

The Duckabush Journal



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PRESS**

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Mountains Never Held, for Lu-chuan reprinted from
The Basin, Empty Bowl

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We sincerely thank you all, but specifically wish to mention: Judy Ashley, At Your Fingertips, James Dean, Kathleen Dickenson, Jack Estes, Shannon Gentry, Wayne Larrabee, Michael Moore, Pioneer Square Theater, Valerie Sievers, Tom Snyder, Spice of Life Espresso Bar and Gallery, and Grant Walpole.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

With the first issue of *The DUCKABUSH JOURNAL* there is the hope to always meet the standards that we have set forth. We dedicate this first issue to our readers who we hope will enjoy the poetry, prose and illustrations within. The words and images are reflective of the voices and sights of not only the Olympic Peninsula, but the Pacific Northwest as well. *The DUCKABUSH JOURNAL* is its contributors; is its readers; is the mood, the spirit, the thoughts of all who live in this region.

So with this first issue goes the heart, the soul, and the creative flow of a river called Ish.

Ken Crump
Co-Editor

The DUCKABUSH JOURNAL was conceived and designed for its contributors and readers. Though the editors must assume responsibility for its quality and cohesiveness. There's no question that we have rejected some very good material.

We have done our utmost to produce a magazine that generally presents the Peninsula ethics and esthetics - (an abstraction which we are not prepared to define). We've sought and received a lot of good advice, followed our instincts and prejudices at times, and have always had in mind this majestic region and its wonderful inhabitants.

If we have somewhat succeeded, we value your recognition. If you feel we went off track, let us know. It's your journal.

Steve Grubb
Co-Editor

GRANITE FALLS FISH LADDER, OCTOBER, 1985

Again and again stone solves
the water's fluency, reshapes
movement to its own ends.
The fall here lives up to its name.
Ledge to ledge the river steps
down, taking each interruption
fluently, washing the stone face,
breaking tension, green to white.

In the pool below the falls, fish,
who are the very embodiment of desire,
place themselves deftly, group
in threes and fours, as if for study,
precise and defining. Their subject
is water, falling toward them, grave,
true. This water brings messages
of home, evokes an urgent wrench,
has drawn them here, away from their
green mother, the sea.

Dianne and I have found our way here,
to the foot of Granite Falls, following
a failing light down, light green
as water, cedar boughs, her eyes.
The water is shadow-dark, enfolding;
very like liquid themselves, steelhead
rest still in the calm behind boulders.
Dark and supple, their sudden movements
catch the late afternoon light,
throw it back.

Gasp tears air, Dianne pointing
and the water, stone-torn and trembling,
falls white past leaping black,
four and then three steelhead leaping
dark questions against the fall,

Robert R. Ward

futile leaps where the water's weight
is too much to carry.

Instinct had brought them here,
up the river's long fall, here,
where water, branch, stone
bone bright and broken, mix
light and air on the cliff's worn
cleft. White water, once gathered
against the Cascades, Big Four,
the headwall above Twentytwo Lake,
runs counter to the fishes' homeward
rush; and then the falls.

Their bold rushes blunted, falling
short in the river's steep and spill,
they are swept back, rest again
where broken stone calms the water.
At our feet a smaller rush marks
the fish ladder's throat, the only way
past the falls. The concrete is
weathered, worn with winters; the flow
is a trickle, lost in backwater.

Then counter the current's broken
surface, one fish slips forward, tests
the water, senses a clearer path;
others follow, make their passage
beyond this barrier, last reach
before the sunlit gravel beds
they know as home.

More than light gathers in Dianne's
eyes; her smile is unsteady at one
corner, mirroring ming, but says
everything: fish make their way
upstream, and grace need not fail.

PORT TOWNSEND SCENES

AFTERNOON

I did not buy your book
because it was priced too high
or printed on rich, rice pages;
I did not buy your book
because it graces the coffee table
when sensitive guests arrive;
I did not buy your book
because these are ancient songs
sung in modern keys;
nor did I buy your book
because we agree that This
is what was said and meant--
but here I heard and saw
a recent hand defer
the urgent worm waiting
beneath the sediment, the sand
and the turning page.

NIGHT

Include the black sky
And add to black cliffs
The black water;
Impose the north wind
Across an outrunning tide;
Sever the waves' crown and
Force the spray through the sky.
Let an unseen salt wind cut through
The stays and sheets; choose, sculptor,
The hours before an iron cold sun
Hammers away the marble night.

CHRIST AMONG THE PLUMBERS

I worry him
with my irons and flux, convinced
a religious longing
may prevail.

Sunday afternoons, he brings
his singing blowtorch,
the hourly wages
of our obvious sins.
His repeated tapping reminds me
I am not alone, after all.

In the parable of the bumper stickers,
where men struggle to relax by drinking domestic beer,
the water to the toilet must be shut off, we learn,
before the master may begin his work.

Happy as a little horse he comes,
a sure and cheerful man,
transcendental
in a radio-controlled truck.

POEM IN NEED OF EIGHTY ACRES

Metaphysical in my lawn chair,
with the lawn mowed and the whole afternoon
to drink beer, I notice how
my neighbor's yard
compares. Nothing personal
but I wonder when they'll get started.
I wonder why they stand on their back porch and point,
as if alarmed by something invisible to me.
Evening silvers them like foil.

Meanwhile, grass declares independence,
dandelions flower big as seagulls.

Acolyte to the living barbecue,
I scrape the grill and speculate further...

I think there's an experiment here in my neighborhood.
I think these people may be androids
which don't work right.

CAT REPORT FOR SNOHOMISH, WASHINGTON: SATURDAY, JANUARY 7TH

One rather fluffy longhaired cream tortoiseshell in the bay window of a small second-hand bookstore. 1950s charcoal-and-pink. Standoffish upon direct approach, but she brushes my trouser-leg later as I browse.

Farther down the block, one small marmalade tom sleeping on pink velvet seat of a chair in the window of one of town's putative ninety-four antique shops. Paws curled under chest engagingly. Beside cat, a large jade plant is (remarkably) in bloom. Flowers somewhat like those of white *Daphne*.

The porch of the northernmost of three dilapidated cottages supports one compact, tawny tabby, in repose. Prances to an offered hand, follows me down the row, accepts copious petting. As the restoration wave has exhausted all the grander Victorians and is moving in upon the period tradesman's dwellings, this cat's status may soon change dramatically, short kinked tail notwithstanding.

Outside town along Snohomish river, one orangey calico is chased onto a farmhouse veranda by a threadbare pea-hen.

Nearby, at the junction of Riverview and Swan's Slough, a remarkable sighting: a skein of four wild longhaired kittens weaves across the road, into the riverbank brush. An orange, a black, a tortoiseshell and a tux -- all wooly, unkempt and wild-eyed; unapproachable. Likely the offspring of the porch-cat, but less timid with pea-fowl I would guess, at least in numbers. This reporter's first running pack of cats.

