

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



by walt curtis

Salmon Song, 26 Books, W.C., pg 4

ten poems

out of the ashes press

walt curtis

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“Olympia” — Birthplace of Illusion

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.”

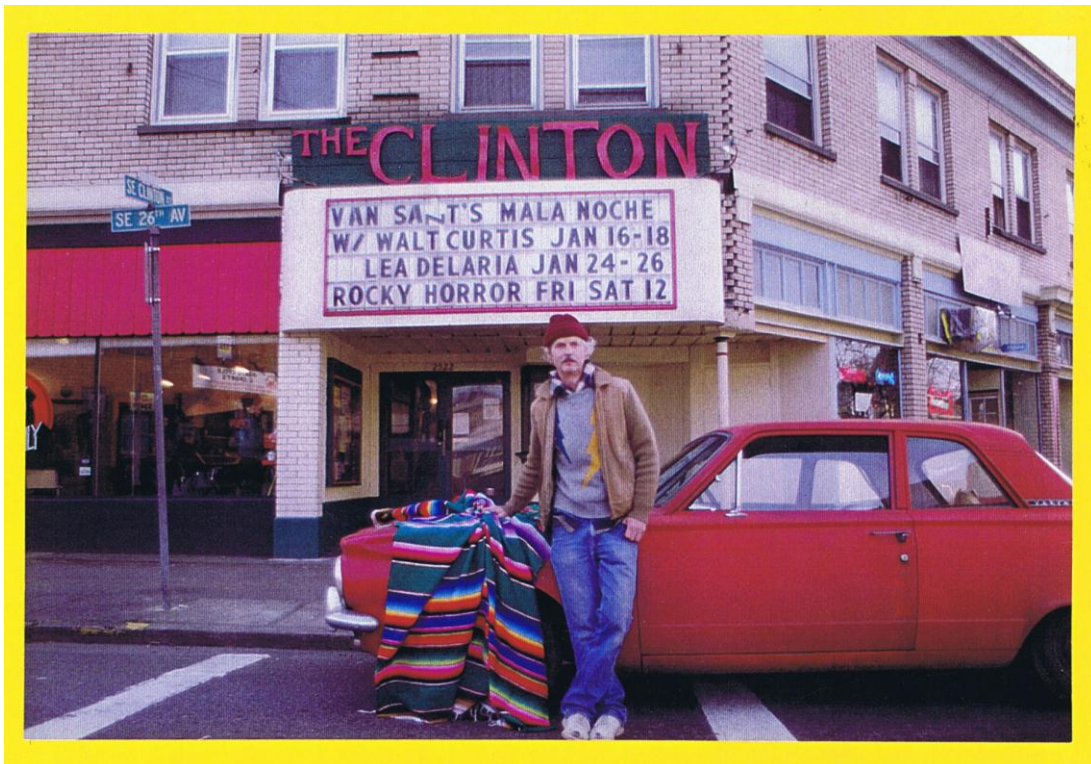
To be born in a town
whose name is made famous
by the label on a beer bottle.
The picture of Tumwater, the brick
brewery and waterfall
with its motto: “It’s the water.”
Growing up, I kept thinking,
“Olympia — the home of the gods.
What a lucky person I am —
coming from here!” Just like
a story in ancient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

Peckeneck 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.

Peckeneck 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.



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.

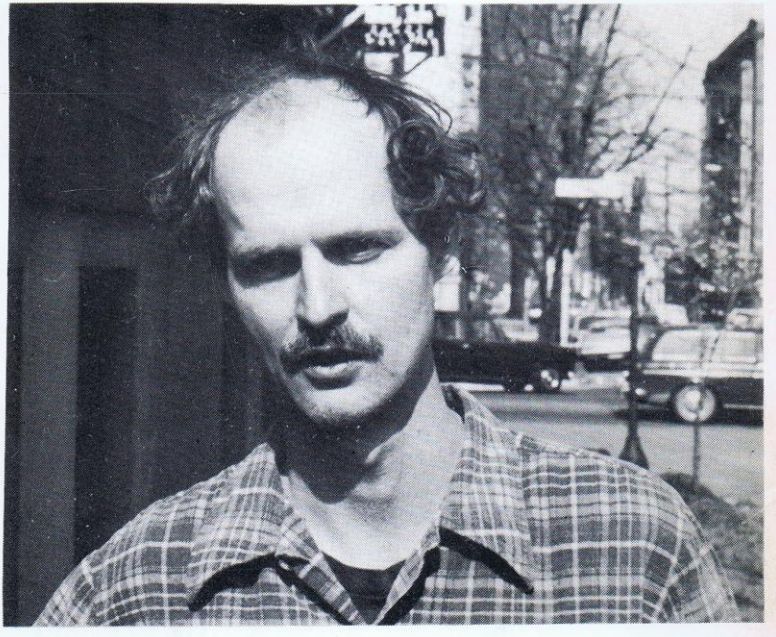
Ever since reading the first pornographic novels,
wherein women's breasts are compared to pears,
I have imagined it the other way around!
The woman in the wood bends forward
her branches and whispers, Pick me.

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.

Walt Curtis is the author of *Angel Pussy*, *The Erotic Flying Machine*, *The Roses of Portland*, *Wauregon*, *The Sunflower and other earth poems*, *Mad Bomber's Notebook*, *The Mad Poems*, *the Unreasonable Ones*, and *Mala Noche*. He is associated with Out of the Ashes Press.

Curtis plays himself, the poet, in the Portland movie, *Property. Peckleneck Country*, the title poem of this collection, he performs at the end of the movie.

He was born in Olympia, Washington in 1941 and has lived most of his life in Oregon.

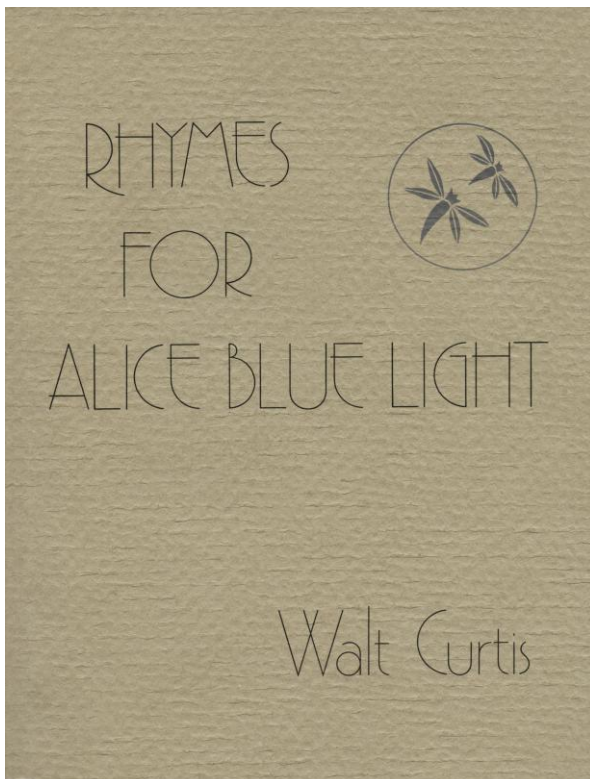


Peckleneck Country, W.C., August 26, 1975, pg 33

Cabbages In The Garden

They are nine in number.
Their outer leaves are of odd animals,
Rhinos', 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."

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



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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., 1984, pg 59

