I was a little bit nervous about my arrival at Andrews Experimental Forest in the lower Cascades. I didn’t know what to expect, and in my mind’s eye the forest had become more remote and even intimidating each time I thought about it. It had been a long time since I’d lived among trees. The final instructions I’d gotten from the staff about my weekend arrival were—we’ll just leave the house open for you. I had an image of being Goldilocks, including the bears.

But I drove from Eugene through some lovely country (river gorge, apple orchards) and arrived in the midst of gorgeous old growth forest (ferns, moss, salamanders, huge trees). And immediately was greeted by the sociable sight of a mushroom class strolling out of the woods with hands full of psychedelically yellow chanterelles. And instead of the rustic cabin I was imagining I had an apartment—really too big for one person but fine. There was a phone right in the office.

In my imagination this old growth forest in the Cascades had been unconnected to my life in New Mexico or even to much of anything around it. It was a green island floating in time and space. There was no cell phone reception so I’d imagined a lonely pay phone lit by a yellow light bulb. But Andrews was more peopled than I’d realized and it was a research station after all.

At Andrews, I felt the intersection of humankind and the wild. There were very tame deer and fawns who were no longer being fed but who had good memories and weren’t shy of humans. There was a little pond of koi who surfaced at the sound of human feet, expecting food.

I settled into my apartment. On the linoleum of the kitchen was the giant image of a mushroom. These fungi would soon become my totem in Andrews, for they were everywhere.

The next morning I had a wonderful time getting oriented by an ecologist and former writer-in-residence named Tim. He had spent a decade studying spotted owls. He took me to two of the three designated "reflection points"—these are the spots set aside for observation for 200 years, and each writer who stays in the forest writes about them.

First, a clearcut with replanted trees which was so horrifying in the context of this forest. Although I’d seen such cuts before I had under-reacted. This was like seeing people or animals being mistreated—and I understood the trees as living beings, not as resources.

Then we drove to a remote-seeming old growth/log rot area—I got a good explanation of the ecosystem as a whole and could distinguish the canopy. I soaked it up in case I didn't have the nerve to traipse that far in alone. However, I soon found myself in possession of a field radio, and began to feel more secure in the woods.

The third plot was a gravel bar right near the apartment—its theme was flood as the site had been created by the force of water. It was literally in my backyard, and I visited it many times. The first time I went out I was dashing, trying to see it before the rain got more intense. I forgot my walking stick, slid down a bit of incline, and wondered how I'd get back up. Looking around
and pausing for a moment, I realized I was surrounded by potential walking sticks. A gnarled broken branch, dripping moss, graciously allowed itself to be used.

There was also an experimental flume where researchers sent down soil and mud to understand landslides, a pretty dramatic mechanism in the landscape. Here, the earth itself was volatile with mud slides so slow the naked eye could not see them, and with volcanic activity.

My friend Pat drove all the way from Corvallis to visit. We'd met when we were sixteen, and marveled that we still had a lot to talk about. She brought me a quiche made with chanterelles, and drove me into the lava fields above the Andrews, and all the way to Sisters. The mountains were obscured by clouds. The next day it snowed and the pass was closed for the season.

I felt I'd gone native when I soaked in a local hot springs in the rain--something a New Mexican would never do. But it was pointed out to me that if Oregonians didn't soak in the rain they would almost never get to soak at all. In the forest, I went to sleep very early, sometimes waking at dawn to write in bed. I loved just taking the compost out. I'd see a new kind of mushroom or fungus every day by the pile. The forest itself was of course a vast compost. And so it seemed was my imagination.
Mushroom Pantoum

beyond the peaks
beneath the earth
in the dark of sleep
intricate, enormous mushroom network

beneath the earth
nitrogen in soil, fixates
intricate, enormous network
fungi, mites, nematodes, protozoa

nitrogen in soil, fixates
mushroom larger than leviathan
fungi, mites, nematodes, protozoa
white rust, black spot, blue mold, canker rot

mushroom larger than leviathan
or anything that walks on earth
white rust, black spot, blue mold, canker rot
the rustling of beetle galleries

anything that walks on earth
was it supposed to grow that big?
a rustling of beetle galleries
mushroom=fungal fruiting

was it supposed to grow that big?
this self from before the kalpas--eons
mushroom=fungal fruiting
clouded salamander, clouded mountain

this self from before the kalpas--eons
beyond the peaks
clouded salamander, clouded mountain
in the dark of sleep
Afraid in my mother's house at night in the wind
Stand of hemlocks three times as big as the house
Pointed starward--and rustled--
A world up to no good.

Shadow, headlight, streetlamp, the ceiling alive
With pattern,
And a child in bed.

Or waking, hearing how in the storm
A tree crashed into the neighbor's roof
And came within inches
Of crushing the children
A story the hired help told
With more interest than sympathy.
Or how at my grandparents’ lawn party
When the huge tulip tree, rotten at the heart
Split, and my little sister
Started running and reached the canopy
By the time the tree hit earth
Bruised but all right.

How as a young woman I lived on the point of the beach
Each night the trees
Seemed to come closer to the house
And I'd turn on the floodlights
To wait.

How the god Pan is panic,
Fear of being lost in the woods
How here in the old growth in middle age
I saw the big leaf maple fall and
Fall, red mushrooms poke
From earth, a salamander
Slide away
And dreamed all night
Of another part of the forest.

*Rustic*

Entering this world's
Ink washed scroll
Up the MacKenzie River
Past apple orchards,
Mist starting to burn off,
Yellow leaves fall
Visible in slow motion
Palmate leaves as big
As a baby's head
Or both my hands.