Surprisingly in this rural district, no field cats were noted, sitting, stalking or pouncing. This however was more than remedied the next morning when your reporter spotted a sleek black cat on the roadside verge north of Vancouver (Wash.). Rampant regardant in the act of washing, finally salient. The outcome went unnoted.

HALLOWEEN STORY

To the old, white house came a new black cat. There was already one black cat in residence, pampered and plump, a beloved member of the decidedly one-cat family. There was no room for the newcomer. In any case he was an unneutered male who sprayed, intimidated the resident cat out of his rightful complacency, and ate his food. So the new cat was discouraged and chased away whenever he came around, which was most nights.

Some in the family, who had to pay for the cat food and disinfect objects he sprayed, called him the Scum. Others named him the Shadow, since he seemed a ragged, emaciated, and shaggy shadow of the fat, sleek home cat; and since he slinked, and never made a noise. One in particular even left a bit of food in his way now and again and failed to chase him into the rain once or twice, thereby defeating the efforts of the others.

So the Shadow came to be unafraid of this one. He would run silently a few steps, then stop and turn around; and the person would see in his amber eyes the same cat-ness as his cat's green eyes held, as well as a desperation of hunger and wetness. And though that was probably imagined, it made him softer-hearted toward this interloper.

Came Halloween, and both cats dashed among the shadows, disturbed by the trickers and treaters, and by one another. Finally the pet had been shut safely into his dry out-building and the Scum chased into the damp, dark night. (There was a full moon for Halloween, but it was not allowed to come out.)

Near midnight, the children long in, the man who called the cat Shadow carried the pumpkin jack o'lantern from the back porch to the front, because he liked it to shine its last grimace down toward the black valley, so that anyone crossing the covered bridge below might see its glimmering leer. Sometimes he walked down to the bridge himself at midnight on a Halloween, just to see the jack o'lantern through the mist, way up at the old white house; and then he would hurry through the dark bridge with a delicious tickle in his middle-aged, hard-to-spook spine.

Robert Michael Pyle

This Halloween, as he carried the pumpkin to the front porch, he startled the shabby shadowcat, who had taken shelter from the rain beneath it. Scum ran a few steps, stopped and looked around, then walked unalarmed into a larger shadow than himself. The man went back in.

The night being wet, he thought he might not go down to the bridge. Instead he merely took the kitchen crock and the chamber pot out to the compost pit to empty them, for a stretch and a fresh, moist breath before bed. Bending over he gave his offerings to next year's mulch. Then he stood and added the leftover liquid of his evening's drinks.

For a moment he stood there, smelling the cool wet breath of the night air over the hot must of the compost. Then he felt that old prickly tingle climb his spine like an icy monkey up a warm ladder of flesh and bone. It was dark by the compost pit. He knew that the feral black cat watched him. He knew as well that the cat might at any moment fly from the shadow of his hungry frustration, grown to panther-size through the power of the injustice of his life. That he might pounce on this human who would fatten and shelter one black cat, while forcing another to catch rodents in the rain -- as if the man were a mouse himself.

He knew too (as the tingle rose and deepened, becoming cat's claws on his vertebrae) that the cat would tear his soft man-flesh, break his back, bat him about, shrieking with revenge for all feral cats, eat what he wanted, and leave the rest half-buried and disarticulated in the compost pit, like a rotting pumpkin. He knew the cat could do this, and he didn't blame him for it. He saw himself discovered in the morning in the pit among the molding leaves and vegetable bits and urine-soaked coffee filter bags and eggshells, in bloody pieces, like the voles his own cat left as treats on his porch.

He turned to face the assault, but all he saw was the great shadow of the night.

The claws in his neck retracted as he walked back to the house. Before he went in, the man noticed that the candle had gone out in the jack o'lantern. So it should, it was midnight, there was no one left to see it.

But there was one, after all. The man stepped out again onto the porch of the old white house. He took a fresh candle from his pocket, lit it, and placed it in a seat of its own hot wax, deep within the big, lopsided, carved pumpkin.

The luminous leer was restored. As he turned to go in, he saw down at the bottom of the lawn, in the faint glimmer of the gourd's glow, two amber lights in the night; two bright holes in the soul of a shadow, watching. Watching the flickering face, watching him, as he closed the door.

UNTITLED

The old matted witch lies wet on sand
Moonlight reflects her white feathers black with dirt.
Eyes shine.
Her beak a grin,
Yellow, Open, Laughing.
She watches...she who dies to rise with night
Cackles at the change of sun and moon.
Naked lovers swim
Shine upon the rapturous sea.
Child with a witch's blessing is born dead.
Yesterday I attempted to aid her.
She turned her neck in circles.
Mouth opening and closing,
Close and open.
Eyes wild, wing broken with the waning moon.
She dies... Lies there haunting wanting my wings.
She dives into my sleeping oceans
Steals fish, leaves me hungry.
The sun stretches awake.
She is matted and decayed, eyes rolled into her neck.

RIVER PATH

Four miles of marsh and willow
Brings us to a place and sorrow
We cannot name.

This rock divides a river
And a myth.
One stream delights us with a falls
And flows in sunlight to the sea.
Its brother grows underground
And moves among
The stonework and the dead.

To be constant,
To a constant harmony,
We first must learn
The singer and the man.
The hopeful "I love"
And the toneless underground
Wherein we move
And keep, or break,
Our promises to keep
A hopeless faith.

SOLITAIRE

At fifteen my great uncle George
lost his arm to a woodmill band saw
his first day on the job.

Later he made his living as a
one-armed dealer, shuffling and
cutting cards, slight a hand,
with fingers supple as Houdini's.
He drifted along the railroad river,
a house of cards carpetbagger
carrying sealed decks and one
silk shirt, the empty sleeve
pinned up to the shoulder,
bluffing his way through hard
times and good with a pair of
deuces and a Buster Keaton
face shaded by the derby he
only removed to sleep in the
boarding houses he called home.
His brother Fred received a
letter from Yakima saying
George had died.

It looks like his wallet was stolen,
the landlady wrote, but I found
your name and address tucked
inside his derby. He must have
had a heart attack. He was still
sitting at the desk, a game of
solitaire spread out in front of him.
My father drove Fred to Yakima and
they buried George under cemetery
oaks where railroad tracks run
through irrigated orchards,
buried George wearing his worn-shiney
double-breasted, silk shirt, his dealing
hand holding a sealed deck of cards.

EAST OF THE OLYMPICS

there ain't much
that ain't east
of the Olympics
some Indians, a few loggers
and the wind

I have seen them
across the sound
lasting in their corner
the end of America
the middle of a dream

UNTITLED

drunk, and
standing in an outhouse
somewhere in the Olympics --
sneaking a cigarette
on the edge of America,
I watch the flies
circling

Linda Katz

BLACKBERRIES

Lustrous fat black jewels
Nature's gift
Luring me into their tangle of thorns

FOR YOU

Sometimes, sitting on this beach,
Fingering sun-warmed stones
Smoother than skin,
I drift off into memory
And feel again my fingers on
Bare shoulders,
Softly stroking, stroking,
Like the waves here
Fondling their shore.

