HEADLANDS, RISING

by

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Introduction

This is Robert Krieger's first collection, and the poems in it present an authentic voice richly evocative of the Pacific Northwest. Landscapes and creatures are caught with a brilliance of detail suggestive of Hopkins or Wilbur; the struggles of the poet's psyche are integrated with his vision of the natural world as in Roethke or Kunitz. Krieger's poems have great diversity and mastery of form and subject, and are filled with images whose felicity will delight the reader.

What I look for first in poetry is the strikingly original image which evokes an individual insight. Krieger provides many such images: In "Geographic," the fir-roots "cage the hills' truancy"; in "Night at the Fish Traps," one feels the "slow drawl/Of water on ropes." This is the mark of a poet dedicated to his art. Throughout these poems, the sensuous identification of poet with object is precise; for instance, in "By the Enclosure" Krieger creates such empathy that he and the buffalo "wear humps with the same ill-ease." In each of his images of elk, deer, tide-ponds, salmon, storms, antlers, Krieger brings to focus a moment of revelation accurately caught. One of the ultimate functions of imagery is to present the universal in a microcosm: Krieger does that with aplomb; an instance is "A Now Famous Escape."

A sure sign of poetry at its best is the wedding of acutely observed details with onomatopoeia, so the experience is felt in many dimensions at once; in "Figure, Bicycle," for example, "Wheels turn and grind back/Endless sandscape in a gritty silence."

One of the most moving and evocative of the poems is "The Recognition," where the father's contradictions and the son's intense but divided loyalties are caught exactly in images of snakeskins, bottles, Eden. Another evocative poem is his elegaic "Memaloose," where the Indian past is being invaded by the Columbia as workmen excavate the Indian mounds.

Other poems whose evocative intensity I greatly admire are "Boy on a Pullman," "Man under the Hill," and "Swings." Krieger is consistent in his commitment to his art, saying the most in the fewest words. As Marianne Moore once said, "Compression is the first grace of style."

Robert Krieger was born in Tacoma, Washington, and has lived most of his life in Portland, Oregon and Seattle. He received his B.S. from Lewis and Clark, his M.A. in Advanced Writing from the University of Washington in 1959, his Ph.D. from the University of Washington in 1971, writing his dissertation on the early poems of D. H. Lawrence: "Erotic Design in **Look! We Have Come Through!**" His fiction appears in **Paris Review,** his criticism in **Prairie Schooner,** his poems in such magazines as **Atlantic, Nation, Poetry, Poetry Northwest, Quarterly Review of Literature, Literary Review,** and **December.**

This volume establishes Robert Krieger as one of the Pacific Northwest's most technically skillful and precisely lyrical poets. His consistently memorable poems are a lasting joy and delight, leading always to surprise and illumination.

Nelson Bentley
English Department
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January 2, 1977

Geographic

Cloud country, whose wobbly hoop name,
Oregon, rolls to our eye as well as ear,
Jangling as the sea, a bull-horn of winds.

This uncut country, head poked-up like a fable,
Feet planted in mud. Really, her bones fit
    together
As a numbskull might wire a princess' frame

Stitch by stitch with muscles from a bear.
Proving? Well, nothing coheres without holds
Of inward belonging. So something

Is always flying away—fish, cloud & dune,
Rooftops upsadaisied near Eddyville,
A mountain that walks the street like a doe.

But at rock headlands, salvation of trees,
Especially fir-roots to cage the hills' truancy,
Wet loops of trees streaming like hair,

The tap of those roots going under,
Fastening & binding the wind-blown—ancient,
Uncut, stronger than the sea's tug

Where he rolls by her side flashing blades,
Hai, hai, chisel and drum,
Banging and whooping his lamentation.

