

Native Tongue

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.

Native Tongue

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 the waves that

slip back,

never-ending.

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.

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.

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 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

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.

Coming in on the Ferry

excited, silver Seattle
stunned in the 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

At the Winslow Ferry Slip

dark night pierced by far lights –
pricks and blotches of color
on the horizon pinpoint Seattle,
outlining harbor and inland hills
across the black water
flat as a table.

the silent boat
glides from her folds;
her jewels – red, gold –
lighting her, the city shimmers
(laughter in a dark lounge).
her lights plunge laughing
into the night water, they glimmer
on legs that leave –
like a woman's – her dim skirt,
parting it. kicking towards us, splashing,
she stops, laughs, throws
her lighted necklace
after the departing boat.

bare bulbs burn in a long string
down the gangway;
lights inside cast the terminal's
interior out in squares upon the pavement.
amid quiet talk in the chalky
dark the gathered people wait.

the ferry rounds the corner,
enters the harbor, huge
self-contained,
silent. slipping into the dock,
it moves over the water
like a Taoist warrior or
a benediction passing
over a quiet face.

At Night, From the Ferry

Seattle –
like a bracelet,
like a party
reflected in Puget Sound.

Seattle at night –
the waterfront lights on the water,
the thorns, red, green, indelible
on which we rolled and giggled.

The ferry at night –
pulling out on the black table of water.

The city –
rolling down from its hills,
tumbling in lights,
splashing

out towards us
like party laughter,
like a woman in an evening gown.
Unclasp

her things.
Pull her lighted bracelet,
pull her necklace
from her throat. See them

sink and glow
in the wake.

See It

on Puget Sound
the late, flat
afternoon fades
in long tresses
of failing light.
in their rooms
ladies dress
for the evening
in thin shreds
of twilight
picked up off
Seattle hills
like gowns lifted
from chairs
in dying light.
they fasten
bright necklaces
to their throats
and thighs:
city lights –
streetlights, homes
lit by lamplight,
store signs in neon light
prick out a musical
scale of colors
that runs along headlands
and highways,
lifting stories, private
dramas to a stage lit
by their vivid flecks:
an impressionist painting
of blurs and blotches
(no one watches
the whole play
except the Sound
that rolls in
numb and cold, waking
on the shore
from its dumb
falling over itself,
to see it see it
see it.)

5:50 p.m. Ferry to Winslow

cold rain, wind gusting to 20 knots,
temperature in the low 40's –
stand out on the edge of the dock watching
the big waves come careening in
plunging silver over one another,
over the hands of the wind.

the gulls, their porous bird-bones
flexing in the gusts: no control,
like debris that can sail.

the pilings lean on one another,
rub up against each other
play tubas and big horns with each blast.

the ferry approaches from the Bremerton side
so that the wind will blow it into the dock.
a grebe doesn't even get off the water,
he dives; wind *hard*.

shuffle on board, warm with the sheltering herd
watching the waves bounce in the yard
formed between the Bremerton and Winslow ferries—
slanting, they rush from side to side.

out on the water, the ferry catches the wind
like a steel kite, snapping taut
as soon as it leaves the dock. Ellen
whipped bright and clean by wind,
wearing her giraffe shirt, catches up to me:
"look at the *size* of those babies!"
white wakes trail from each wave
the way wind-blown sand streams over wet sand.

the sun pierces massed clouds,
making the rain shiny.
the Olympics move down closer, their feet
in the icy water.
on the other side of the boat, gray rain falls.
a dour sky over Alkai Point,
the sun angles under the gray cloud pack
making it look blue.
a white cumulus trapped under the gray mass
outlined by the sun against the false blue sky.

Taking Stock

(Mt. Townsend Solo Hike – for Molly McAllister)

I

fire dying for lack of wood.
plenty of snow – three or four feet
cover the trail and the dry wood.
no lack of view
 below Mt. Townsend –
 the foothills, flatlands
 (grey-blue)
merge with the bluegray Sound,
then white peaks climb again to Mt. Baker.

Windy Lake lost – not by its sign.
must be snowed under.
no snow stakes; sleep under a tarp
tonight. tomorrow
climb the peak and go home.

II

in my bag by dusk, watch
the stars slowly appear
and then
become invisible again with dawn.

waking fitfully through the night,
saw the archer
for the first time –
 bow drawn.

all night the wind pours
over the ridge, dies,
then gathers in the gorge
and comes roaring back up
like heavy traffic.

III

woke at 5:30; the eastern
horizon – Seattle and the Cascades –
red. the fire catches
with two matches. stringy lichen,
a pale apple-green; shavings
from a dry fir snag; powdery
heartwood – all burn.

the biggest sticks catch
in 30 seconds. powdered scrambled
eggs and o.j. for breakfast;
dissemble my mattress
of Grand Fir, cover the coals
with snow, break camp by 7.

IV

moving above the trail to the ridge,
find the rock outcrop
where yesterday i slept, exhausted,
flag my pack with bright red
down coat, turn and climb
straight up, digging
fingers and toes into the packed snow,
the mountainside right in my face

until

suddenly it disappears,
the mountain falls away
on all sides
green-pine slopes dive hundreds of feet,
peaks beyond peaks.

V

walking the long ridge between two
worlds, it takes no time to lose the self.
the wind constant, heady. dried shells
of alpine flowers everywhere.
only the hardiest
are out in April – blue,
dull red, violet. not sure
i can find where the trail enters
the woods, i don't stay
long. running downslope in leaping
bounds, aiming for my coat.

within half an hour, well into timber,
pause by a waterfall, drink
a cold trail of definition
down my throat,
wash my face, write.
two more miles to the logging road,
a mile down the road to my car,
and – if the keys are still in it
and if it starts – 80 miles home.
so many connections.