Year after wordless year
My fingers turn these stones
And remember you.

ERIC'S DEER

He must have turned sixteen that musty autumn
when the frost bit early and the colors
muted on the trees as if obscured
by smoke. I was thirteen. It would be the first
Christmas without a doll under the tree for me.

He came running through the orchard,
shouting incoherently: red hat pulled
over redder hair; an absurd boy-man waving
his rifle like a stick and whooping.
Mother looked up from her work and saw him
through the dishwater-spattered window;
she smiled. He stumbled into the kitchen,
half-thrill, half-urgency -- "I got a buck
on the back of the place, I'm gonna be late
for football practice!" Mother put down
her towel and argued, first. I watched,
head tilted up from my book, eyes wide
behind brown plastic-framed lenses, while she made
up her mind pragmatically and almost unthinkingly,
as one makes up a bed. I was conscripted
to help before I suspected enough
to flee.

Eric drove the Buick station wagon
up a logging road that wound its way roughly
to the west of the farm until we arrived
within a manageable distance. We walked
a long ways, circling and backtracking
through the red alder and scrappy brush
before he caught sight of his trail
and led us to the fallen deer. The woods hushed
around us like a church; the hum of the shiny black,
languid flies was a chant. We stood, awkward

Bethany Reid

worshippers confronted with an uneasy ritual,
until a grouse thr-r-rumped us back into life. The deer
was beautiful. The coat was as sleek as if brushed
daily, a tawny brown composed of hairs
gray, black, white and tan except
on the underside, even of the stubby tail,
where the colors gave way to maiden white
in an exact line. The hooves were dull
black, cloven and small like a calf's.

The bullet had entered at the end
of the neck, against the spine. Eric grabbed
the antlers, and the neck extended, exposing
the black-red gills his hunting knife
had carved there. Mother and I each took a hindquarter.
The legs already seemed to be stiffening, the white
underbelly, to swell. We struggled
out of the cleave where the deer had surrendered
and the mushy hillside covered in rotting
leaves crumbled beneath our boots. Underbrush
tore at our coats. Wet branches stung
unready cheeks and my glasses slipped down
my face again and again. I scrunched my nose
to push them back into place.

By this time, Eric's teammates had begun without him;
he set a pace we could not keep -- taunting me along
whenever I asked to rest, calling me
a girl. Mother, amazed
at how heavy the deer was, bickered with him
but kept on, while I let tears fog my lenses
and tremble, disguised as rain,
down my cheeks. When we came to the property line
the rusty, barbed wire fence stood like an angel
barring us from an untended Eden. I slipped
between the lower strands, then strained to lift
the bottom one high enough for the others
to drag the carcass under. Eric swore;
Mother sapper. A barb scratched a line

across the hide, but no blood oozed
to the surface. When I let go of the wire
it left a rusted groove imbedded
in my palms. No one listened
when I complained, so I didn't, very much.

We drove to Granpa's house, dumped the deer
on the gravel drive and Eric sped off in the wagon
for practice, anticipating extra laps.
My grandfather shook his head: "Foolish
womenfolk". He strung the deer up
by its hind legs, told us always to gut
an animal before dragging it anywhere -- "Most
of the weight, you know." Mother said
she hadn't thought of it, and that she didn't intend
to need to, ever again. I shivered
in the slanting late afternoon sunlight and whined
to go home until Mother nodded,
releasing me to play. And then, as I froze
in the moment before movement, Grandpa made an incision
down the belly of the deer and I shrank,
stiff-eyed, bloodless, as the guts spilled out,
green, billowing like seafoam.

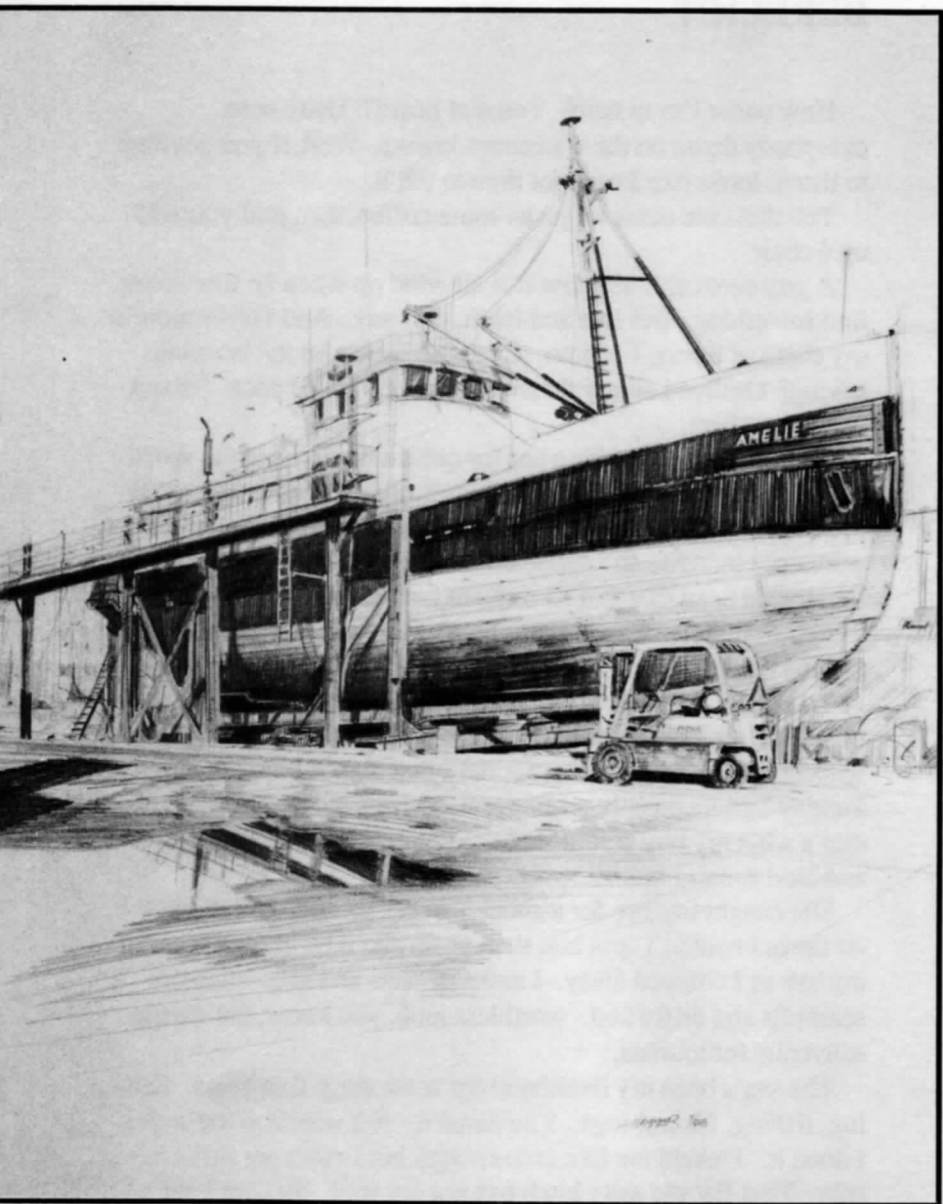
PORT ANGELES FROM THE COHO FERRY

It's a sleepy town.
Mist nudges houses
scalped into hillsides.
Untethered pilings of
cold chimneys
stick above
an airborne inlet of fog
while smoke curls from others
and settles like eiderdown
to tuck them in.

