

“Russo’s *Meaning to Go to the Origin in Some Way* dances out the ‘muted dramas of gardening’ in a broad prairie geography, with its redistributed chaos, brawling trees, and ‘feet set down in the ruminant patterns of crows.’ Robins and squirrels punctuate grass fit for a sustainability plan, while the compost trails of worms invest the native vegetation. ‘It begins with walking,’ yet returns to its yard, to register the mucked, embattled, compromised steps of learning from proximity. This poetry sings brightly for the ultra-local, itself a collection and dispersion of sympathies, grasped at earth magnitude. I admire Russo’s yard work, as attuned to the ‘workaday’ as to the squawk of unidentified bird calls, for its self-awareness, humor, and sense of beauty. It’s strong yet supple writing: poetry for what’s underfoot, in any weather.”

—Jonathan Skinner

“Linda Russo has written an exceptional bioregional text—one that re-seeds landscapes with a re-fashioned language of ‘interspecies inhabitation.’ To go to the root, here, maybe anywhere, is to go into a weaving of multiple strands, to re-order the many layers of displacement, settlement, and development and—finding the remnants of indigenous ecosystems along the bioregional margins—reveal that ‘things’ are once again ‘assemblies,’ coherences around which information gathers. Even the incursion of Walmart signals the simultaneous fixity and impermanence of the human element. Testing ‘the analytic capacity of sentient poetry,’ Russo encourages us to live simultaneously lightly, and with deeper roots. This is exactly what I’d hoped the meeting of poetry and ecology would give us.”

—Stephen Collis

“As a sensitive study of living systems, *Meaning to Go to the Origin in Some Way* demonstrates receptivity and attuned openness in astounding, replenishing ways. Russo takes into consideration the complex local ecosystems in which she lives—a local and historical inquiry that involves bodies and languages—a surging bio-semiotics of human-animal relation. Anthropologist Anna Tsing writes, ‘human nature is an interspecies relationship.’ This charged understanding is echoed throughout Russo’s polyvalent text that concerns itself most explicitly with 46.7325°N, 117.1717°W: The Confluence, South Fork Palouse River & Paradise Creek, Pullman, WA U.S.A—but also all that pulsates through, within and around. Various modes of presencing and thinking are engaged within this capacious document in an effort to thrive within cultivated, regulated, domesticated and also occasionally almost wild domains—together with the diverse organisms that share these domains and make their meanings known.”

—Brenda Iijima

Also by Linda Russo

o going out (chapbook)

Secret Silent Plan (chapbook)

MIRTH

picturing everything closer visible (chapbook)

Linda Russo

*Meaning to Go
to the Origin
in Some Way*

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From top right: Rose Creek Preserve; wheat field adjacent to Rose
Creek Preserve; a portion of the bank of the Palouse River (South Fork);
riverwashed “nests” near the Palouse River (South Fork).

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Look around, dear head, you've never read
of the ground that takes you away.

—*Lorine Niedecker*

but none of it 'indigenous' to here except
through conviction of the poet combining
these strands into a useful cord...

—*Joanne Kyger*

GOING TO SURVEY WALMART CONSTRUCTION
FROM THE CREST OF PIONEER HILL

it begins with walking, feet mucked by competing agendas
and a wish to speak as part and parcel

a rare Cow Parsnip community

part of a history of embattlement
of space being filled

a well-preserved remnant of Idaho fescue grasslands

where walking is merely civil
and walking is compromised

still the largest remnant of natural Palouse vegetation

citizenry

I wish to invoke freely a culture of interspecies inhabitance

valuable thickets of Douglas Hawthorne

conflicts resolved, powers balanced

sometimes it takes less than a minute

Magpie Forest, Rose Creek, Smoot Hill

you hitch up your bird wings hoping

This is a ground poem. It takes flight but weighed with the gravity of the situation; it wants to see the beauty, and it is necessary to witness the beauty; it wants to believe that in its acts of spatial reclamation new worlds begin. It sets out to be derivative of the sentient world in the only human way it knows – to return through animals.

