

[*19] I've been working ever since I arrived in Olympia 5+ years ago on overcoming, to the extent possible, my dependence on this sort of external validation, which I have come to realize is an addiction like any other, one created by those aspects of late-day capitalism that have little if anything to do with money. There are many different kinds of "capital" operating more surreptitiously in our culture, the approbation of others a particularly intense one, sometimes redemptive, sometimes insidious. The shape this takes for a writer is response from an audience. Up until two years before I retired, I lived in a warm sea of approbation about which I was almost entirely unaware: My wife loved me, my kids loved me, my students loved me, many of my colleagues respected, even admired me, my scholarly work was well-received, I was in a home and a city I knew intimately. In swift sequence, all of these sources of gratification, except for my kids, disappeared. My wife's sudden death was the catalyst that started it. Very shortly my job became intolerable, my social circle contracted dramatically, my writing seemed staid and pointless, my home felt inimical to me, and I left all of that behind to move out west here, *sans* pretty much everything but myself and the affection of my two children. I did, of course, feel bereft about these losses, even though most of them were intentionally self-inflicted. But I presumed I would be able to start over and make a new life for myself in a new place. I had done that once before, when I was thirty, and expected the same result. It took me at several years to realize that was delulu. What is possible at thirty is not possible at seventy. Still, I was a writer and believed if I wrote enough in my now-new way and shared it with enough people I could find and maintain an "audience," the capital that the literary marketplace traffics in. That turned out to be delulu, too. So overcoming this addiction has been a highlight of my inner life. I've made so much progress, but still have some work to do. I can see the destination from where I'm at now. I'll be so happy when I get there, if there is such a there to get to.