LOG SHIP AT ANCHOR PORT ANGELES HARBOR

Fog boards
the rust-streaked log ship
and transports it
to infinity.

A ghost ship remains.



DERELICT

How come I'm in here! You aint heard? Dang near everybody down on the waterfront knows. Well, if you got time to listen, looks like I sure got time to tell it.

Tell that cute nurse to get us some coffee, then pull yourself up a chair.

A guy sure can't see how it'll all wind up when he first noses into something. But live and learn, they say. And I done more'n my share of living, I reckon. Can't say much for the learning. Living! Outlived all my dreams and all my loved ones. Mixed blessings, there.

Well, I'd been watching her for quite a while - a white speck out there bobbing from trough to crest. Just a speck. But to the eye of one who knows the sea, it was a sloop. Though her sails were up, I imagine an egg-beater would've moved her faster. Weather'd been like that all day - in fact, every day for more'n a week. And stiller yet at night - pretty unusual for the straits and for this time of year.

There was humor to it. I could've hauled her in - in half an hour. Didn't have anything better to do. But I amused myself, wondering how she got that far out - that diaper flapping dinghy. Sunday Sailors prob'ly renting a sloop from town. "Pukers", that's what my boy would've called 'em. Winkum, Blinkum and Nod for all I knew.

She caught my eye for a chuckle every so often as I worked. At times I couldn't spot her, then again she'd be in the corner of my eye as I chipped away. I make trinkets and knic-knacs of seashells and driftwood - worthless junk, you know, but decent souvenirs for tourists.

The sea's been my livelihood for some sixty-five years. Sailing, fishing, ferries, tugs. You name it - if it was atop the water, I done it. Treated me like crap enough but I can't get rid of her now. That flat old salty bitch has got my soul. So here I am - trinkets for tourists.

Anyhooo ... that sloop moved a little west past the lighthouse on the spit. I couldn't tell if the shore was getting any closer or

not. I thought about cranking up the outboard - but what the hell - the surface was smooth enough and the sun was till above the cloudbank.

I'd been punching holes in clamshells for the past five hours and my hands started rebelling. Besides, I caught the smell of perch frying in Thomson's beachhouse. Inspiration enough! I struck up the kerosene in my three-burner Coleman and cooked myself up a pan of flounder. Flounder and wine - it keeps me going pretty good.

Say, Honey, where's that coffee? Did the cook take off for Columbia a picking beans?

Let me tell you - the sea's given me a good life. A lot of peace and health. Oh, a share of heart-ache too. My father was on the *Peere* when it cracked under tow back in twenty-six. Imagine her breaking up on the rocks ... masts and spars everywhere, canvas dancing on the waves like mad ghosts. There was one survivor but it wasn't my dad.

I can't wax so poetic about my boy. He just disappeared out there. Sailing by himself, a sloop to Hawaii.

Now I've been through a lot of storms - some real wild times out on the soup. But I never lost a vessel under me. Never really thought I would. Sure looks like some old sea god'll be dragging me from dry land. A beached derelict! Wouldn't it be a little kinder if he took me before this old hull just rots away? - while I'm still alive enough to get pissed off about it.

Anyhooo ... I got my kerosene lamp a going. There's 'lectricity around but I never figured why I need any. Don't need much of such things ... got a good Aladdin lamp, same as they used to use in that lighthouse out there. Anyway, I'm up at daylight and usually down when it gets good and dark.

'Keerist,' I says, 'that sailboat!' I rolls myself up a cigarette and finish another cup of wine. then I make her out - just a little white speck ... a speck.

My boy was out there like that and no one around to help. Not a dang soul. I was down there punching goddam holes in clamshells.

Well, she just seemed to be floating out there on the twilight. Way down the strait and a long ways out. No breeze to speak of

Trebor Nevetsburg

and not that much tide. Didn't make any sense her being there but I go ahead and drag out my little dory.

The outboard started right up and I headed out. And why in the hell wasn't anyone else concerned? There's plenty of us old geezers along this shore with not much better to do than watch a few boats going by and the lights of Victoria.

But if I'm the one who sees her then I'm the one I should be concerned about - right! It was getting right chilly and real close to dark. Still a rosy glow on the fringe of that cloud bank creeping in ... sneaking in like a hungry sea god about to swallow that little white dot.

Didn't seem like I was gaining at all, so I cranked the throttle up a bit. She just kept drifting on like a carrot in front of a little horse. Wasn't even sure I was seeing her now ... or I ever did. She just kind of dissolved into the night. Damn I wasn't going to let this one get away.

It was right cold - and black as tar. I just wrapped myself over the motor for warm. Don't know if I was shivering cause I was all worked up or just freezing my fanny ... prob'ly both. But I was going to bring her in if she was out there - then cuss the damn fools out.

So I cranked her clean up. She coughed. There it was - out of gas and no goddam oar. So here I am.

I'm not even dead and these people forget I exist. Suppose we could try one more time for coffee? - I ain't died from it yet. I ain't asking for wine, you know. A sailor can't live long without his coffee.

These saw-bones have been running more tests on me than a crew of engineers on an ocean-liner. They tell me I look good as new but they handle me like my ballast shifted. Guess I was rambling on about my boy. Guess I dreamt he was going down out there - and I was close by - and I just couldn't get to him ... or something. Damn nightmare, you know.

Goddam hospital beds aint right bunking for an old salt ... but here I am. You'd think I'd known better - running out of gas that way. I spent the whole dang night drifting and it sure didn't get any warmer as it went.

I couldn't bring myself to holler like a baby for help. Guess that don't make much sense either. Yep, spent the whole night riding the tide, staring at the lights, and trying to remember all the words to "The Great Silkie". They caught me smack in front at daylight.

Well, here comes that pretty girl with a couple cups. Thank you kindly, Sweetheart.

Caught me smack in front of the lighthouse and towed me in. Drug me up here ... a dang beached derelict.

THE CIRCLE

We follow the forest path,
my son on his bike
me striding beside.
Sky pieces slip through leaves.
Spokes project myths on
passing ferns.
We two
run, ride;
oscillate, bound by
the elastic light.
Wheels accelerate.
Love stretches and thins.
We do not anticipate
the burst
into the brilliant glade,
the sudden crescendo
of sun and sky!

