

1976

Left Hand Canyon

William Matthews

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In order to build correctly,
I watched all signs: major eclipses,
the tides in the lakes of my fingernails.
Soon I was building.
The river towered up from its base.
Blue as I'd imagined,
it lay overland like a pair of trousers.

One day, in the middle of my river,
I heard a storm coming.
Trees shook, the rain stumbled
on the ground behind me.
The river broke like a great wall
away from its scaffold, leaving only
the sad steeple of one wave.

Left Hand Canyon / William Matthews

for Richard Hugo

The Rev. Royal Filkin preaches
tomorrow on why we are sad.
Brethren, Montana's a landscape
requiring faith: the visible
government arrives in trucks,
if you live out far enough.
If you live in town, the government's
gone, on errands, in trucks.

Let citizens go to meetings,
I'll stay home. I hate a parade.
By the time you get the trout
up through the tiny triangular
holes in the Coors cans, they're so
small you have to throw them back.
Glum miles we go
to Grandmother's house.

The earth out here doesn't bear us
up so much as it keeps us out,
an old trick of the beautiful.
Remember what Chief Left Hand said?
Never mind. Everything else
was taken from him,
let's leave his grief alone.
My eastern friends ask me

how I like it in the west,
or God's country, as it's sometimes
called, though God, like a slumlord,
lives in the suburbs: Heaven.
And I don't live "in the west";
I live in this canyon among a few
other houses and abandoned
mines, vaccinations that didn't take.

Where Wylie Ends / Richard Hugo

Our road ends near stars.
The stream flows counter to our road.
Dogs howl at the end of the road
in the woods where people howl.
Beyond the woods other roads end.
Not our road. Our road ends
near stars and howling dogs,
near water going the other way.
Their roads end going the same way
as water, going away from stars.
Dogs howl at the end of their roads
in the woods where people howl.
Same dogs, Same people. Same howls.
The howling people have no road.
They howl in the woods with dogs.
The woods has roads. The howls
find trails that lead to roads.
The howling people have joined us