This yellow
In the Chinese black
Landscape
Of Oregon
Makes me think of Phil Whalen
Or a Gary Snyder poem
And although I was expecting
The solitude of rain on my arrival
Emerged into sunshine.

If old growth means never logged
Then I am not old growth--
Fern, moss, lichen, nurse log--
I've been cut, and more than once,
Who hasn't, by middle age.
But there's a salamander glistening in the shade
Red and brown, a silky soil
And the yellow leaves that fall apart
Like water in a gorge
Could cover my fisted heart.
Reflection Points

"Only a while ago all mountains moved in fire." Yosano Akiko

Clear cut--rows of dollar signs instead of Douglas Fir
Lower Lookout on 1501
hill of colored scrub and madrone
trucks that carry out not just logs but nutrients
farm not forest.

Lookout Creek at 1506
great logs allowed to fall by time, time's gravity
first seedling shoot towards an opening in the canopy
the cycle's obvious
could be viewed as romance
of interdependence
how a stump becomes a hassock of brilliant moss
or viewed as waste--no profit here--
just mosaic, spectrum.

yew draped in moss
the forest holds a cure
for what ails, or will ail us,
standing snags--
trees that refuse to fall
scorpions in the depths of forest floor,
mushrooms glistening like mother-of-pearl.

pink flags mark the strands of false broom
like a tiny installation by Christo,
a plastic wrap
of an invasive species
still--barred owls fly out of their range
to spotted ones
might compete, or mate--
it's not as if we knew what we were doing either.
water's force took the curved road out
it sounded metallic, like a huge gamelan
playing as rock tumbled forth
from the slow slide gone mad.
the gravel bar
beside the stream,
red alders fixing nitrogen
and how you get here?
simply enter the gap
in the trees
and proceed through green.

earth moves so slowly you can't see it move
takes years to tumble down the hillside
yet move it does
the physics of the flume, strong as desire

reflection means to think but also
to see by means of visible light
in the old growth--
this world, this self.

A Different Forest

The woman at the hot springs
Asks what brings me here
I say I'm staying in the forest
But she mishears
And thinks I've come to visit
A local boy named Forrest
Who lies unconscious in the hospital
After a terrible car wreck.

I don't want to be reminded
Of the descansos on Old Las Vegas Highway
Four crosses in pastels and purples
For the kids killed that night
By a drunk driver
Or the sound my daughter's friend made
When she heard,
A sound beyond weeping.

Logging trucks go by in the mist
Like a line of oversized hearses
All around me
The forest is awake
With its moss-draped yew trees
Its beetles and fungi stirring a tree trubk
To ferny soup.
Only I am sleeping.

Two Tanka

your small clay teacups
with pinch pot impish faces
seem to contain
river, falls, mist, rain
a whole watershed of dreams

compost bin buried
in yellow big leaf maple
mushrooms shine gray, red
in the rain, and I believe
they are dreaming of me
Forest Haiku

waxing moon
in the mist--
fir, cedar, hemlock

STOP sign
in the old growth forest
covered in moss

torrential rain--
doe and fawn have come close
to my house

dream of coffee cake
and loss
but not of you

in the moss forest
tiny mushrooms
loom enormous

raindrops
in the hotspring--
concentric circles

rainbow
over the lava fields--
stark white tree trunks

just as I left
I saw the geese
also flying south

something shining
on a moonless night
led me home

Aubade

making love to you
in the single bed
in the forest
I drop an earring
black and silver beads
I bought from a Navajo woman
on the rim of Canyon de Chelly

that was a thousand miles from these firs and hemlocks
and a long time ago, too
but even then I was with you
though after a long absence

walking along the forest floor
you tell me how your time at the Pacific
reminded you of the desert
the same feeling--
maybe it was the horizon line
or the availability
of vastness

mushrooms--orange fairy caps and honey--
release their spores,
why, standing upright
is the future in front of us
the past behind?

my dreams have gills
can leap, amphibious,
although I’m never going back
to the place where I was born
but place
the unfamiliar cup
on the unfamiliar table
and move on.

What Am I?

feeds on decay, is phosphorescent
scavanger that cannot move
sometimes poison, sometimes food
on the forest floor a perfect ring
umbrellaed with a cap and stem
destruction turned to luminescence

Untitled #4

can't place the melody
at 3 a.m.
tiny orange ears
of mushrooms
    poking through fallen needles
open to cups
    that catch rain
    a snatch of
    Mozart?
    DNA?
    in the trembling wood.

Spore Print

gills laid to white paper
on an overcast day
sketched in mushroom ink

coral fungi
no shell
no sea

the way we floated on the lake
above the trees petrified in lava
how it gave the children nightmares

how what we ignored or couldn’t explain
remained in plain view
while looking down

until one day
the surface of the water
simply filled with clouds, with rain

Nocturne
loneliness whistles
with the tea kettle

and it is hard
not to feed the fawn
the doe with the cougar-bitten ear

snow
on the far ridge of mountain

raven is here, as expected
impossible to live
in a world without crows

when I was young
I suffered, wondering if you loved me

now ask the same of god.

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Notes

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Notes
In “Saint in a Landscape” the quote “earth’s surface and the figments of the mind have a way of disintegrating” is from Robert Smithson.

The title ”From Air to Air” came from a phrase of Pablo Neruda’s.

The quotations in the poem “Oneida” are all from women who lived there.

In the poem “Seneca Falls”; the first quote is from Charlotte Woodward, 1848. The second is modified from an article in the “Declaration of Sentiments.” written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The third is a letter from Susan B. Anthony to Stanton. The fourth quote is from Elizabeth Cady Stanton.