

# 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:  
scaly- 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.