



## BLOEDEL RESERVE POETRY PROMPT PART I: BIRD MARSH

*G.C. Waldrep, December 2020*

There are three sets of prompts, keyed to three different locations in the Bloedel landscape: the hill overlooking the bird marsh; the benches on the bluff (behind the Residence, overlooking Puget Sound); and the Zen sand garden, by the Japanese guesthouse.

Directions: complete each instruction, in order. **Do not turn any page until you have completed the instruction(s) on that page.** Be outside when you begin, on-site. **Please take this printout with you, together with a pencil and a pen.**

You may work at one, two, or all three locations. You may skip prompts if they seem too difficult for you (although it's more fun to at least give each a try). You may respond in sentences, prose paragraphs, fragments, or verse—whatever feels natural to you.

The goal of this exercise is to sharpen your attention to both your inner landscape and the outer landscape that is Bloedel, to bring those two landscapes into relation with one another—which is how we actually experience any landscape, all landscape, without always being aware.

(This is part 1 of a 3-part set of prompts, at three locations in the Bloedel landscape. You may complete it on its own, or together with the other two parts.)

## I. Bird Marsh

*Walk along the main path loop until you reach the granite blocks on the hilltop, overlooking the bird marsh—between points 6 and 7 on the official Bloedel Reserve map. Sit on granite block.*

i. PLACE: The bird marsh is a very naturalistic landscape, but in fact the pond was created by man, in the 1970s-80s, from a preexisting low-lying marshy area. The six islands in the lower part of the pond are also man-made (there were originally seven, but “one sank,” according to the Bloedel Reserve Heritage Landscape Report).

Looking from the top of the hill, describe, as best you can, the *surface of the water*. (1 stanza or paragraph) (You can also step down to the edge of the water, if you like, for a better look.)

ii. SMELL: What does “fresh” smell like, to you? How is this like, or different from, what you smell right now? (Use simile or metaphor if necessary.) (1 short stanza or 2-3 sentences)

What does “possession” smell like, to you? How is this like, or different from, what you smell right now? (Use simile or metaphor if necessary.) (1 short stanza or 2-3 sentences)

iii. DWELLING: As you sit on the hilltop facing the Bird Marsh, the area immediately to your left was once the site of a farm. The farmhouse burned down circa 1949, after which the Bloedels bought the land and added it to their estate.

Can a building be a ghost? What would the ghost of a building look like? How would it act? Who would get to see the ghost, and under what circumstances? What would a building-ghost want (if it wanted anything)? (2-3 paragraphs)

iv. BEECH-HENGE: If you look straight ahead, to the right of the northern edge of the pond—just to the right of the bench by the pond—you will see the spot where Richard Haag, a renowned landscape architect whom Prentice Bloedel engaged in the 1980s, planted a perfect circle of 11 beech trees, which he intended as a “living Stonehenge,” to balance the more natural-looking landscaping of the ponds. He hoped the beech-ring would stand for as long as Stonehenge, but the trees were removed less than a decade later. No trace of them remains.

What does “worship” mean to you? (1-2 stanzas or paragraphs)

If you could say something to the beech trees—or their ghosts—right now, what would you say?  
(1 stanza or 1-3 sentences)

v. TOUCH: Describe the feeling of a bird's quick breaths against your skin—be as specific as you possibly can.

(If you have never experienced this sensation, imagine what it might feel like. Use simile or metaphor if necessary.) (3-4 sentences)

vi. YOUR ROLE HERE: To the meadow grass, you are a pressure, and/or an interruption in the light. That is what you are, and that is all you are—to the meadow grass.

How does this make you feel? (1 stanza or paragraph)



## IV. By Way of Conclusion

xx. ROOMS: Richard Haag (who was only one of many landscapers and landscape architects the Collinses, Bloedels, and the Reserve have employed over the years) described the parts of the landscape he helped shaped as “rooms”: the Garden of Planes, the moss garden, the reflection pool, and the bird marsh. He had other rooms he had planned, that were never “built.”

Describe the room where you were born, or—if you have a child—the room in which your child was born.

If you can't do either of these things, then describe a natural “room” *you* would build here, at Bloedel. (1 paragraph)

xxiii. FINALLY: You find out, belatedly, that your great-grandmother, when she died, left you a small wooden box. You receive it in the mail, heavily wrapped in dark paper. Once you've unwrapped the box and opened it, you find inside a single candle, with no note or explanation.

Do you light the candle? If so, what happens when you do?

If you don't light it, what do you do with it, and why? (1-2 stanzas or paragraphs)