Night at the Fish Traps

Smoking as a spell, gray as shale
At the edge of pilings near the wickerwork
    traps.
Townswomen do not heed this slow drawl
Of water on ropes. It is the solitary
Who feel its deft weight, the dynamite
Of this pebble-voice rolled deep at
    the riverbed.
They peer; eyes polish dark.
But women, intractable, have always said,
"Water never enters like a wave
Nor whispers anything to us."
Still the young must leap for its nets.
Tonight—townswomen know—girls will cry
Between the lean and fat of their wisdom,
Trying hard to grow old in it.

At the Tide Ponds

The ponds, that sultry noon, gave us
No comfort—we waited at their side.
We hoped for green, and suddenly
The vetch sank deep as beds: inshore
Rode a helmsman-bird, rare and sulphurous.

Each lupine stood for cutting then,
A broil of purple rocking in a cloudless
    sway.
Water kept its full; no food but
Happiness, so heart took half, and soon
Assured of wherewithal, gave half away.

And visibly, skyward from the dunes,
The resinous forest burned air to blue.
Weeds spilled their catch of ragged fruit
As if asleep, and so our dunce regrets
Dropped ignorant as the hours turned,

Until the bait of waywardness flew off
And like a promise, brimming, at our ears
Out of driftwood shapes we heard
At the water's mouth, "Sleep well.
You will not hunger in this country-side."

By the Enclosure

Measuring animals makes anyone sad.
I study the buffalo
Confessing—I must—sure of his stance
Deep in the munchy grass,
It's simple to see a family resemblance.

I buy this wasting day;
I ask what do we hold in common danger?
Under the foddery clouds
Our heads knock against fences.
We wear our humps with the same ill-ease,

For we're both here—aren't we?—
Two in buttercups at the unbusy edge.
He doesn't know, doesn't mope:
Watching him bulge like a holiday guest,
I clutch at my own kind of dread

And sense his loss of a daily task—
A shagged, unsettling thing
Chomping his pleasure to the end
On the web's other side—
Having no hand in the making weather,

No collar or rope, no bundles
To drag from place to place,
Old lump to be fed, ignorant—
I do not mean to malign him; no,
But nuzzling here remind myself

How lives hiss out, coming
Unravelled pressed to nobody's charge.
"We tire of noons and nights in the vetch
Far from the sweat-pits of Egypt:
We long for more wages, more purpose."

Flowering Antler

Met at the entrance of this wood,
Stranger with stranger, lost with lost,
How shall we tell each other what it means
Who are not satisfied to call it horn,
Buck's horn, but what we make of it?

It is of beast for good or ill
And eyes can mark such bone as kin,
Deep-rooted as the mind's old grudge;
It is of sweat, and animal, a chiseled
Wood sprung wild against the world.

How may our breath hold back, our love
Not claim a branch's dazzling gift?
Tines burn or silver by the fire
Or at our touch—a scented shield
His shagged and open head foreswore.

And do we need to say what pain
Occurred, how he ran breathless from these
firs,
Brute hold torn finally away,
Or how he flung this specter down,
Poison his loving-self redeemed?

We need not draw this telling out,
For all its windings are the same,
And in this rise and willful fall
Lie our mind's flame, and our mind's chill
That sets the smiling in your look

And weaves its story into ours
While beasts run freely in this wood;
Ten-tined, it stands and burns and blooms;
It points our pledge, sings
Lover homeward, lost to lost.

Elk

We heard him take his running in the wood
And hooves strike winter from a buried bell:
Where long brances hung with ice
A bough of six: before the moon
Another spray, and held against a single fir
He stood, legs set to snow—
His keen cold feet on fire,
His head twelve-tined like a running year.

Chinook

Butting
Toward the bell-face of rock
  Where mountain-wash pours
Rainbow through its flume.

Herds of salmon
Jump to keep their coupling
  In the lookout shallows,
Or break the rapids tugging down.

Air like camphor
The spangled stones deceive these
  Roan-and-silver leapers
Grinding through spray.

Sexual, misshapen
Here at the season's turn,
  Dog-jaws spread
And fluttery with scales.

How many did we count
In lightning flash
  All night, all dripping dawn
Beyond our lamps

Till the run gave out
To a few the color of milt,
  Several straggling kings—
How many ghosts begun?

