



photo by Leslie Hall

## **Steven Lautermilch**

### **Sleeping in the Mark Twain National Forest**

I made camp in your forest last night, Mr. Clemens.  
Like your pen name, at best an artful dodge, pure Sawyer and Finn.  
At worst a sheer counterfeit, an imposture, a sleight of hand.

Around midnight, maybe later, when I woke to stand  
under the pines, the lake a fathom of misty light  
swaddling a fathom of heavens.

When along the path, losing my balance,  
I saw the ground beneath my feet suddenly lift and turn,  
gather form and like a ribbon of vapor moving under a keel

become a slow cloud of white, a small white billowing swirl  
that was watching me, the pupil of the nimbus like the eye of a cat,  
the iris pointed, the yellow dagger of a blade.

Till glowing like an ember, a spark thrown from a fire, the eye  
of the cloud blinked hot white and closed  
like banked flame.

The cold that crept down my neck made a nest in my blood.  
Coils there still, deep in the hollow of the bones,  
amorphous as a corona of stars, shards of the moon,

foam on a dark sea. I have no names for what I felt, only

a presence that opened and flowed, a sluice, a spillway of light,  
making a night of names, letting the larger, other, older night pour in.



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"Salt Oak, Open Sound"  
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## **Pool**

Rise and fall, swell and subside, waves of flame  
in a looking glass.  
Float and drift and stall, gulls and clouds like flowers,  
the petals and leaves of sky.

More rock than water, more fire  
than air,  
in the half moon of a battered shell  
you can find her washing, maybe a glimpse of her face.

Walk the beach, follow the swells, you can see her handiwork.  
Like a hand of the wind  
she comes and goes with a brush, feathering  
dark to light.

With a wet brush she works the canvas,  
then with the dry bristles  
shapes  
a detail to form.

Basalt at a cliff base,  
one cup after another,  
holding its measure of water,  
the many-footed tide running out.

Among anemones, the rose petals of lichen,  
the tendrils of a star bed of moss -  
the underwater galaxy where  
again, and then again, comets trail the glimmer of a form.

All along the shore, the ambiguous alphabet of the coast.  
In hollow and cranny and cove, where  
the trunks and limbs  
of sculpted trees lie scattered in a graveyard of bones,

like strokes of ancient calligraphy, the weather-bleached  
scroll of shale and salt,  
you can hear her whispering, fingering the stones,  
the shells, the bones, talking to herself,

casting and reading her runes.

*A poet and photographer, Steven Lautermilch has traveled in the far west for the past seven years, exploring the sites of ancient cultures. A selection of poems from the western work received a Pablo Neruda Prize in the Nimrod/Hardman awards given by the University of Tulsa. Mirror Light, his most recent chapbook of poems, appeared in 2005 from Pudding House. Solo exhibitions of his photographs have been held at the Glenn Eure Gallery in Nags Head, the Main Lobby Gallery of the Duke University Medical Clinic in Durham, and the Getchell Library Gallery at the University of Nevada, Reno. A new show of photographs is scheduled for this summer at the Festival Park Gallery on Roanoke Island. Steve lives on the Outer Banks where he offers workshops in dream study, meditation, and writing.*