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At the Chemical Plant

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At the Chemical Plant

by Paul Lindholdt



About the Author

Paul Lindholdt studied under writer Annie Dillard. His work has been recognized by the Academy of American Poets, the Society of Professional Journalists, and the Washington Center for the Book. His latest book, published by Louisiana State University Press, is the creative nonfiction *Interrogating Travel: Guidance from a Reluctant Tourist*. Among his other books, the most pertinent is *Explorations in Ecocriticism: Advocacy, Bioregionalism, and Visual Design*. Books in progress include “Sacraments of the Flesh,” from which the poem “At the Chemical Plant” comes, and “Rogues and Renegades in the Evergreen State,” a dark history that goes back to territorial times.

At the Chemical Plant

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Boeing attorneys yesterday characterized defense arguments that the company ignored pollution and strong-armed state officials as ‘character attacks’ and ‘Boeing bashing.’
—*The Seattle Times*

He pumps the tanker truck dry
and squints across the holding pond
whose fluids gleam. He is cold
on this year’s longest night,
his stocking cap drawn over his ears.

A flock of grebes confused by fog
lit in the pond last month. Their bones
and feathers now clog the pump.
He’ll have to find a rake
and drag them from the pond.
But it’s almost break time—
instant coffee and a smoke,
fifteen minutes given
to studying the sludge in his boot lugs.

The catwalk where he stands is rusty
from the splash of acids
used to clean and etch
the Boeing company’s plane parts.

Fugitive dust from neutralizing lime
blows past him. Lime kills
silverfish in his rooming house.
Maybe this lime kills trout
in the Duwamish River and taints the bay.

But now at last it's break time.
The foundry crew roll up their sleeves
and traipse on in.
Flecks of flame above the holding pond
shoot up like feeding minnows
and stars reflected in its surface sizzle blue.