Deer Crossing

All who are watchers
Driving the coast route, 101, see
Bayberry haunters gone predictable,
No longer stealthy for scraps.

Theirs?—a secondhand realm,
Negotiable, but fallow we think
Knowing wind and deer once
Signed no highway commitments.

For winding at Neskowin
Through misty firs, remember
Pulling up short? In the fog
A starveling without

Lunged at our sides, death
And eyes in the carlights
Looked straight through
Our hedgy lives—a single

High stormy gaze flashing
From under a brim
As we swerved,
Wheels gripping the air—

An antlered head
Like a king's drilled in
And gone, hooves
On the gun's easy side—

Remember?—remember reading
Later the arrogant dents
Under the mythy hills
Tapped in like braille?

River-Island Storm

Wind—and possessions we know
As safe, bottles, pots on shelves in trouble,
The marble cupids near the backdoor screen,
We wonder if these will end
Wet on their backs in the next state,
Hearing rain pick our crackling roof.

All morning the middle of the island
Is the wind's pit. In the distance:
Pebbles, tons of sand, cold dunes move;
Firs—in a kind of Swedish drill—
    stutter
And vanish. Then, fathomy haze—
Unlit images from a faulty projector.

Hour after hour we learn
To tilt so well we hardly brace.
Under noon-pour the walls run sweat,
The half-sun veiled and hurtling down,
A shutter leaves like a canvas-wing.
What's the use to ask why the test?

House aches and creaks into the night.
Drowning in quilts, we flex like fish;
Eyes shine: like fans close and open;
"More of the same," sobs the scratchy
    Philco
And we turn to love, remembering
On such a night we lost Atlantis.

Scrub Oaks

They were lit and gusty,
Leaves gone lindy, whirled round their wicks
Orange and brazier-blue,
Wet, fumy voices of drifters.
So we drove through that blur
Seeing scuffed colors run
(Even trash-oaks have days
Built of guys and stress)
Careful to mark what suddenly
Passed us—would bits of them
Fall piecemeal like rust?
Would some do what they whispered?

Every tree has its crisis:
They boiled across our roof till
We smelled wounded resin
As all of them tugged
At invisible weights—quickgold
Down to their polished knees,
Till we could no longer hold our own vertical
Hearing their moral hum
How all is in flourish, patches and flourish,
Every leaf, solo, blazing it
In a rush of flags from a pole
Above roots humped like anchors,
The same hoopy voices of drifters,
Delirious, like us
In reckless abandon at the road's edge,
Talking of sailing and not getting away.

Ogresses

Drying big bras on the windy beach, bones
In their paw scattered in four directions
Like bilge to the isle's off-shore, each
Sits lolling, sunny, head on a stalk.

And before a sailor can run up the hemp—
His ship gliding outbound, gulping wind—
Quick as a dwarf or bums to a chamber-pot
Arrival is whinnied and trumpeted.

And they wait, warty old sticky-hairs,
Colossal Wagnerian doxies, to crack
The first man, with a clam-kiss
Divide his elbows and knock knees.

Asking for seconds—a stud heavy with fish?
(The eye in their belly tries to pretend)
Or Sweet Many-Swords—will there be others?
They fake for spirit but growl.

And they tidy their Russian square heads
(A few remained pictured in stories);
They fling white tits and choose snares,
Never brides, only obvious Urges

Who, swathed in homespun bands, violet-crowned-
Bedecked, tune voices, furry
Muscles announcing a day of bloodlike
Sounds in a slop-jar, dagger and flute.

Figure, Bicycle

Even the gulls cry water's dominion:
From tidal-flats over granite beaches
Dunes shift inland. Ever to eastward
Angles drift as high as a sand-top lies.
Where rhododendrons, burning in a slough,
    blow to be buried.
Direction binds longing and distance.

