

Michael McDowell

## January Lessons, Portland

Portlanders learn to conjugate  
fog, mist, drizzle, shower—

*amo, amas, amat:*

It's why our skin is so soft, our hair so supple.

After weeks of warm west rain, an east wind  
roars down the gorge,  
topples the cottonwood across Ash Creek,  
drops the easy-living fir down the street.

When Portland clay sloughs off hillsides,  
hundred-foot Douglas firs  
take a downhill ride  
turning Montgomery Street into Walking Woods Drive.

When mudslides block Cardinell Drive  
and retaining walls sigh in a burst of basalt stones,  
then we know it's January,  
and winter's placed its wet stamp on Portland.