. I fill my pockets and clamber away onto high sea mist rock. After sitting where the cool spray rises, I turn inland, cross country, into humid rain forest tangle. Step by step through branches, eyes full of sweat, grab root and pull. Elbows bend, reach, and grab again. Much farther than I thought. Finally, I scale a ridge to break upon clear green lake lain amidst the trees. Walk old trail out to road, back to camp by evening.

trees drift in sea mist--

rain

taps on the tent

Hour beyond hour in the darkness, adrift through sleep, I hear rain, rain awash more loudly than the waves of high tide. Wake to more rain, gradually, in grey light.

At first let-up, the other campers pack tents and gone. Solitude through tenacity. Eat in my tent, read. Near noon a yellow sun spreads moist wind over the sea. Gulls walk the sand with gathered wings. I go out to them. They run, look back, then fly out to a rock island near shore.

waves break over rock--  
gulls, spray  
fly

Steam rises from beach logs in green light. Grass stalks hung with drops twist in the breeze.

Evening after all day's rain, sky clear, nighthawks slash above the trees. After such rain a long time to get fire started. I blow on it . . . coals burst orange and . . . turn from smoke in eyes. Coals dim. I blow hard and . . . dizzy. Sit as fire fades again. Blow once more, and damp wood finally catches. Galaxy of embers grows.

Finished eating, sip tea, write. Sharpen my pencil with a knife. Yellow shavings on pine needles shine in the glow of the fire. As I scribble, pages dampen with dew.

I walk to the beach to scrub pots, swirl the sand around, scrape down to a metal sheen. Look up across the water, to where summer constellations, Lyra and Aquila and Cygnus, shine beyond the mist. Constant calm



rhythm of the surf stretches around. Stars thrash in the beach sand,  
glitter, and return to dark. Above the sea, Antares, the red heart of  
Scorpio, lingers in the eye.

stars through twilit haze--  
even after the sky has cleared  
rain drips from the trees

After waking, I drag sleeping bag to beach, spread wet clothes in the sun,  
on dry sand. Walk beach all day, sit and read, do nothing.

dense mist--  
in dawn light a gull  
again finds land



Once more a morning, sky clear. Thin haze slides off the sea into the trees. Small cumulous scatter over the inland mountains. I break camp and head for the road. Hitch cross island all day. "Ever seen such windy roads as on this island?" "Sure, back in Pennsylvania, even windier." "Naw."

Victoria, buy a few peaches, toss pits into the sea. To what avail time, waiting for the ferry.

cross the straits  
through evening blue  
venus behind thin clouds

I lean on the rail. Tonight too, crossing Victoria ferry, white sea gulls high in the air float with motionless wings. To what avail space.

In the distance the lights of Port Angeles begin to come on. A few bright stars above them.

[6/27 - 7/18, 77]

## Climbing Kachina Peaks

Wake at 3 a.m. and make a cup of tea. Moon through the window a waning gibbous.

lift kettle from stove coil--  
orange glow  
lights the kitchen

Planning a hike up San Francisco Mountains, the Kachina Peaks. I throw a few things in pack: thermos of hot water, tea bags, cheese, bagels, an apple, bird book. Hop on my bike for ride to the mountain road.

pedal along dark road  
Jupiter too  
speeds through pines

At 3:30 in the morning no car even on the busy route to the Grand Canyon. I turn off at mountain dirt road, park bike among pines away from view. As I walk, sporadic clouds obscure moon, map no longer readable. Without the moon, which way?

car suddenly here,  
suddenly gone--  
dark mountain silence

Even in cool moonlight the road dust coats my tongue.



hike by moonlight  
dead pine's  
sudden jaggedness

As I climb to a pass, the gradual light of dawn emerges from the sky.  
Still dark beneath the trees.

dawn light--  
white flash  
of junco tail feathers

leaves rustle--  
among pines  
pale aspen

Hike along thinking of haiku. Stop for tea at sunrise, write them down.  
Forget some. Sun rises over painted desert. Distant mesas' black juts  
horizon.

blue asters  
closed tight--  
cool dawn

sunrise  
pines above me  
glow orange

Pass through field full of flickers, leaping from grass to tall dead limbs.  
Fifteen or 20 at least in this one spot. Secret in their throats, a wild cackle.  
Farther up the trail three bull elk grazing. One astride the trail turns to  
sniff the air. Considers me a full minute.

bull elk on trail--  
glad  
he's not fierce

Not much sport in the hunt, but it will start soon anyhow. Not long now,  
these might be dead. They amble off down the slope into dense cover,  
huge racks gracefully avoid branches.

elk cross trail--  
their scent  
lingers among spruce

Didn't think to bring the field guide, and an unknown mushroom. How  
many more I don't know about, alive beneath my feet?

As I move higher up the mountain, aspen begin to yellow. At first only  
the top few leaves flutter golden, then leaf by leaf suffused. On ridge line  
dead bristlecone pine low to the ground. Huddle behind it out of the wind.  
How long it lived here, now bone-whitened by mountain winds. On the  
lee-side, sheltered from gusts, flowers manage, and a good spot for lunch.  
Look across basin to tallest peaks.

the harsh wind--  
tea in tin cup  
quickly cold



On the Kachina Peaks nature removes a mask.

thin cloud drifts off peak  
hoarfrost glitters  
on black boulders

Where the snows come from. Soon I will be up there.

Clark's nutcrackers seem terribly wild as they fly near timberline,  
piercing the wind with their clattering. Several juncos bathe in trail dust.  
Spin in little dust piles, feathers twitching. Reluctant to leave as I  
approach, they return as soon as I pass.