Between Cape Blanco and unsighted forests
A man, bicycle, a ten-mile country of dunes
Are stage-props to the wind's persistence.
In a haze of flutters, the eye holds nothing;
Wheels turn and grind back
Endless sandscape in a gritty silence.

Even the gulls drop like a question.
Blinding half the sky. Dune grass goes white.
If luckless winds never turn—face set
    homeward—
The wheels' direction is his only keeping,
Riding, riding, the bicycle makes small distance.

Art Lessons

In this slight orchestration by Dufy
—"The Artist and His Model in a Studio" —
The build-up is of blue, and *brio*.
Brio color thrums on walls and chairs.
Dufy's long coat, blue hair—the wash on
    everything
Except the nude who lolls on sheets.
It's all a matter of dissembling:
Monsieur pretends he's staring at white
    breasts
As through an underwater bell
(The gloom burns blue—color alone is almost
    form and theme).
For what comes real?—the nude who smiles
    at us
Or all the seascape he has chiseled in
Outside expectant windows?
So we are looking at Dufy—we've seen
The nude (thin lily-arms), time made
    flesh—what else?
And if we cannot mark his eyes (he's
    turned)
We know he stares beyond the lattice to the ships,
    those fiery hulls with waving flags,
And to the real predicament, the sea.

The Delay

When I struggled out from your final hold
Into the orchard's intractable air, what wild
Willingness to stay sprang at my head
On that planked road caving to the sea?

Then you appealed, and your bees
In lively invitation danced to tell
The colors of goodbye, their pollen like a dust
On the long way down the rocks.

But my ship rolled too, its figurehead
Crying another test—the sea!
And still I lolled, cold for separation,
While all the winds moved slowly round.

Love, was there no sign for relenting?
And then—that backward-driven gull,
Blinded and old, silent with regrets,
What sent him soaring wrong?

For all my favorite joy the ropes held fast;
The winds that turned the gull turned me.
I saw wild orchards breaking at the cliff, saw
For the first time new foam in the branches.

Landfall

For days we waited like thieves to land,
Winds forbidding us dry residence
In that bewildering isle, and in our hands
Cheap condoms blazing to be used.

The waves stood stiff as Oriental brass;
A speaker blared: *O here's where you belong.*
At night, we saw the piers fill up with dolls,
And thought we'd suddenly come of age.

But would the frothing reefs be kind
And let us disembark? We circled patiently.
In such a spot, a feather-merchant's God
We knew, and stared up at the sky.

So let them milk us at their shrines
We called. *We'll never breathe I'm lost—*
betrayed!
But as we stripped for joy and toasted wine,
Only sharks and reef replied,

And not one wind gave in; like family ghosts
Forgetful how they looked and sinned,
Each fixed a grudge against the east;
They sealed our cold acquaintance with the sea.

A Now Famous Escape

I float in that balloon over myself
Seeing my own darkness in the light.
Casimir Wierzynski

Ropes that held its wonder swayed;
I felt my body move through airy tides
Above each head, over the maypoled firs
And pylons, rising above this country-fair
(The pulleys creaked, the harness flew),
And hoisted from such bondage at midday
I left my elders pointing up.
Wind whirled the lines and I was canopied.
Mother, mother, where's your son?
And I was going in that wild balloon
Past bits of sky, above their silent look
Drifting where scud blew lightly.
I had no weight. Rooftops. Dreams.
I dreamed a voice flew in a rage
Sighing and sighing up is down;
I woke. What winds can bear this load?
And as I fell, unsettled from my hold,
My elders' hands stretched high to greet me
For they had never loosed the ballast-tie.
And then like one who falls
And turns to look the crowd apart,
I heard my number called out everywhere:
My adversary cried, my murdering self,
"Goodbye loud sun! Goodbye sweet answering
air!"

Boy on a Pullman

Such privilege was his—to stay bewitched
And ride those sundown rails above the world!
But the steaming train, passing each right-of-way,
Outsteps his map, each friendly sign.

