

## SAM HAMILL

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To: Artist Trust

Re: Paul E. Nelson

Over the past decade or so, no one has done more for poetry in the Pacific Northwest than has Paul Nelson. He has sponsored and hosted free public readings and workshops while bringing to Seattle notable poets like Wanda Coleman, Nate Mackey, Michael McClure, Brenda Hillman, George Bowering and other leading figures in the world of Organic Poetry. He is as fine an interviewer of poets as anyone working today, coming to each interview thoroughly informed but retaining great flexibility, letting the various threads intertwine. These interviews, combined with lengthy scholarship, have produced a number of remarkable essays and, ultimately, his manuscript *American Prophets*.

Nelson comes to poetry not simply as a maker-of-poems, but as a way of life, a way of being. Furthering the tradition of sequential poetry established by Ezra Pound, Charles Olson, Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov, Nelson's first major book, *A Time Before Slaughter*, interweaves local history with a personal mythology to create a cosmos. His is a poetics that reveals process rather than conclusion. His study and practice have revolutionized his approach to poetics. Eschewing the poem as a highly polished objet d'art made of words, his poetry tracks the movement of conscientiousness, or what Duncan described as "the dance of the intellect." Borrowing from the Medieval Japanese form *haibun*, a combination of prose and haiku, he adds a Latin American *neo-barroco* layering of language to create something uniquely his own.

He returns to regional history once again with *Pig War & Other Songs of Cascadia*, tracing an almost unknown history of the San Juan Islands since the days of Juan Vicente Guemes Horcasitas y Aguayo gave us the Spanish names for the ports and islands we revere to this day. His fascination with bioregionalism has led him to start a multi-decade research project into the culture of Cascadia and to the creation of two successful Cascadia Poetry Festivals, the last held this past May at Seattle University, and a third is planned for Nanaimo, BC in 2015. His 2013 residency in Loleta, California, awarded by the Morris Graves Foundation is one more recognition of the importance of his efforts.

It is an encompassing mind and heart at work in his poetry, and a generosity of spirit and devotion to learning that is very rare. Paul Nelson has given us much for which to be grateful. It is my sincere hope that the Artist Trust panel will agree that he is most deserving of support at this time.

Sincerely,

Sam Hamill  
Anacortes, WA