Tim McNulty

At Goblin Gates, Elwha River

For several hundred feet, as far as can be seen down the canyon, a multitude of faces appear in succession near the water's edge. One could conceive in them a tortured expression.

-Charles A. Barnes, March 5, 1890

Upvalley, my fire is a point of light flickering on a gravel bar. But here the river tightens against a ridge of sandstone, pools restlessly at a cliff face, and plunges through a jagged river-cut slot into a deep canyon.

Barnes called this the "Goblin Gates," and from just upstream the serrated walls do present a ghoulish aspect, but what holds me here is the river.

Deep, slate blue, muscular as it curls against the cliff, then —a blade of light splintering over a gallery of boulders drops away into gray-green spray and distance.

A mile or so down-canyon the river quiets beneath the flat calm of impounded lakewater. One could conceive "a tortured expression" there, too.

Sky darkens over the autumn flush of maples; my fire has fallen to a muted glow. As I start back, the ancient forest rises unbroken to distant ridgelines where the ragged gates of treetops unleash a flood of turning stars.



Tim McNulty

On First Arriving at Quinault

With apologies to Su Tung-P'o

Funny—I never could keep my checkbook balanced, And it gets worse the older I grow. Low clouds wreath the hills—like a Sung scroll; Narrow road through rain-forest trees eleven inches last week alone! Not that I mind, a seasonal laborer on the road crew; Other poets have worked for the park service. But I worry about all the poems idling away in the high meadows; Who will be there to catch them When I'm tarring a leak inside a culvert With July Creek sluicing down my back, and the weekend Days away?