

Poems for Peace Notes

Gratitude to Anderw Hall, Adelia MacWilliam, SICA-International, SICA-Canada and SICA-USA. I am in the ancestral homeland of the Duwamish Tribe: Real Rent Duwamish.org

(Start with video of [THIS CLOUD IS A LIFE](#))

A couple of recent articles in the New York Times have brought my attention to my own activities over the years and how they have been driven from a commitment to peace and justice. I've had my interest and activism in bioregionalism validated the more effort I invest in it and the deeper I get into it and believe it's the foundation of peace, justice & sustainability. This means the bioregionalist program addresses many of the concerns affecting our communities and our planet right now.

Two definitions of bioregionalism are:

1. The belief that social organization and environmental policies should be based on bioregions rather than on arbitrary political boundaries.
2. The belief that naturally-defined [regions](#) ([bioregions](#) or [ecoregions](#)) should be the basis of political or cultural identity,

Poet Gary Snyder won a Pulitzer Prize for his 1974 collection *Turtle Island* and his introductory note to that book does not sound dated in the least:

Turtle Island – the old/new name for the continent, based on many creation myths of the people who have been living here for millenia, and reapplied by some of them to “North America” in recent years.

Also, an idea found world-wide, of the earth, or cosmos even,
sustained by a great turtle or serpent-of-eternity.

A name: that we may see ourselves more accurately on this
continent of watersheds and life-communities – plant zones,
physiographic provinces, culture areas; following natural
boundaries. The “U.S.A.” and its states and counties are arbitrary
and inaccurate impositions on what is really here.

The poems speak of place, and the energy-pathways that sustain life.
Each living being is a swirl in the flow, a formal turbulence, a “song.”
The land, the planet itself, is also a living being – at another pace.
Anglos, Black people, Chicanos, and others beached up on these
shores all share such views at the deepest levels of their old cultural
traditions – African, Asian, or European. Hark again to those roots,
to see our ancient solidarity, and then to the work of being together
on Turtle Island.

I WATCH A SUNDAY DAWN

lake cloud
rise above

NEWCASTLE HOUSES

below newly-snowed

ISSAQUAH ALPS

before Savasana & other

RESTORATIVE ASANAS

after Sowilo

& other auspicious &

invocations of the w/ large
body

&

c

u

r

v

e

d

t

r

u

n

k

& the essential oms
what made it

so.

A buck
wheat
pan
cake
break
fast

.

Morning matcha latté
con

leche

de

avena

y Latihan Kedjiwaan

y

esta

vida

mestiza

what
saves
we

TURTLE
ISLANDERS

from the

INHERENT HUMAN HATE

of personal
individuation

&

FEAR OF THE SUN

.
5-Dec-2021
8:06am

The two NY Times articles I mentioned were:

Everyone's Moving to Texas. Here's Why.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/23/opinion/move-to-texas.html> &

Where Should You Live?

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/11/23/opinion/sunday/best-places-live-usa-quiz.html>

The first article has this paragraph:

A Californian will feel right at home in Dallas even before touching the ground. Like the suburbs around Los Angeles, San Diego and across the Bay Area, Dallas and other Texas metros are built on the certainty of cars and infinite sprawl; from the air, as I landed, I could see the familiar landscape of endless blocks of strip malls and single-family houses, all connected by a circulatory system of freeways.

The bioregionalists 50 years ago said we are living on this continent like occupiers. We do not have a compact by and large with the place in which we live. This is at the core of why there is no real peace in this world, just moments between wars of many different kinds. A Snyder poem from Turtle Island addresses the demonic. Part of it goes:

SPEL AGAINST DEMONS

The release of Demonic Energies in the name of the People
must cease

Messing with blood sacrifice in the name of Nature
must cease

The stifling self-indulgence in anger in the name of Freedom
must cease

this is death to clarity death to compassion

It was Gary's ex-, Joanne Kyger, probably in 1998, who upon hearing my stories of the place I lived at the time, Auburn, Washington that it was originally called Slaughter and has a river named Stuck suggested I was writing a *Paterson* for Slaughter. That was a reference to the William Carlos Williams epic about Paterson, New Jersey. I

would soon see Charles Olson's epic *The Maximus Poems* as a guide as well, though I think the term "serial poem" is more appropriate for what I'm doing and for our post-patriarchal era which is arriving more slowly than most of us would like.

My latest series FLEXIBLE MIND is deeply connected to place and the current moment, which is one of the joys and one of the secret powers of writing spontaneously. Writing a "received" poem. Here is another poem from that series:

ANONYMOUS

they
crawl in on the in
land sea

(our
EXTENDED
BRAIN
we call The Lake.)

FULICA AMERICANA

& late this year
& the raft itself

ONE AUTUMN MIND

punctuatesthelake

as if slow motion
morse code.

*ARE YOU SURE THE OSPREYS
ARE GONE?!?*

they don't ask

in the modesty of their

MUDHENNESS

.

(The gift Gebo
predicted.)

C
O
O
T

S E A S O N

announcing the

initiation of

THE WINTER ART

((the inner art))

of raft-making.

