

Bill Siverly

Cathlapotle

For Mike Wiley

As long as oil from distant lands
Can still deliver us to destinations on demand,
We drive the Range Rover north to Ridgefield,
Three thousand folks in eight hundred homes.

Many commute by asphalt to Vancouver,
Some from mass-produced gingerbread mansions
Sited on the ridge like churches of money
Overlooking wildlife and wetlands far below.

Overlooking the plank house reconstructed there,
We enter the circular doorway to a dim interior world:
Eighty feet of living space along a central fire pit,
Carved houseposts of ancestors looming at the back,
Sliding planks overhead venting smoke from ancient fires.

Homeward bound, Lewis and Clark camped the night
Where three rivers merge, where Cathlapotle
Made their way by swift canoe through rich
Spirit worlds of Salmon, Blue Jay, Elk and Wapato.

Nine hundred Cathlapotle, by Clark's count,
Dwelted in fourteen plank lodges.
Suddenly we realize, when all the oil is gone,
Everyone we know will live in one room.