

Puget Sound Country

0.9 Inches of Rain by 6 a.m.

Budd Inlet, Eld Inlet,
the old Nisqually Delta.

I drag the mattress nearer the open window,
raise the sash 3 inches towards the rain.
In Olympia, the road is jumping
with little frogs
that hop out when the rains come.

Hemlock,
a soopollalie bush by Puget Sound.
Mallards, buffle-heads, lesser scaups,
ruddy ducks, shovelers,
canvas-backs, and hundreds

of American widgeon migrate
north. A mist draws back off the Olympics –
piles of old tree roots and squaw wood
left by a bulldozer near the Dosiewallups trail.

Hunters are out, breaking
marsh grass and bracken
on their way
to the green-banded neck.
Pines and ferns are dripping drizzle
off their fronds
and a fine fog is blowing.

After the Rain

the dharma goes on
swelling
 out of itself

hydrangea wet
 door open
 roof quiet

the little boy with the
green frog
umbrella
comes running toward me

 a second rain
 drips
 from cedar limbs

 clear tones

from all these centers –

ripples that do not cancel
at the nodes

 breath

 no sound –

 flower

 bells

sky drying itself,
mind clear.

Driving the Olympic Peninsula

climbing NW into Sequim,
the mean wind flings drizzle
like darts down off the Olympics;

yellow shafts of skunk cabbage
and big grasses play wind-whistled
trombones in a bog by Lucas Road.

driving to Kalaloch, where black-haired
Mary works at the lodge.

weathered gray Clallum Co-op silo,
west end of Sequim; then
Port Angeles and Lake Sutherland ringed
with fishermen and summer cabins.

fast-flung boughs of wild ocean air
volley blue spruce;
western red cedar shakes wet fingers
in the drooped top sprays
of western hemlock.

the coast suffused with a native tongue:
Elwah, Calawah, Makah, Shi Shi.

Elwah,

Calawah,

Makah,

Shi Shi. the names like restless breakers
roll in from a gray sea –
cobble awash with waves that
slip back,

never-ending.

the breath on which the names go out
pausing on the ahhh –
names fading away into fog
like the ghosts of those
who spoke them.

and then Mt. Storm King
hulks hundreds of feet
out of the mist that grips his shoulders,
giant thighs plunged
into the earth, logging slash
stubbling his unshaven chin.

below lies Crescent Lake, she, the frigid
unfathomed goddess who marks
with snags and spars where dead men
(who sought to plumb her legendary ice-blue
depths, clear for hundreds of feet), now

know her well.

driving with the window down,
the cold surging in,
warming one hand under my leg.

gray ribbed turtleneck
red down coat
old levis and boots.

a street cleaner like an orange sloth
lolls its bristle tongue
on Sappho Bridge, over the Soleduck.

then only the wet deer in the fields
and the rainforest.
salal chokes both sides of the road;
water sprays from under the tires.

i'm in your country now, Mary;
stepping hard on the accelerator
whenever i remember your gray eyes.

Fauntleroy-Vashon Ferry

Woke up at 3 a.m., wind out of the southeast.
Squall still hard
when I arise at six.

On board before seven. Clouds up and down
the Sound; off to the northwest,
Southworth Ferry
hooked on the shiny worm of street
guided down to it by streetlights in the dark dawn,
riding rough waters.

Due north,
 Blake Island,
a tip of Bainbridge,
little else visible.
To the east, Fauntleroy, Lincoln Park –
the West Seattle dock
an eyed light in the winter maw.

Stand out on the deck
till the rain beats up
as the ferry heads out
from the sheltering cove.

Go inside, sip hot coffee
return to stand facing
the pickaxes of rain at the brow
of the ferry.

Dock below Lincoln Park,
 walk off the pier –
grebes float the gray water under gray skies –
still sipping the coffee.

In the Fields a Light Arises

In the fields a light arises
and makes her way on feet as thin as the young grass,
bending and shimmering through the chill dawn.
The gunman pauses at the trigger
and wild geese too thick to count fly north.
A mist lies on the havens –
a damp hand so that the paints,
the watercolors run together.
The straw and mud still slightly warm
where brown-banded wings stiffly
lift a neck arched out over the marsh
– frozen in midair with a crack –
(like an iceberg that splits suddenly, offering passage
to a hidden continent) of scarlet splashing
clouds spilling over the horizon
with promise for all the brilliance of morning to follow
on wings with golden accompaniment.
Motion begins like a feather
on its own between air and earth,
and an echo twisting away
among the fog and the men and the birds above them.

In the fields a light arises
and makes her way on feet as thin as a razor.
Excitement beats at her throat
like the breast of a pulsing bird.
White and curved the flight of the arrow
shot into her dreams;
tracing a chalky path to where it lies,
she reaches out her hand with all her fingers spread
to covet the silence and the height.
What she touches leaves her fingertips cold
(as if passing through arctic waters)
yet crimson and ragged at the edges
and shot through with flecks of blood like an opal.
She draws it to herself
slicing through mere flesh like a razor.
To her breast she holds it;
to her core it penetrates –
and she is filled with unbearable trembling
and it is filled with light –
an arrow of bone and muscle, fatigued
and missing feathers from its journey through the night.

