

WHAT ABSENCE SAYS

Raymond J. Smith (1930–2008), and others

TOM WAYMAN

The chord dwindles to a single note
—a tone that remains drifting in air
like a puff of air, after silence

Such an extraction makes absence
corporeal
Along a mountain river
in February: smoky haze of
leafless cottonwoods
front a frieze of evergreens

White clouds streaming
swelling into a third of the sky

Ray's solemn, courteous drawl
Lynne's amused dubiousness: *Now, Tom,*
you don't really mean
Percy's lilting cadence

O fill that space
with hyacinth
lobelia, sunflower

Mount Cascade approached from the east
—its bulk striated with snow
in April: a rock so huge
its forested flanks become moss
halfway to the summit
and higher yet, lichen
then blank stone

—all I see
until the road turns

Each emptiness
reverberates under the bass of my days
while unheard treble sounds
shimmer like a stalk of
meadow fescue, stem of
aspen leaf

where the wind was