

Bill Siverly

Clackamas Lake

For Mike Wiley

We pass through the August arch over Pacific Crest Trail,
Cathedral door to Romanesque Douglas fir and Gothic hemlock.
People project holiness on ancient forest where none exists:
A concentration camp where trees survive and try to wait us out.

Beyond the trees we see the reedy expanse of Clackamas Meadow.
We imagine its meandering brook as habitat for bull trout
Our fathers once caught, now long gone from empty waters in Idaho.
A tiny cabin sits on the edge of the meadow with no one in it.

We come to springs bubbling from underground and flowing
Across the lake as blue as sky into a fork of the Clackamas River,
And on down to Pacific Ocean. We talk about our projections of God
Over place and time and mind. But is projection such a big surprise?
Don't we already know who God is?

At the campground some of the six billion people on earth
Have spread their plastic gear next to their cars in numbered spaces.
We hike outside the barbed wire fence that defines their realm and
calms
Their fear of any animals still at large, like bandits from the hills.

The dusty trail emerges from the forest to cross the asphalt,
Where we encounter a toothless couple selling firewood.
They say they don't walk anymore, but only drive their car.
God is you, and God is me, and God is the hush when night falls.

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Lownsdale Square

At noon the citizens on jury duty
Issue from Multnomah County Court
To mingle with office workers and retail clerks
Lunching and reading on benches.

Hundred-year-old elms extend their arms
Shading the square from the sun of mid-July;
A preacher takes up his station off to one side,
Prepared to shout down traffic on Fourth and Salmon.

A soldier upon a pillar for the sixty-four Oregonians
Who fell in the Philippines a century ago
Occupies the center of the square to mark the first
American Indian-fighting expedition overseas—
A hundred Oregonians dead in Iraq so far.

“You there, walking away,
You’re guilty as sin and you better get right with God—
Or you’re going straight to hell!”
Shouts the preacher at no one in particular.

Under delicate ginkgo trees
The fountain in the middle of Main
Spews water into troughs for ghost horses;
A bronze elk surveys the lawn where real elk once grazed.