whereas, a sort of smallness is
whereas, the tentacles of my circumference
whereas, a kind of attending to
whereas, breakdown quietness after moving
whereas, heart + beat =
whereas, I think affects
whereas, endlessly clear and endlessly dirty

whereas, drops the wood deck darkens
whereas, sweeping sensitive and greenly
whereas, flat-footed birdsong intends
whereas, lure of the windex tapestry

Orchard Sprung

if any are uncertain, we show them
how we map an informal space between us

until a sudden sky reveals
the mold into which
so much behavior is cast (as so many
American women know)

when none are near

how many distances do animals have?
flight distance, critical distance, personal distance

so many she forgets her own locality
in the fixed-feature space of her culture

(the walls don't tell)

together in our unconscious geographies
I'm nobody you know

but now distance binds us

she said: I want to be the last wild female rabbit
on sagebrush flats – that farmers hate

solitary in her territory
tolerating sagebrush toxins

cuddly but aggressive
cute yet angry

burrowing in the deep soil of the sagebrush flats
winter's pinkish tinge fading to brown

I. One Yard

part of it has to be given
while the rest is a repository
beds overgrown with grass and inviting our little wagers

will we have flies, we have flies
whether or not will we have flies

beetles, gnats, fireflies, centipedes
and a rarely visible mouse

some clay, intensely dirty years, perennial eyes yet no reply

with our experimental modern improvements
coiling into the local geography

we've got our houses to keep
us company

An Essential Radish (on the Pacific Flyway)

simply an essential radish (from “radical” / having roots,
meaning to go to the origin in some way –

on the Pacific Flyway
the seed you planted sprouted, the Least Terns took wing
flashed silhouettes of shorebird (running, pecking)
at Koppel Farm, in landlocked Pullman, June two thousand
and ten

meaning to go to the origin in some way
acting animal-like toward boundaries, breathing

Interlacing Words and Things

To turn a place into a field
interlace words and things
question not & bend the site
intuit infinite things

to turn a place into a yard
intuit infinite things
live among rambles, spittle weeds
the workaday rhythm of wings

to turn a place into a garden
the workaday rhythm of wings
trills and sheen, sparrows and earwigs
colorful battles in stings

greenness surges the circulation
colorful battles in stings
all the stink of thine simplicity
interlace words and things

lush entangled vines forever theregoing

II. Winter

our yard, though partly grown and hardly deep
gets attention
and it is surprising

(the juices of the grass)

covered with, dappled with, snow
keeping tree trunks, think tree trunks
spiky, true crystals
of an appealing architecture

one advantage in our yard
is learning to love the seldom disagreeable wind

GOING TO SURVEY WALMART CONSTRUCTION
FROM THE CREST OF PIONEER HILL

I am searching for the winding path
in this patch, that patch, this patch, that patch of “land”
crowded and crabbed by the abstraction of space
and powerless to exercise options

you and I – we comply
to our contract, extending and retracting
curling up our edges
with a gentle hello

(the malady of isolated movement)

I wish to invoke the analytic capacity of sentient poetry

sit for a spell in my space
& drink this tea with me

recall current taxonomies

it's where you might go
to reinvest in the blue of Chickory
or Wormseed Mustard, or Whitlow Grass, or
Niedeckerweed

patching together remnants, restoring
wild handwork culture

then she said: I think they make too much of dinosaurs

shopping centers and cheap food production
the song of arable, of dams, of more
natives squeezed out in
the production of more
arable land

err-able, likely to err we are

PARTICIPANT AS BIRDS

participant as birds – unlash from the clouds
peeking, gauzy and heavily

her small body (there)
practiced on bird-scales
returns public space
to public use

till syllables unlink
till traffics return

brought back to the familiar, the creaturely
(existence plus alphabets)