

Watching Humpback Whales from a Beach at Low Tide

The tide is out.

I perch above the tidal zone on a rock
crusted with sharp creatures.

Tiny snails punctuate the chains of barnacles,
black dots and white interspersed
like some intricate genetic sequence.

Below me, to the sea, a thousand rocks lie jumbled,
each, I imagine, with its own intricacy of clinging white and black.

Over them all lies the brown wet stuff of the sea,
drooping and still, like wet leaves in my Ohio garden in the fall.
Bladder wrack crowns them with gleaming dreadlocks,
and near the tide, long ribbons of kelp
drape from rock to rock,
waiting for the rising tide.

Under all these, I'm told,
live millions of things
that scuttle silently away when you lift a rock,
who make their bare living on the wrack
in wet cold darkness.

These are the kind of lives I'd rather leave alone.

Up here above the tides, I'll hold
to my dry rocky seat, watching across the tidal mess,
taking a view more distant –
the foggy horizon, the eddies
of the flood tide,
the great sea mammals on their journeys.

Their breathing time, their sighing breaths,
their rise and fall around the waterline
are rhythms I can follow,
somehow, strangely, in sync with my own
human lungs, and gut, and heart.

--Aug. 3, 2008, Point Augustus, Alaska