ORCAS ISLAND

I watch my son, dancing on shore.
He whispers to shells of departed clams;
explores a blood star, fingering the secret mouth,
underneath. His pole catches seaweed fish;
pale, green - they shimmer and dive.
Hands grasp jellyfish, dream-clear;
swimming, they disappear.

Morning becomes memory:
two lines drawn with light,
sky on sea, sea on shore.
his iridescent spirit
sanctifies the land.

MY FATHER, AGE 4

His clear eyes
greet mine
from the hand-colored
photograph,
perfectly balanced
on the library wall.

Outside,
neon signs swim
in a silver fog.
An angular house
white, stark
emerges, disappears
without sound.

Grey seeps through
glass,
diffuses his image.
I strain to perceive
shape and hue.

Failing,

I paint a mirage:

My twelfth birthday
The curve of his hand
on mine
The pattern of waves
on sand
Surf brushed with sun
Laughter,
the color of coral.

THE SCORE

Who'd have thought
I'd already be
proud of his throwing
ninety miles per hour.
Thought I'd be
ninety myself
before I
brought it up
again. It's not that I
hated the game.
It's just that his mother
used to look at me
like how dare you
chew at a time like
this, and his father
spoke of baseball
as if his son couldn't
read or write.
First time I told him
I loved him I said,
"Whether you play
baseball, or not."
Of course,
his mother always
resented that.
Truth is
he signed himself up
for little league.
He developed his arm
throwing rocks in a lake.
If our son didn't have an arm,
it would have been
all my fault.

He should have known
I'd turn his son
into some near-sighted...
Okay, so I used to dream
of a little boy with glasses,
tossing a salad.

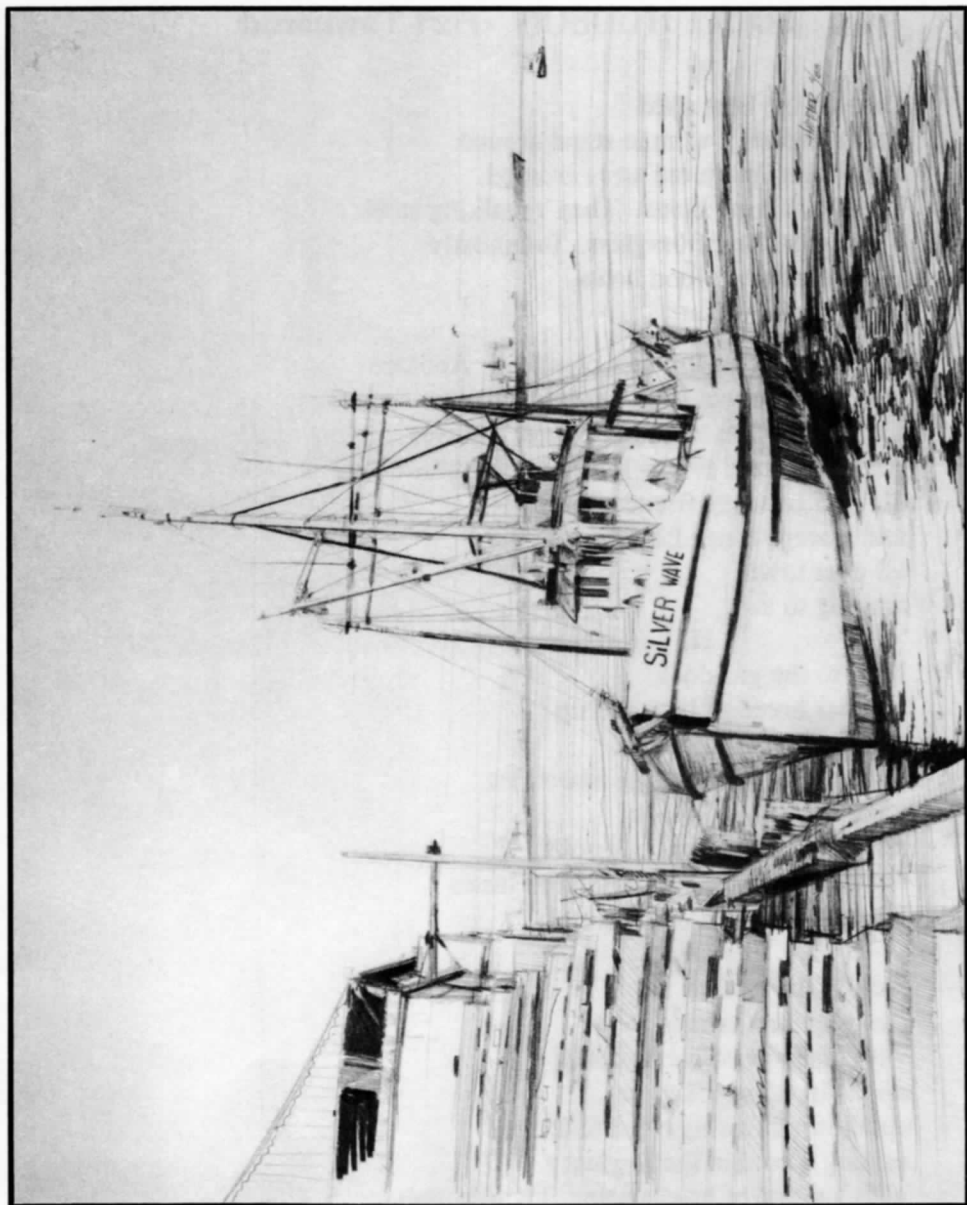
"If only her son were
six inches taller,"
his mother used to mourn,
"he would have made it
to the pros." Rob
has his own team now--
not your typical
little league coach.
He has those kids
stealing bases,
calling balks--
plays none of the
parents or coaches
have heard of.

Then again,
he has a tendency
to gain weight.
He's losing his hair.
"He stole your youth,"
my mother choruses in.
And I
stole his.

You know,
I enjoyed those last
few games. Sure,
there were mothers there,
but they weren't ours.
And because I loved
none of those little boys,
I could love them all.

Leslie Patten

I fell in love with a
salesman. He said,
"You want to buy a baseball,
little girl," and I bought
the whole package.
We were fifteen.
Now he's selling himself
and a little title insurance
to every secretary
in the South end. He says,
"Sometimes those women
don't see a man all day."
Company picnics, he gets that
ball in his hand, and just as he's
ready to show what he really can do,
he realizes
it's just a little girl
holding her mitt out
at the other end.



POINT HUDSON -Port Townsend

I.

Outside the boat shed
four men and a woman stand around
with paint splattered arms crossed.
They're talking boats. They're talking steel.
They're talking fiberglass. But mostly
they're talking wood boats.

Inside the barn
a band-saw rips through planking. Another
cuts knee-curves from heavier timber.
There are boats to be built here. Houses
have been sold to pay for them. Furniture
divvied between friends, family
and storage bins. Lives are on hold
all over town
waiting to sail.

II.

