Oregon is a Rhapsody

Because you don’t have
eyes to see
you miss
all the beauty out there.
The beauty of ordinary things!

I drive my car
down a country road
What a rhapsody! Jazz
on the radio, a vibraphone
tapping out high-pitched metallic
tympany of Lionel Hampton
to the tune of February
green spring grass.

Matisse would go mad
over the way cowshit and
rainwater
grow Oregon pasture

like living emeralds, dipped
in the dye of organic energy.

Holy shit! That rusty
rouge light on the old red barn,
I cream my eyes out
the way the sun’s last light

lovingly lingers hallucinatory bruises
on the weathered painted wood.

It couldn’t be more perfect,
unless a black farm horse came trotting
out of the barn, his fetlocks
fettered with dried caked mud
beyond the straw piles and damp.

Salmon Song, 26 Books, W.C., pg 4
July 4th, 1941, just before the bombing of Pearl Harbor — later Hiroshima! — I came into the world in the state of Washington. (A state of mind!) Near Fort Lewis, the heart of the military-industrial complex. “It’s the water that makes it so refreshing.”

To be born in a town whose name is made famous by the label on a beer bottle. The picture of Tumwater, the brick brewery and waterfall with its motto: “It’s the water.” Growing up, I kept thinking, “Olympia — the home of the gods. What a lucky person I am — coming from here!” Just like a story in ancient Greek myth. My life, blessed by such a birthplace. “It’s the water that makes it so refreshing.”

In high school we boys drank lots of beer, seeking our manhood from a product. Manufactured mythos went the number of dots on the backside of the label of a bottle of Olympia entitled you to success in sex with girls. One dot a kiss, 2 a feel-up, 3 heavy petting, and 4 meant a piece of ass! I recall fingernails enthusiastically scraping damp labels from bottles shaped like small glass hand grenades. Tossed at road signs! “It’s the water that makes it so refreshing.”

To be born in a society, bombarded by false premises and empty advertisements might make one go off the deep end even if he couldn’t swim. “It’s water under the bridge” was another suicidal saying about time and futility, living out the lies of American culture. I was “gay,” a goner! And all I’d get was my buddy’s thigh pressed against mine in the dark. How could I actually fall, for such a naive and stupid illusion? Birthplace of lies!

_Salmon Song, 26 Books, W.C., 1995, pg 18_
The Sage

The sage, perched on a cliff, welcomes the abyss, clouds and emptiness. Vast space, galaxies and stars. The sun is an atomic tunnel to the other side, nuclear inferno blasted from the Big Bang. What a playing field! Mountains and rivers without end. Only it isn’t an explosion which nurtures life and thought — mist on the face, from waterfalls and endless billowing clouds wash over from the Pure Land. Green moss, lichens and wild birds sing into being music from afar. Ancient pine trees with gnarled fingers might well be wise old men and crones in silken garb. Wisdom needn’t bow to a nuclear blast, world’s end — Worlds are reborn. The sage knows. There is no beginning nor end. Everything comes from nothing, and returns. Mist on his face, craggy wind blowing through garments, the sage knows: Time is an illusion. Eternity is percolating in his cells right now. The softest thing, water breaks down granite peaks and rivers return gently from the sea, all entropy.

*The Land of Ch’i*, W.C., 2005, pg 21
Shaman Ritual at Sunburst Canyon

Shaman Michael drumming at the river. The most beautiful sight in all creation. Handsome long-haired youth standing proud stark naked before Mother Earth. Drumming up his dreams. Otherworldly, contact on the ribbed rock, inside the whorl of the Sunburst on the Molalla. His spirit place, he said. Pool mirrored the ribbed rock and whorl of magma. In class, a woman shaman took him on a journey to the underworld entrance. He rode a horse, but still didn’t find his animal helper. But his place of power was here. His guide to the site me. Both having swam naked here in the past, smoked pot, sunbathed. My glorious Michael in the pride of young manhood. We hallucinated on the clabbered clouds, flying high above the firs. He asked me, “Can we camp overnight here sometime?” “Sure,” I replied. My heart beating faster than the drum. How could the cosmos give me such a lovely friend? Soul son. May I be worthy of his trust and love, O Goddess. O World Mother, protect us both, nurture our friendship. Please I beg. I promise to be worthy even unto death. We laughed, we were stunned when the horse-hide drum suddenly lost its timbre. How? Why? Michael’s long wet hair moistened the shaman’s music into silence. O Goddess, your powers and energies are everywhere.

The Land of Ch’i, W.C., July 5 02, pg 37
The City of Sorrows: A Fable

There is a city in the West far from Constantinople, with its fabled spires and golden minarets. Scent of cinnamon. The wind sounds like hush, whispering in the wintery firs, all summer long. Nothing is obvious about the sorrow the people feel. They find it quite unreal enough, as much so as the loss of love.

White doves die daily, silken feathers spattered with red, and no one is able to express the dread he feels when a little shower downpours on a child’s head. The child cries and runs to Mommy. The fountains trickle, like leaky faucets. The butterfly’s wings wave bye-bye. Grandmothers wearing gewgaws eyes go gaga at moist icky slugs creeping on the walk. No one knows exactly how to express it, but each feels it in his bones like rheumatism when sorrowful fog rolls up the somber valley like wagonloads of cloud or milk, fog like a cold hand on the back of your neck. Yes, it rains everyday in the City of Sorrows and the windows of the houses are streaked with what appears to be tears, at second glance.