And suddenly transforms its character,
Leaps flat on wheels round a sickered hill
Derelict, he rocks at twilight now,
A face in a cloud of hopelessness.

No doors open down the unmarked plains:
Through fog the engine hammers the dark.
He keeps his fear: wheels forget and slow;
Glass rattles twice and he is nowhere.

Hello, hello and good evening (falsity)
Greets him under a station's warping name
Where endlessly trailed by unaccountable
baggage.
He turns, he sets his look toward home;

For what he finds leaps heavy at each gate,
A draft at corners pounces for his breath;
Here nothing cries reprieve, the bells beat
back,
Ringing a loss he cannot hold.

Reflections of a Fellow Passenger

"What you might do," she says,
"Tonight, tomorrow night, forever
If you can't sleep, is sit up
And count houses bumping
Like stacks in a flood."
"And you'll see," she says,
"How to wait for the farmhouse
Whose face is turning gray
(Last to appear) the color of
Downriver rain or train-smoke
(Victrola-voice at an infinite distance):
A house swirling in view
Tugging its comfortable tether,
Yard full of rubbish, a shack always,
Tar-paper boards (I've seen a few),
One, at least one, trying
At the edge of every dark town
Burning a light like hello."
"Never fails," she says, "As I
Was saying how the poor, our neighbors,
Remind us to keep journeying."

The Poor Have To Be Singing

1. Old Men's Dreams

Sticks and shedding boughs.
We are standing by a wood
Amazed. Noon, and smoke
Like a ghost in a bundle swirls:
And listening, looking in
As sounds materialize
We smell a fire begin:
We hear the sound of runaways.
Frightened—like all our days—
Plotting to stampede.

2. Words from the Spinster

Sparrows nibble the blades.
I am fifty and who? Who?
To tell you Venus bled
At my birth—still does.
I wait. I swing the screen
Open to sun-brightened hoppers
Watching my wood-lot seed.

Think of the leaves, the years!
Nobody, loveless, has any luck.
The clock, the weathervane down
By the fishery cries. *Household*
despair!
Life like a thread catches
At nails—and I fear flesh
Falls in with murderous things.

For yesterday—was it yesterday?—
(I begin to distrust my senses)
Light as honey and young
That boy in hand-me-down clothes—
I watch him combing his pony . . .
What is it I ought to remember
Down on my knees by the hedge?

3. Adolescent's Song

Here was wrangling, clucking in my net,
A fish, half-woman, with a plover's eye.
Everything else silent, pitch-dark.
Why had she risen wild from the sea?
By ordinary light I found her
Back of the boathouse old lovers know.

Out of gauze I drew her head.
Up from mud two, meeting, bumped
In birth. Her breasts cut air,
Singed like a brand; under the fishlines
I was out of sense when she spoke,
Hooking a mouth near mine,

"I'm the dove you're promised for,
That freckled sphinx, your coddling rose."
In the deep of pooled eyes
Love flew like a feathered barb.
O all her scars were one-way set
When my hands plummeted her side.

Did we drift in silt? I almost drowned;
Skin, in riffles, dropped its skin—
She led me by, portioning breath
To make me see. I stretched
To a bird, fluttering scales.
Out of caves, tame water roared.

And we went flying where no corners are,
Linked arm-to-fin, a mineral bait.
And my heart learned from my thighs
To take that leap beyond the wheel
And lose my mask in the tangled stream.
O she named me once, no longer boy.

Swings

Girls are outlaws with swings,
And the goodbye of a child, yours or
Mine cantering straight for leaves,
What meaning's unravelled
Seeing them pump halfway to dark?

First ride goes fiercely erotic,
Arms looped in ropes, not wanting
To burden the grass; lawless,
They hang low in the saddle
While joy, marginal prince, rocks beside
    them.

"Come down, come down," mothers call.
It's time to tether the swings.
Windows like lids, screens bang, all
From journeys bumping like sheaves;
But supper does not delay them,

Not sparklers nor threats, hoops,
Whatever blazes mothy at evening
Can steal defiance from Susan or Jane
Bare-toed, singing of boys;
Desire cuts them like a spur.