Next to the gas dock
another breed of boat ties up
just in from Bristol Bay.
Green, pink, and orange hootchies
hang from the hayrack
alongside nickel plated hooks
and stainless flashers. Peculiar tastes
for today's fish.

III.

Across the marina
the only man around
with his shirt collar turned up
and shirt tails tucked in
stands on a freshly oiled teak deck
casting a bobbin that's glossy
with a stripe of bright paint. I squint
and watch it soar by. A whoosh of color.
A hissing ribbon. A fleeting band
of weekend-red.

HANDS

Even if the seine fleet wasn't in
or our pale arms weren't sleeveless
I could tell from this photo where we were
which summer from our past we left home to find work
by the size of your hands
swollen from three months
rebuilding a cannery and dock
constructed first back in 1912

Years ago
when men did not drive to work inside
but dug rows in the mud for seed
their hands adjusted slowly
like pekoe sun tea
to the color of rich earth. New skin
grew right over the dirt.

There are men in the city, men
right here in our small town
whose hands are smooth, nickless
as a slab of marble. Hands perfect
and really quite pink. I study such things
like how your callouses grow thickest
where your fingers meet the palm and when cut
draw no blood.

And there are men
musicians maybe
or lawyers
able to grab at small objects
with the tips of their fingers
instead of rolling one hand on its side
and letting the thumb do the work. Men
who can sit next to a woman in a library

Mary Lou Sanelli

or church rubbing her legs covered in nylon
without being heard or lie in the dark with her
on a sleeping bag unzipped and opened flat
with hands that prowl easily
without catching on each lofty seam.

There are even men so unlike you, men
who would drive a bent nail deeper
into the grain of mahogany or teak
just to get the job done.

YES, AND THEN BUCKY RUNS INTO THE 'QUATCH

What are the Olympics
good for if not
to harbor the misunderstood?

(Really, wasn't that
the role of Mt. Olympus
in years past? I mean
who understood those
old gods - Zeus, Apollo,
Mercury, the rest?

Not Homer.) So,
enter the 'quatch.
Why not? Now,

Bucky knows 'bout bears.
He can even match Stan
bear story for bear story.

He hip to birds, too
(long's he has his birdbook).
Marmots? Deer? Elk?

Chipmunks? Mountain beaver?
Hell, old Buck knows 'em
by their scat. That's

knowin' 'em, I say.
But a sasquatch? Not in
Conca's *ANIMALS OF*

THE OLYMPICS or in
McNulty's *CREATURES (NOT
INCLUDING TOURISTS)*

OF THE ONP. No mention
in anything legit. But
there, over there,

Jack Estes

by Canyon Creek, all
hunkered down
in a hairy ball,
snoozing: A 'quatch yes
a 'quatch in the sunlight,
and it makes Bucky happy
that it makes him happy.
He can see it breathe.
Looks young, a crazy mix
between a French sheepdog
and a Chinese rock singer.
He thinks of the Code
of the Park: Don't feed animals.
Kill your fires. Carry
out litter. Keep
quiet. Revere mountains. Avoid
excess. Talk to fish.
Love bugs. Respect
the Buddha. (Sometimes
Bucky gets his Codes confused.)
So, "Uh, excuse me,"
he says. No response.
Again, closer: "Pardon me,
you okay?" To put it
straight, the Buck's heart
leans toward the 'quatch,
reaches out, and. . . :
Furry One awakes.
Spots the Buck. Snorts.
Coughs. Stomps right foot.
Snorts again. Sticks tongue out.

Laughs. Chortles. Brows. Burps.
Pulls tongue back in. Scratches.
Remember: Buck no fool. This,

he notes, corresponds precisely
with the mating ritual
of girls he himself dated

as a high school sophomore.
He flashes on tortured nights,
back seat of the old Chevy,

Everly Brothers on the car
radio, jumbled mass of hands
and snaps. Bucky exits. He

fly out of there, out of
pristine alpine forests
red heather blue lupine

right on out to the trailhead.
He don't slow down
for gazing at that eagle

dancing on Feiro Peak
or for tasting the breath
of the wind down the side

of Blue Mountain.
I mean, he be moving.

Sure, Bucky, and without a photo,
right?

MOUNTAINS NEVER HELD
— for Lu-chuan

In spring you rode that long affair
of buses here, suburb to town,
town to Chutze Hu,
by foot through the village
down the path to my house;
and I'd always think: more beauty
mountains never held.

And we'd go saying through the day
in different tongues;

"Green" for the maples on the winding road;
"Ch'ing" for the duckweed in the paddy water;
"Lu" for the grasses and your given name;
"Green" for our green love.

In summer you'd come out of the cauldron
of Tapei replacing my view of the pines
with a landscape (a heavenscape) of you among them.
I'd teach a little English,
in hum-drum, pipe-smoking fashion,
and you'd read and show me lines from the T'ang,
and we'd walk the dry and dustless world
of mountaintops, clouds,
of resplendent pines.

In fall the first cool days
slipped over the pass, rustling bamboo
like scrolls on temple walls--
ripe maize weathervaning in the wind.

You'd come early then, all the peaks
still steeped in shadow,
and we'd go out less,
talking, reading, drinking
pots of tea on clean, light-struck tatamis.

With winter...O the rains were cold and
wind knocked hard at the window casements,
yet you always came when you could,
from factory smoke suburb into gray bleak town,
then up the mountain on 301.

And you'd often find me unshaven, burrowed under
blue *mein beis* which you'd lift up
the way one turns over beach rocks
to see what could be living under them.

I'd be up, though, in a whirlwind
of bedding and longjohns,
getting the kerosene stove lit
and the tea pot whistling; flying
around my cabin talking English,
Chinese, Gillette Blue Blades;
but then awake and watching you
sip tea from a steaming cup,
both hands to hold it,
as you in turn watched me.

How wonderful to have you here,
quiet and lovely in the gray cloud light.

The grass has left dew on your tennis shoes;
the trees, a frayed leaf in your hair.

FROM TAIWAN WITH LOVE

"The scripture of the stars / is fading. Is it an Eastern / or a Western text?" Mike O'Connor wonders in his "Proem" to *THE BASIN: LIFE IN A CHINESE PROVINCE*, his most recent book-length collection of poems and translations--from Taiwan mostly. Empty Bowl Press in Port Townsend, Washington, has produced O'Connor beautifully, with no small thanks to Shannon Gentry who designed the book and Lin Ku-chein whose calligraphy sets it off.

Fading stars aside, is *THE BASIN* an Eastern or a Western text? The question answers itself. Both. O'Connor has not dabbled in things Eastern, things Chinese, as too many American poets have done; rather, he has lived the life, richly and deeply, in Taiwan. And the poems he offers us in *THE BASIN* witness that fact. "Important things," as he rightly calls them, are in these poems...like "what I'll eat for breakfast. / which books I'll need today / and should I suffer buses. / ride my bike, or fly." The stuff of O'Connor's life in Taiwan, and the decisions, however small, that make it *his*.