Nearing the summit, only bristlecone pines and lichen remain to be seen  
of life.

tiny bristlecone  
lichen covered boulder  
I breathe too

Trail follows cinder block ridge to top. Wind grows immense.

kicked a minute ago  
boulder far below  
stops rolling

On the distant horizon, Grand Canyon north rim looms above the  
invisible gorge, cut deep into earth. Brilliant depths invisible from here,  
hidden beneath everywhere. To the east, beyond painted desert colors,  
remote Hopi mesas break level horizon. Their prayers, in spite of tourists

and ski lodge and hikers such as me, turned towards this sacred ground. At the summit, so windy I can't stand up. Home of the kachinas. None that you'd notice though. Maybe they've gone dancing. Clouds form over these mountains, carry rain to distant fields, whether we pray for it, whether we don't. Somewhere up here, under a rock--which one none of my business, or yours--a prayer bundle. Still, good to know. Thunder sleeps in these boulders.

Turn to descend into wind. Pass many hikers on their way up. "How much farther?" "Are we almost there?" Some Sierra-clubber types who look like they'd rather be reading about it.

Walk quickly back into trees, wind eases. Juncos scatter before me, but Clark's nutcrackers high overhead don't notice. An hour later, in a meadow sheltered by aspens, I lie in the sun, drink the last of my tea, watch gold leaves shimmer in sun and breeze. Far above now, the summit. So recently I was there. From the flanks of Kachina Peaks, spruce, aspen, sprout.

suddenly here  
grasshopper on my knee  
suddenly gone

At a small spring I stop for a sip. Water right from under spruce tree root.

glance back  
juncos return  
to the cool spring



Thinking of a shower, and hot supper, and how to write this, I hike through forest I don't notice. Now, after shower, and supper, and writing this, I think of forest I missed.

cold moonlight  
on kachina peaks--  
if I step outside, if I don't

[Flagstaff, Arizona; 9/10/86]

## On The Fishing Fly

After days of rain, the sky cleared a few hours ago. A wisp of cloud lingers in the ridge-top firs. Evening's purple light settles on the hills. Mountain's shadow casts darkness on the water.

With pants rolled up, I stand in the current, lean upstream. Toes grip slick stones--north fork of the middle fork of the Willamette River.

I watch my fly--grey caddis--drift downstream. Suspended on the riffle of the sky reflecting stream, the fly drifts, drifts, and then . . . vanishes.

After the catch, my firm grip relaxes. Trout's silver tail flicks and disappears. We are released from the anxiety of death.

river holds darkness--  
a drop of blood glistens  
on the fishing fly

Later, almost asleep, I hear a leaping trout splash. A few stars glitter among the tall trees.

[Above Westfir, Oregon; 8/2/89]



## **Autumn at the Valley's Edge**

Oak trees assert their yellow among the hills. Beneath them lie the vivid reds of blackberry leaves, wild rose, and poison oak. I step over fallen tansy, around clumps of withered thistle and teasel, damp from recent rain. Water steepes through my pants, chills my legs.

Basalt outcrops, glittering with moss, protrude into the late afternoon light.

I grapple onto a boulder. Over the blackberry tangle, two, three, four, then six deer raise their moist eyes towards me. Nostrils dilate. As I hold my breath, the only sound is a doe chewing. Then, as one, they walk, trot, and suddenly gallop up the slope. A sensitive panic ripples the herd. Small stones clatter behind them. Only a hint of grace in their desperation.

I would crouch with them beneath the trees, brush rain water from their flanks, but it is their nature to flee, and mine to be fled.

Later, I climb steep slope near the summit. Fresh clouds from the Pacific move over the valley. They thicken. Grey air fills the landscape. I sit, indistinct in the vague light of evening. The yellow in the trees and the red in the scattered shrubs suffuses into the damp air. It is our instinct to be remote.

I notice, far down the hill, that the deer have stepped out of the trees and stand silently in a clearing.

far down the slope  
a few deer feed--between us  
rain begins to fall

[Mt. Pisgah, Eugene, Oregon; 11/6/82]



## Horseshoe Mesa

Hike down to Horseshoe Mesa, old mining site, half way down, half way up, the Grand Canyon. Pitch tent near a ruined miner's shack. A long walk down the mesa slopes to find a trickle of creek amid cottonwood and tamarisk. Lug water jug back up to camp in the late evening. Climb the steep redwall, tug a tree root, cliff a thousand feet down.

Just past sunset.

soaking up all

the dusk light--

Juniper berries

Jupiter emerges first from blue sky.

Abrupt darkness sweeps down from the desert. Overwhelmed by stars. I know their names--Vega, Deneb, Altair--but does that make them closer? No constellation but experience. Still, I'm pleased to repeat the names.

Boiling water for tea. My stove's blue light and insistent hiss.

turn camp stove off--

crickets

in darkness

Later, dozing under the stars.

I'm more lonely  
and less--  
crickets chirp

In the morning, hike to the mesa's west tip. The top of the redwall thrust  
out into the canyon. I'm surrounded.

Sun risen over painted desert. Light shafts angle over edge, don't reach  
the pre-cambrian dark inner gorge. My shadow, juniper shadow, plunge  
a side canyon.

Always me in here, looking at the light and shadow, talus slopes,  
boulders, cliffs, creosote shrubs. A few yellowing cottonwoods and  
willows in the distant creek bottoms. I try to stop thinking about it,  
thinking how I'll write this. Just the experience.

a raven's cry  
echoes in the gorge--  
then our silence

[Grand Canyon, Arizona; 10/23 - 10/24/86]