And their fathers at the picket fence
Squint hard through sprinklers and wonder
At daughters riding to steeplechase.
They do not call, older, targeted
Suddenly by the pathos of empty shoes.

6 A.M.

Two stories at either ear. Pots and kettles.
The ax, far down wet lanes,
Signals as I lace up my shoes:
Heartwood, heartwood, long silver edge.
But house summons its own ghosts.
Downstairs a woman sings in a corner
And I adjust my bones to the pleasure of hers.
Two stories. Sparrow-time. Someone choosing.

Puppets

variation on Rainer Maria Rilke

Imagine the unstrung
Sobbing for Judgment Day,
Their slop-jar hearts full of
Strawy rage and little else.

Grown tired of gewgaws handed out
On a proscenium not of first choosing--
Suddenly they bite dull wires:
Like anarchists, escape.

Punch and Judy in Bastille clothes,
Mooncalf, Mistress Bawdy-Bitch,
Heart-on-my-Sleeve, Beardy Face,
All that idiot tribunal

Leaping (with flags) over
Footlights, while our babies
Sit and peer at tattered bodies
Mocking threads and needles.

And no crime will these agents
Forgo if all dead floggings
Come avenged. They'll give
Our darlings such wild knocks

With phallus-bread and club—and
In a flash of photographic powder
Drag the tiniest before
The painted boards to strut

For wasted justice burning in
Excelsior hearts and sawdust brains,
Long tittering at their scarlet luck,
Backbite violin, red drums.

And they'll be the High Vigilantes,
Hands dripping joy, blind
To jerk real necks, make characters
In a madhouse play-yard,

Our children down on battered knees
Breaking each other's skulls—
Unless we suddenly intervene
(Oh for our dear babies' sake)

Taking imagination as portent
To keep these unpaid actors happy,
Or feed them to a wholesome fire
Braver than a mock-sun's.

Ecology

Out Sunday windows our street blooms nuns,
Escapees, provident Sisters behind white
Blinders, crosses, robes in a breeze;
And I watch—my noontime game—
Who own no claim on them, they less on me
Except the most one-sided debt:
I know they're being punished for my sins.

They've told me so. In Jesus-squirmy words,
"We'll pray for you!" and then
(Their business is to intercede for flesh below),
They glide up heaven's hill, straightway
To save my angel-half by relic-shine—
Five decades of dear Sister beads; they
Wished I pastured on the Lord's green stretch.

So they parade away my sins—
Sent out, perhaps too fat with schoolgirl pride
Themselves, to penance-walk beside gray walls,
Saying office, old mysteries, all in cob-web
black,
Intimidating. I know (their glasses flash!)
They've marked me with a sign.

Why is it some don others' hair-shirts,
Eat thorns, stick fingers in their ears?
They steal soul from its honest pleasures
Coming behind us at life's trough
To nip like sparrows—injustice collectors!—
At our dangling laces, our loose cuffs;
They fidget with our finest crumbs.

But what can we say or do, chosen,
Living on crossed streets? Nod — war's
Over; their prize: vicarious redemption!
I'm less honest than my nature is,
But hardly sorry, smug at Sunday windows,
Except for having vexed good Sisters so:
Must I apologize for human weapons?

Some Quarrels Do Not Stop in Reno, Nevada

It's a leaky old story
That chose us in Reno once,
That began with money and spiralled to sex.
The usual pities of some wheezy two
Barging into our sleep
From the dark side of a razor-wall—
Like a migraine growing steadier
By the hour (adultery, religion, drunken son)
And ending god knows where in Reno, Nevada.
We were their horizontal spies.