I like *THE BASIN* a lot. I like visiting O'Connor's neighborhood as I read his book and meet the "old friends" he says he misses, but doesn't, in their language flesh: from "the old man washing sweet potatoes" to "the monkey I feed bananas to." But what I especially like is that O'Connor writes from the heart. In "Questions of Travel" he says, "if you ask me where is the center of the world, / I say the heart." And for him it is. He thinks by feeling; what is there to know?

All of O'Connor's poems are, arguably, love poems, inasmuch as they document his giving of himself: to place, to work, to language, to friendship (for which he has a gift)...to what he calls "the otherworldly beauty / of the world." Time for a poem, "When It All Comes Together On Earth, In The Clouds."
"Dusk, and we watch / as mist-softened light / moves along the pine. // You sing a quiet pretty song, / my arms around you. // and I begin a song I don't know, / and my voice, humming on your shoulders, // is so much better than mine."

Not the poem as poem but the voice speaking--singing?--in and through it attracts and holds me. O'Connor's voice, in love, is so much better than O'Connor's voice. A working definition of poetry? My favorite love poem in *THE BASIN* is *Mountains Never Held for Lu-chuan*. (see page 36)

Speaking--singing?--of Lu-chuan...many of the poems in O'Connor's book are dedicated, are given away, to another person. Frank O'Hara, it was, who said: "Poems are between persons not pages," or something like that. O'Connor's dedicated poems are guaranteed a reader, one reader other than the poet himself, which is one reader more than most poems (and poets) have. Earning the right to have one reader, other than one's self, is what writing poetry is about, is it not? And O'Connor, in *THE BASIN*, earns that right. His poems are dedicated to me...and to you. From Taiwan with love.

Substantial and unpretentious. O'Connor is not a career poet. (Too many of his contemporaries, in America, are.) Rather, he has vocation; he has been called to a life, the living of which has poetry, the heart, at its center. He is courageous enough to publish poems that are part of *his* life, if not always part of ours. But reading him, we find ourselves guessing at what parts are missing in our own lives. I am reminded, reading O'Connor's poems, of Gary Snyder's work, whose name--presence? --is in *THE BASIN*.

I haven't mentioned O'Connor's translations, which matter greatly in *THE BASIN*. Wang Wei, Tu Fu, and LI Po, the T'ang Dynasty masters, known well in America and done well by O'Connor, are here. But so are Chia Tao and Ch'iu Wei, who are new to me. My favorite translation in *THE BASIN* is *On Failing To Meet The Recluse Of West Peak* by Ch'ie Wei.

On the mountain top: / one thatched house,
eleven miles / from "somewhere."
Knock on the door: / no answer.
Look in: / only a table and tea stand.
The firewood cart / is covered;
are you fishing / in the autumn stream?
If I looked among the pools, / I'd only miss you;
wanting to pay my respects, / they must go unexpressed.

William Slaughter

Grass shines / in the fresh rain;
pines murmur / at evening windows.
Here, at this moment,
a harmony, profound and unrivaled;
the self completely cleansed, / the heart, the ear.
Although there is no / guest and host per se,
I'm able to intuit / your pure thought.
Filled with happiness, / I head back down the mountain;
what need now / to wait for you?

What need now, having read O'Connor's Ch'iu Wei, to say anything about the virtues of his translations?

THE BASIN is the work of a good man; the quality of his life is the quality of his poems. I haven't met Mike O'Connor but, having read his poems, I'd like to. In my experience as a reader, a rare thing. His book is one I need today.

INTERVIEW WITH MIKE O'CONNOR

THE DUCKABUSH JOURNAL: *Before THE BASIN you had another book out called RAINSHADOW. When did you begin that?*

MIKE O'CONNOR: I remember in 1975 I wrote the first poem in *RAINSHADOW*. It was the first poem that jelled for me. That I felt was publishable. That I believed in it enough that the whole book came out. I had been writing for years and years in cities and different places. It was the beginning for me where that language finally started to cohere with the heart and mind. There was a period of four or five years that I was working on the *RAINSHADOW*. It was grounded very much in the new feeling of rehabilitation - of going back to places you were born or had lived.

By '79 I just about finished *RAINSHADOW*. My wife at that time won a scholarship to go to Taiwan and it seemed to me the right time to move out of where I had dug in so tightly. After a seven month season of tree planting I had enough money. When I got there - the society is so bustling, so alive. The feeling is of immense energy. I found, like many Americans, I could work part time. This is what made it so appealing. I like the hard work of tree planting but here was the opportunity to have a large chunk of time to study the arts and the East and write.

Before you went to Taiwan you were already acquainted with Chinese history and poetry?

Yes. I started that very early, '65. I was into Oriental poetry. This is without studying the language. All translations. But painting was very clearly illustrative of what Chinese culture had at least been and what I still thought it to be. Those paintings tell you everything, translate right across. The landscapes in particular. So I went there prepared and it turned out to be a natural extension. The one thing I liked about Taiwan is it had this funky characteristic that we had on our farms or cabins. What people thought were hardships, like not any toilet paper, or having to

watch food because of disease. The fields stank of human feces. All these little shops and beggars were hobo type figures. None of that put me off. I have a poem (*THE CHINGMEI*) about that in the first part of *THE BASIN*:

"Open sewers, torn-up roads, / Chinese in funky shops and alleys, / the smell of human feces / in ox-plowed paddies, / dust, factory smoke, / a mangy dog or two... / These are the nutrients of exile, / detritus where the lotus blooms."

When you were writing THE BASIN were you feeling that you were writing for the people of Taiwan or here?"

Originally I was writing it with the Olympic Peninsula in mind. Only toward the end did I start to have a feeling I was trying to speak to the people I knew there too. I think I ended up writing a lot of poems to people there. But my sense of poetics are still very tied up with the people I knew on the Peninsula. There is a group here - early on we knew where we were with our writing. What we wanted to emphasize and what we credited with value. Basically it was that our poetry would be grounded in experience and our experience would be grounded in where we are. As opposed to a poetry of writing out of our heads. That level of poetry is not what we were interested in doing.

The Tang Dynasty had both cerebral poets and ones who wrote more directly from experiences...

The court poetry came closest to cerebral. But the great poets of the Tang, I think, were writing very closely from their experiences. Li Po was very much in his experience. Tu Fu was probably the most cerebral of them. His sense of history comes into his poetry. But basically, all those people were talking about - "my friend going out the door and how I feel about that."

It was more emotional than cerebral?

The cerebral is there in some of the syntax, some of the rhyming and technique. What is there mostly is this real grounding in experience. They have touched down and have come back to a

level balanced between the general and the specific. There is abstraction, but in the universal sense. I don't think it is an abstraction in the sense of poets that are using language to trick up on itself. To trope itself. Tropes troping tropes. There is a place for that but I think it's dominated poetry in this country to some extent - associated with academic poetry. It's difficult for me now, having been gone, to talk with any authority on American poetry.