Peckerneck Country, W.C., 1978, pg 18

The Soft Rain

Something is sensuous about the soft rain, and sad. Like a string of — not pearls — but hot tears plucked from the ocean depths, pried from the oysters of your eyes. I, the poor lover, made you cry. Everytime it rains like this, I realize that. I am the deep-sea diver who opened your eyes, a flood of salty vision. Those signals of your SOS, such jeweled distress, do not reach me at forty fathoms deep. No. Only the soft drops of rain on my face when I rise to the surface allow me to recall the look, the place, a lover’s disgrace. Seeded by flakes of grit, your body remains on the bottom of life’s ocean. Not Murine, no lotion soothes the ache. Touching my face, the soft rain is like the sobbing of a seashell pressed to my ear and dripping hair.

Peckerneck Country, W.C., pg 19
The Blue Mouse Theater

O Blue Mouse, we love your old bones
which are your stones and funny marquee.
A blue mouse nibbling on cheese.
O Blue Mouse, you have proffered us
good and bad movies down through the years,
untold power fantasies and Hollywood reveries.
You have been a church to us
for lack of a better name.
We cannot let you go down like this
beneath the wrecker’s ball. The blighters!
You are a homely institution in Portland town
saving us from madness and the bleak rains.
A home away from home, shabby red carpets
and popcorn. Who has not found comfort
in your warm and comfortable cave —
even the most unlucky and dumbest among us —
slumped down in the backrow?
Or sprawled in the balcony, legs draped across a seat,
rubbing your crotch, slurping a soft drink
watching Charles Bronson or Clint Eastwood
suffer, survive, smashing his way to victory.
Upending the Mafia or shooting a bad guy
in the heart. They can’t do this to you,
you who have given us so much, some good laughs,
thrills at incredible chase scenes
and cringing at bullets in the gut and buckets of blood.
The ordinary people need an escape
from this machine-crazed, money-grubbing Ratrace.
So in the middle of the afternoon, they plunk
down their buck, go in and watch a double feature.
Coming out a couple of hours later, refreshed,
less uptight and frustrated people.
Civilizations have been made and lost
just on the presence or absence of such escape
devices, dream palaces, and Exits from the workaday world.
Don’t those schemers in city government know that?
With the Blue Mouse knocked down, there will be
no reason to come downtown at night.
The mean inky blue little mice of this destruction
will haunt the gutters and empty parkinglots, and City Hall.
Forgive us. This is a prayer and hymn to your spirit, O Theater,
before you fall before the heavy wrecking ball.
I was not one to disturb a sacred place.
I reveled and marveled in the magic of your imagery,
soon to be lost to this grim and thankless society.
O Blue Mouse, upset the sleep, at the least,
of these greedy, power-hungry ones who steal our past from us
and who think their excrement is made of gold.

Peckerneck Country, W.C., pg 20
Picking Pears

I toss the pears on the quilt, cushioning the fall. What an easy way to get them off the lifting limbs rather than handing them one by one to my invisible helper on the ground.

Pendulous, bell-like fruit, aren’t fresh pears peerless pared with a knife and put into a compote? My hands caress their cool green globe-like forms, green breasts with a rosy flush and wooden stems.

Bright yellow and sweet in a week or so – yellowjackets would gouge their fragrant skins, if left upon the waxen tree, or they would fall with a thud and bruise themselves.

Seeking delicious, life-saving winter sap, the fierce bees become sadists. And mind, they’d sting mine if I didn’t leave them alone with the leafy lady.

Ever since reading the first pornographic novels, wherein women’s breasts are compared to pears, I have imagined it the other way around! The woman in the wood bends forward her branches and whispers, Pick me.

My clumsy eager fingers glom onto her and boxes fill with bosomy beauty. Boxes of breasts, like hard green bells. Ding dong! I sing along as I pick pears, humming with the bees.

Peckerneck Country, W.C., August 26, 1975, pg 33
Cabbages In The Garden

They are nine in number.
Their outer leaves are of odd animals,
Rhinoceros’, an armadillo’s ears smashed flat.
Rooted solid,
their heads are little green suns
or ugly crystal balls.
Poor cabbage has no close neighbors,
except rhubarb, with her red limbs
and elephant’s ears.
The cabbages in my garden are so sad:
they are like moons fallen out of sky.
I want to cry
viewing them so forlorn and serious.
Worrying about coleslaw and sauerkraut,
I promise never to eat them.
Instead, I will send them to an orphanage
in a big basket tied with Easter ribbons.
“Don’t worry, my dear cabbage—
My little darlings! I won’t beat you.”

Blanco

I look into fields of frost.
The heart is white, like snow.
I have seen people running and hollering
in flats of white.
They walk down lanes of porcelain
toward rivers of ice-milk.
White is no color!
White reflects absolutely
upon its ability to deflect your warmth.
When you go away to the Institution forever
you will enter echoing
hallways and absolutely perfect geometric cubistic rooms
as sterile as a surgeon’s gauze mask,
indifferent and gentle as a polar bear’s beard.
God will be a white china cup,
not cracked, but blanco in perpetual perfection.
When the operation begins,
when it is written upon the absolutely blank sheet of paper, you
will become specks of bone, fine white ashes,
white chicken feathers, or ragged — torn confetti.
But we will salt away somewhere.
But we will be found in a field of white flowers,
perfumy whitish smoke curling above the fascist crematorium.

Rhymes for Alice Blue Light, W.C., pg 22

Rhymes for Alice Blue Light, W.C., 1984, pg 59