

**Robert Lietz**

## WHICH BERRIES

Tell me again nine thousand miles might conceive  
and signify, and twenty states, beginning  
a year ago tomorrow, occupy themselves, as even  
these scribbles must, encouraging  
the poem somewhere in this, and photographs, though  
we can't be sure what's respite or commotion,  
or what's star-brought, in place to improve on roles  
and motivation, on staying awake, alert,  
avoiding a guard-rail, soft-shoulder run-off compromised,  
before a thirsty season settled into it. It's wrong,  
sure, as decisive can be on a Pacific coastal by-way,  
a prematurity that tempts me, mind and heart,  
minding the time, the miles you step out of, or walk  
a little in with an Olympus, lenses decided on,  
even as ruins and risks dissolve, as if the scene itself  
explains the sprawl, ascent, and the sense you get,  
of the planet dropping off below the trail head, this doubt  
that toys so thoroughly, threading the confidence  
thought shared, voiced by travelers in some other century,  
to note which berries, say, might promise taste  
or tastelessness, where some, you've learned, would find  
a home and some revisit, in any of twenty states,

where work we could not complete asks our re-touching,  
come to become, so long as love appreciates,  
imagining lives, lifetimes, spent in sequoia, geologic cadences,  
in seasons to be, no less elastic than creation, so  
that emergencies disengage, and aperture, shutter speeds,  
presiding, size up scenes as clocks decline,  
the afternoon and ridge recalled, where views made do  
for sandwiches and lunch breaks, for every  
twist of moodiness, through fields cloud-filtered light  
played out and over, to tone the timing settled on,  
or that road found closed for maintenance, where  
you were yet to find the Falls, and still to plot  
your way to Coeur d'Alene.

## SAFE ENOUGH

Bright sprinkle noon with meaner rains forecast,  
mid-afternoon before the expected emphasis.  
But the birds aren't giving clues at any of the four feeders  
and squirrels no clues, crossing the stone road  
to the puddled land and mixed woods marking properties,  
while this dove's perched regally, owning the knob  
that tops the largest feeder's transparent housing, the dove's  
eye on its dove young, on the plenty below, as finches,  
six or so, post up at the twin tubes we've hung for them,  
ignoring the gas crew, tire-crushed stones,  
and the inspectors teamed to check the faulty couplings,  
mis-installed last fall in the front yards along Fifteenth.  
Not even the redbud, noticing, stops for it, the smalltalk  
from the meter, nor the yards in line to be gashed  
another season, packed and planted and spread with straw  
a second time, returning green to the snug homes  
lining village paving, with budding everywhere, or a little  
early still, given the record cold, despite this average  
topping heat the Kaiser's forecast through mid-April. But  
we're good for this, we tell ourselves, the third morning  
out this week, remembering zero and subzero wind-chills  
we skipped walking, years being what years are,  
with work enough indoors to ramp up the next season, even  
a year from starting out, from the fajitas, beers, a meal  
the first night at Los Amigos in Vandalia, as Illinois sunset  
closed on St. Louis destined traffic, thinning as that was,  
and easing, some, our misgivings over luggage, for gear  
we'd felt some thirty days demanded, locked and secure,  
we hoped, outside the same flatland Ramada counted on  
to break up the hours seasons ago to Fayetteville. And  
Los Amigos then, our third time in Vandalia, our first choice  
burned and a second just about acceptable, Los Amigos,  
maybe for our last time in Vandalia, with news we'd learn  
between Graceland and Napa Valley, a family on the move

to Bloomington, though we hadn't expected that, even  
if the spring had sensed as much, if this groundhog might  
have known, coaxed a foot or so from shadows, from  
the play of light through split bridge boards a groundhog's  
stretched awake beneath, to climb into light again, hug  
the still damp bridge post and duck under, with so many states  
himself to see about, and so much groundhog dreaming  
to revisit, and these rains, for all I know, undone, unfinished  
yet. I think how we missed all this a year ago, at Bryce,  
Yosemite, away till mid-May and back, to those robins begun  
in the front-yard rhododendron, those five timed right  
for our returning, admiration, and our lenses, yes, where  
these cardinals, nesting now, stake claims to seat  
necessity's new darlings, safe enough from cats, from  
the hawk's menacing, or safe enough, the ways  
that guessing makes it so.