Do you identify your writing with American poetry.

I think what I'm doing is much the cutting edge of American poetry. The direction I've been going is one of those cutting edges. I feel I'm doing a number of things in my poetry which moves it in the right direction for me. Covers the things of poetry I wanted to do. Much of the other poetry doesn't even approach that. That sounded a little conceited but I don't mean to. This is just my perception."

Did you hold that perception from the beginning over there?

I knew when I was there I had a great desire to communicate that energy. I was getting another shot at a lot of possibilities - almost a reincarnation. So I'm definitely excited about getting that down into a book - into poems - returning that energy to our shores. Toward the end I was trying, ultimately, to fuse East and West ideas. There might be some successes when I'm trying to hold, say, peninsula values and plugging them into Oriental situations.

I think as it went on, the city tended to slowly overwhelm me. I lost more and more track of the basin as a physical entity. That's when I realized there was one more major aspect. That was the aspect of people in a very, very densely populated situation. I end this book sort of phasing my way through the city and phasing out myself from the city. Until the last poem is a long sort of reverie about where I've come, comparing that to California where I spent some time.

That's what makes this book, to me, interesting. I always had a concept of the whole while I was doing small parts of it. *THE*

BASIN was a unified term. But toward the end, as you'll read in the last part of the Taipai section where I'm getting into scenes with city artists, I'm lost in that whole control over my material. So it's finally sweeping me away.

So the material dictates more...

Yeh, right. The basin, the population, everything is dictating more to me than earlier on when I was able to be on the periphery and have that control.

Do you feel RAINSHADOW controlled you as much as THE BASIN did toward the end?

No. No, I think living in the rainshadow I was more on my own two feet all the way through it. I think over there I finally got overwhelmed. I left it that way (in the book) because that's what happens when you go to the city.

There's a translation I used from the Tang dynasty which sort of states the way it was. It's the little poem called *Kiss*. And the woman is leaving for Japan. The thing about the island is everybody is always leaving. An incredibly emotional up and down. People are always coming and going.

Another translation, *Sorrow* a spontaneous kind of poem by Tu Mu, says;

"Down on my luck, wandering, / wine in hand... / Those slim waisted girls, / so tiny they could dance in my palm. / Ten years of it, and I waken / from the Yangchou City dream, / where even among the *blue* houses / I won a name for inconstancy."

I touch on this now, not because this really was my experience, but because it comes close to the feel of (being) just washed out by the intense relationships, the dense population,, the beautiful women. I have to admit it. I had sort of bottomed out. Maybe a couple years or so ago I had to re-assess what I was doing. *THE BASIN* was about finished. I hadn't done much for quite a while. I was pretty much where this poet, Tu Mu, was; burnt out on beautiful women and such.

Ten years of wine, women ...

Yeh, it sounds great. But ... What I have to do when I go back is try for a new orientation. That's why I came back for at least six weeks; so I'd have time to rest and think about what work needs to be done and what I can do. But I'll still be approaching it as a poet. I think that's first, and as a journalist secondly. I would like to do some real work in the ecology field because they don't know what they're doing. It's a real mess. There's people there to work with, too, that are good and sharp that have studied in the states. So it's not like I'm the only person. But might be one of the few who can articulate it in English. Our language is becoming a more and more important part of their culture.

It seems like you're developing a conscious commitment about helping the people of Taiwan.

I think everybody does that who goes there. Americans and others have a real instinct to want to do that. They're (in Taiwan) very open to ideas and change. The problem is the advice they're getting now. I don't appreciate a lot of the missionary activity; engineers who advocate nuclear power, or people who go there and talk politically about the importance of Taiwan as a bastion of freedom - talking arms and guns. That's the kind of input that mostly comes into Taiwan. They don't get much from Greenpeace mentalities. And I've been there long enough, I think, that I can safely say my credibility is high. I've worked for a rather conservative newspaper for a long time. I think they know me now. It's also a period of liberalization. If I play my cards right I could have some influence on the environmental front.

Many northwest writers, if they aren't total pragmatists, seem to hold a philosophy somewhat akin to Buddhism. Do writers in Taiwan have similar orientation?

I've recently been reading a book from a local library on modern Taiwan writers. It has a couple poets that I know. They all have borrowed from the West. So they write a style like a lot of American writers between the 30's and 60's.

Robert Frost?

No, I don't think anything that focused. It's more abstract. They do have a lot of experience, but it's so traumatic. There was civil war on the mainland, separation of families, occupation by the Japanese. These writers have, I feel, tremendous things to say and to work out. But they're using a lot of Western poetry. Particularly, T.S. Eliot and to an extent some French writers. It's kind of an intellectual complex of writing. They have tried to cut themselves away from classical Chinese. This is an older generation. The younger writers have not yet emerged. I haven't been able to get a hold of them. Though, I've seen work in translation by some rural poets who are talking about rural concerns which would fit into the ethic of the peninsula. I think this peninsula ethics will emerge further with writers in the countryside of Taiwan - talking values and doing the same rehabilitation that is actually going on up here.

Gary Snyder was a pivotal person to bring that consciousness about and he was from the Northwest. This common ethic touches writers like Robert Sund, Tim McNulty, myself, the Ish River Community - somehow. The beauty of the environment and its sheer power over us all. Coming back to it is staggering to me. Whatever that relationship is has certainly gone out and vibrated through the land. Wherever it's touched, people have picked up on it, I think.

So there is some common bond?

There is kind of a school of NW writers. A school with no teachers indoors. The teachers are all outdoors. The concept of the back country was in that Gary Snyder magazine, *KUKSU*. They were our counterpart. At that time one - it might have been Steve Stanfield - wrote something like, "Back country is a state of mind." It's a place on the planet. But it's a state of mind also.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Mary Lou Sanelli's work appears in numerous publications. She was a 1986 recipient of a Denny Poetry Award. A collection of her work, *Lineage*, was published in 1985 by Empty Bowl Press and *Long Streaks of Flashing Daylight* was published this summer by Blue Begonia Press. She runs a dance studio in Port Townsend and teaches during the summer in Ketchikan.

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Nov 1988 - Feb 1989

Duckabush Poetry Series, PO Box 2228, Sequim

At press time the monthly readings in Bremerton, Gray's Harbor, Olympia, Port Angeles, Port Orchard and Port Townsend are tentative. Please look for the scheduling in your local newspapers or write us to be on our mailing list.

Foothills Poetry Series, Peninsula College, Port Angeles

Nov. 10 - Robin Skelton

Nov. 22 - Ed Tisch

Nov. 29 - David Shaddock

Dec. 9 - Open Mike

1989

Jan. 10 - Alice Derry

Jan. 24 - Ed Harkness & Sheila Bender

Feb. 16 - Richard Kenny

Red Sky Poetry Theater, Seattle

(Sunday Evenings) This is listed for those interested in Open Mike readings on a continual level in the Olympic Peninsula.

* If there are up coming events not listed on this page please accept our apology and send us any information.