

Tom Wayman

The People Who Used to Own This Place

The May piglets who frisk around the sty,
pleased to bump each other and dash apart,
are transformed in a season to huge somnolent porkers
that lumber only toward feed
when they reluctantly hoist themselves to their hooves.

We each count our summers
in this valley: our brief portion
of the eons these forested mountains
ringed a lake formerly beached
high on what are now ridges.
Descending benches along the slopes
mark the successive centuries where the waters paused
before they drained away to the meandering river
followed here by the first whites
—whose downstream dams
block the kokanee from spawning
and thus purify the river to
a sterile vessel that travels steadily past
homestead, bungalow, clearcut acreage.

We empty out of the valley ourselves:
our memorial the structures we build,
the reconfigurations of the hillsides
and meadows we contract for
or borrow a friend's tracked excavator
for a weekend to effect,
our epitaph the complaints or praise of
whoever next possesses our titles, water licences,

gardens: truest heirs in all but name
of our breath, our labor, our Septembers.

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Portrait of Myself as a Cloud, or Natural Feature on the Valley Floor

Sixteen years now
Jerome Creek
has been drawn down my throat
—the water flowing into
a diversion pipe, across
Cowern's woods to
the distribution box,
bubbling into the southernmost of
ten compartments, the one
I share with three other
households, then along a half mile
or more of line
to my kitchen faucet. Season upon season
the creek suffuses through my stomach
and other organs
and out to my skin: is excreted
or evaporated
while I bury garlic gloves
in late October, clear the drifts
from the bend in my long driveway,
prune apple and plum
in a fine March mist. The discarded liquid
that soaks into my septic field
or lifts into the valley sky
causes my existence here
to resemble each permanently temporary
pond or water meadow

or stretch of river course. The fluid I release
to ground, to air
is borne away in the vast ocean of the winds
or under the earth
but at last reaches the salt sea.

There, the substance is transmuted
back to its pure form
and carried by the storm track
eastward across the Coast Range
and the Monashees
to sift down as snow
high on Perry Ridge,
as rain on the forested
catchment north of Richards'
and south of Avis' drainages, seeping and
trickling into minuscule tributaries,
then tumbling down as white spray and
hasty motion
to the inlet pipe
and to me, itinerant and rooted
in this valley as any cumulonimbus
lumbering overhead, as the deking flocks of
waxwings in the week or two
the red mountain ash berries are ripest,
as the June rise, as weather
—the stream pouring through me,
that I am part of,
making my name as much Jerome Creek
as any other appellation.