If you have a victim's mind
Imagine the quarrels in this place
All sizzling at once. I imagine
Vagrant distance, a wind, the whole town
    of Reno
A tinder of easy divorces, greasewood,
Annulments, a dumpyard of wedding-rings;
For genuine quarrelers fly to Reno
    to die—
Some to scream out their lust, unsatisfied
With mere bodies, and others
Like jittery birds in love with false wounds.
Some never grow wise
Hugging torn lives that would ruin lawyers;
And some—like these—quarrel just to be
    quarreling,
Victims of mutual amnesia as we are theirs
In a storm of dishes and threats
Till deafness must be heaven
In this same motel we keep waking in.

It's an old, old story we must try to forget
Blown down the money-cold streets of Reno,
    Nevada, how
One lover's quarrel can empty a city.

The Recognition

My father could identify a snake by skin,
Blue cabbage-whip, leaf garter like a husk,
And flash a wink to tame a heart
    like mine if
Fortified with whisky for eventual bite.
So five dry skins by a single boulder
(A shedding rendezvous) and fast!
He'd snatch those sheddings up like flame,
    turn wily for my sake,
For five dry skins were five long changes
--Whose life has moulted less? --
And then he'd run them on his fingers like
    a palmless glove,
Dance off and grow the same old bottle round
    us soon enough.

My father was a snake my mother cried
Hiding deep hurts in metaphor;
She told him what the bourbon could not kill,
A telltale badge in every drain.
And when I'd see that Eden of remorse
Behind gold rims—what every boy has glimpsed—
The sorrow of his look that measured
Worm or chrysallis or butterfly (somewhere
the secret taste of napthalene),
I saw my father's life drag over stones,
His tongue too finely drawn
For those who do not lie or slink or foul
    a wilderness,
Those favored creatures of perfected lives
—*Convolvulus*, Red Underwings—
Those lucky ones, the pure transformers.

Memaloose
(Burial Ground)

The island is budded with funeral pines.
Death-feathers hang in air: but they row out,
Workmen hired under union wage
To disinter the Indian mounds.

Water whimpers behind the dam; sandbags
Leak and foam blooms in mushy hedges.
No-one wants Indian beads downriver,
A raft of trinkets or handful of feathers.

There's talk the river's already entered
Grave-tunnels, probing with roots.
Awake it cries, awake to the nibbling
Sounds of old salmon, fins tapping

Treaties have failed them again,
And now the river; drifting about,
What word comes up in Shanoo's tomb?
Water mixes mud with the dust of Kalooas.

The workmen return, pile many sacks
Deep in a concrete pit, unmarked.
An old woman steps forward with a word
To praise the speed and modern conveyance.

And fluttering near, on dry ground
Near Wishram, reporters, a marauder perhaps,
Under a helicopter like a dragonfly,
Opposite a white milage marker.

Man under the Hill

The dark—what of it?
Genius in a helmet's private and sound.
It wasn't hard to take these well-used steps.
My sisters cried, but handed me my gear
And down I came dragging
My cargo of loud air. I'm glad—
More than glad to forage in a field of rocks
And make an end of carping winds,
The scourge, that old regime like creditors;
I keep the colors of my lamp.
But don't imagine I grow proud—
I breathe the hill's breath every day
Getting a step beyond myself,
And when apartness turns immense
My brows are ready! The childish gloom
Locks arms with me
To keep me true—plain, snowy word—
When they return and for new bait
(The old hook painted new)
Drop promises to lure me back,
Blow down a woman's smell,
Ring bells, make slogans dance and sing,
Extend me gold and daffodils
As if I'm still some coltish fool
Who can't decide. I have—
Not up for down. I'll stay
Until ther're fewer couriers than kings
And make my epitaph contrive
To clutch me like a crown for those
I cannot know, the hummers round my tomb.

Epitaph

Here sits forequestioning
And sick enough with life
To build a bonfire of his heart.
The one who keeps his love alive
When all the honest lamps blow out.

Enroute

All these grab-bag trifles —
The merest hum of fencewire.
A gray feedstore, bookend dogs,
An Indian cemetery hazing away —
A family of scarecrows leans
Upon staves by an open grave.
Dusty Yakimas, or a few Paloose.

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