In the fields a light arises
and makes her way on feet as thin as she dares,
flushing a covey of storm-wanderers.
She stands in their midst as they fly
brushing her nakedness with wingtips of thunder,
until throbbing with their ungoverned fullness
she offers back the breathless plunder.
A light like a breath arises
above the clumsy death
flopping in the stiff, crushed grasses
and halos the dimming eyes that strain,
smarting like needles in a bath of drowsy colors.
Under the criss-crossing V's of honkers
the hunters turn, walking the edge of dawn,
their bootheels fading from the mud
of a brilliant morning vibrant orange.
Opening her arms she sways
as the wing-whipped air beats by;
riding with them as they go, riding the wind
into a limitless sky – a shaft of light
flung from the halo of her bow.

It is a Spring Rain Again

it is a spring rain again, drenching
the already full pond,

the singing frogs
have swallowed
their voice sacs,
feeling vulnerable
by light of day,

the wet grass,
already growing with abandon –
it is the irrepressible
surfeit
of wind singing the grass –

it is only
the Pacific Northwest
itself
singing itself.

Multi-Lingual Planet

river rock tongue
throaty gravel;
silver murmur

– the young wife
quiets the house;
the waters of peace flood;
silence follows.

night showers sweep the roof
trains of wind
big freights stopping
at no switch yard.

at first light, a city of birds
the trees like buses
full of morning commuter talk.

soft sleep sounds
the three-year-old's
pink mouth
half-open

sshshshshsh –
sudden crowds of rain
the air silvery

alder, salmonberry
wet leaves
shoulder to shoulder –
Shinglemill Creek
bottomland.

multi-lingual planet
ancient voices
Gaian dying
chorus
our hearing strengthens.

Puget Sound Country

the rain on the roof
sounds like an old woman
shuffling pans
in her kitchen. the rain-
blurred pane
looks out on a gusty
Sound carrying into
gray-blue infinitude.

Puget Sound Ichthyology

Mud Bay, covered by 2' of warm water;
soundings 546' off McNeil Island,
930' of cold depth at Point Jefferson –
two thousand miles of shoreline,
bays inlets promontories mud flats
gravel cobble and sandy beach
tide pools estuaries kelp beds
eelgrass meadows
sculpins rockfish and perch-infested
kelp-forested rocky shelves
and declivities
through which swim cow sharks gobies
sand lances toadfish stickleback
greenling skate snipe eels
drums sauries gravel-diggers
butterfish gunnel and those variously
appellated cling- dog- rag- wolf-
lantern- pipe- ribbon- and lumpfishes.
of sculpin alone three dozen:
scaley- and smooth-headed, rosy lip
silver-spot, roughback, sharpnose
mosshhead, buffalo, soft, the red
and brown Irish lords, dusky, threadfin
spotfin sailfin, fluffy, darter, saddleback
manacled, ribbed, grunt and the giant
cabezon, flashing reds, greens, browns
like shifting light seen on sand bottoms
plus 15 species of flounders sand dabs sole
marvels of geometry, Euclid adapted
to the bottom-feeding habit, eyes that
migrate, bodied forth like wings
that flap sand to lie flattened
in quiescent concealment

Puget Sound in 1000 Reflections

glistening
Sound –
light rushing
over its waters

footprints
sparkling

untold thousands

cedar bark
shred in strips

woodsmoke
on a wet beach
haze drifts

woven in hanging mist
my life

– how quickly

run away.

Puget Sound Mornings

I

in sun-shafted fog
a white tug
baubles – the knot
on the drawstring
of her robe

swinging loose
against her milky legs
that stir the fog
and make the water
ripple.

the tug far off
the port bow;
the bright fog
ready to break.

II

flat –
but motion
lifts
in steel waves.

fog
lugs cold
curtains
around the boat.

III

emergences –

the silk sheet ruffles
that last night was taut;
a grebe's head pops
out of the flat table of water
spread across Eagle Harbor.

IV

excited, silver Seattle
lies stunned in Puget Sound,
the skyline in the water –
black skyscrapers of big pay

where once the coast was bear grass
where men with flintlock eyes
built on hills of blue spruce,
hemlock, western red cedar

Salmon in Air

prodigious runs swam again
in fog over fields
flowed through forests, pulled thin
between trees, poured slowly over
grass, hills,
the huge fish in mid-air
appearing and disappearing
in the mist through which they swam

The Firs Lower Their Skirts

the firs all modesty
lower their skirts
long branches drooping under snow –

white-armed women
stand in silent awe
in the vast circling
fallen now, and still.

they warm and everywhere
slide white cascades
from 1000 brides
white gowns slowly down
graceful limbs –

rustling she drops her down
into her white bed.
from every corner the eye
glimpses
the sleeves of snowing –
gusting, a handkerchief,

a veil,
a shower of linen
loosening lace –
what she put on
she lets drop,
down, down there is nothing
not falling.

The Rain Falling

The rain falling
gray skies over gray seas
and the rain falling

visibility an open expanse
of bluegray seas
tossing, falling

 the rain
numbing the seas
the eyes the will
this dull gray view of life
slowly breaks apart
dissolving in bits
circling the drain

 leaving only

gray skies over gray seas
and the rain
 falling

Told

smell of wet wood
smell of grilled salmon
smell of ash, and soil, and dung
smell of a breath that's mingled
 with mine
smell of fresh laundry hung
 on the line
smell of wet dog
smell of thrilled woman
tell of a life that's toiled and sung
told by the breath that singles
 out lines
told from the mouth that mingles
 with mine.

Vashon-Fauntleroy Ferry at Dawn

still mist
white breath
stealth –

the space

in which the ferry
creeps

stilled breath.
white gauze

grazing the boat's

white
sides.

float forward

motion
undetected.

a host
the Sound

moment –
this one.