8:45am

22—Oct—2021

Casa del Colibrí

Gebo is the Rune that signifies a gift or partnership and the coots and their practice of traveling together in large groups called “rafts” are a

model in these poems for human community and the notion of interconnectedness. Here is another poem from that series that alludes to these themes:

YOU ARE A BIRD

of
least
concern

the birdbrain'd
say

“forages... anywhere
w/ water:
 ponds... parks,
marshes, reservoirs, lakes,
ditches... saltmarshes”

YOU ARE A GARBAGE BIRD

they want to say

exist on pondweeds and sedges
eelgrass in *brackish waters*
even *gravel* when
they cut up 801 stomachs

& yet the

OCTOBER RAFT GROWS

It is a CITY
 OF
 COOTS

AWKWARD & ANGLING

for a

SAFE HARBOR

((as we all are))
before the next

BOMB CYCLONE

The Coot in Indra's Raft
maybe eating Puyallup
wigeongrass

&
THE
OCCASIONAL
DRAGONFLY

.

Look in their
one red eye
((bill full of
eelgrass))

FOR YOUR

mudhen dharma

T
R
A
N
S
. MISSION

8:33am
25-Oct-2021
Casa del Colibrí

If these poems were submitted to a journal or anthology dedicated to peace, they would be rejected. In the scheme of my life's work, bioregionalism, Projective Verse, they make perfect sense, but the materialist paradigm limits our aesthetic bandwidth by training us how to better label things which is the first step in controlling something. These poems, as Michael Boughn said of my haibun, "evade literary capture" and are mongrels as alluded to in the above poem and the phrase *estavida mestiza*.

We can't reach our potential, we will not have peace, disconnected from the place in which we live. We have to stop treating nature as disposable and certain classes of people — and mammals and sentient lifeforms in general — as inferior and disposable. & remember Jackson Pollock saying we ARE nature.



In that NY Times *Where Should You Live* article there was a survey I took which asked to prioritize aspects of the quality of life you value most:

When I made my choices, out came the places I should live, including Bryn-Mawr-Skyway, Washington, three miles from where I live, White Center, Washington, Seattle, Oakland and San Francisco. All came in at about 80% of what suits me best, the highest scores. It turns out the place I should live IS the place where I live. I'm committed to here. I'm building a life, raising a child here, building a soul here and this is the



San Francisco, Calif.

Pop. 874,961 • \$\$\$\$



81% match

What d

Clicking

Schc

Spar

More

Tree

Live

Tran

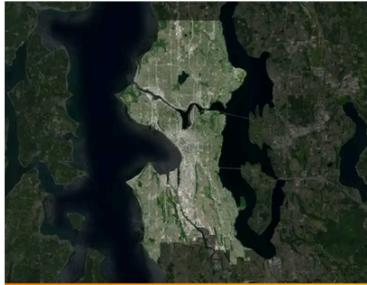
Jobs

Climat

Cool summers Warm winters

Less snow More snow Sunny

Low climate risks



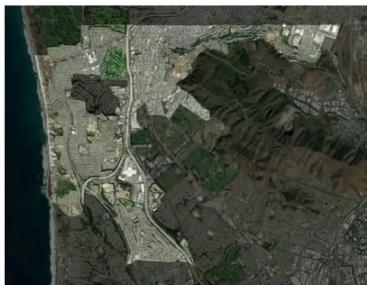
Seattle, Wash.

Pop. 724,305 • \$\$\$\$



81%

ack



Daly City, Calif.

Pop. 106,677 • \$\$\$\$



78%

kind of commitment that transcends patriotism or nationalistic concerns. You don't have to be a bioregionalist to

understand we have more in common here in Seattle with Vancouver, Portland, Spokane, Kelowna, Sitka, Arcata and other Cascadian towns than we do with Toledo, Ohio, St. Louis, Missouri, New York, Austin, Texas and Chicago, though I still root for the White Sox, the better of the two baseball teams from Chicago.

The epigraph to my latest book of poems, *Haibun de la Serna*, is from Dōgen, a 13th century poet from Japan and the founder of the Soto Zen sect. "When you find the place where you are, practice begins." As my favorite living Soto Zen priest Jason Wirth likes to say, be in the now and here. Composing spontaneously allows me to be in the now and to access greater forces than my own local mind. Being a bioregionalist and caring about the kinds of life around me and connecting with those rhythms is

the “here” part. Looking at the history of this place, to get some sense of how things here got to be the way they are, is a key part of my own poetry investigation. As the Bahá’í would say, my “independent investigation of the truth.” How indigenous people lived (& live) here, how Japanese-American citizens lived here how they have been treated and how the land has been treated were central themes of *A Time Before Slaughter*, my first book. Many poems in that book would make the case for how history can be told, but the poem *Elegy for Frank* for Frank Natsuhara, who lived several years in a “relocation camp” is one that I’ll read now. In it an allusion to elders being like libraries, they have such knowledge:

Elegy for Frank

The train stopped
in Slaughter one
more time last
week.

Frank Natsuhara,
punched ticket,
memory
in doppler rhythm

&

train horns
of
one
last
goodbye.

Another library
now
valley
loam.

How did they save
the store? How
did it feel
prisoner
of race? How
the barbed wire,
humiliation?

Oh Frank Natsuhara
how will they
remember you
in
this
your home
this
big valley?

Plum petals sailing
in a spring gust? Juice
from strawberry

R
I
P
P
I
N
g

from chin?

The question “How will they remember you...?” is answered somewhat by the strawberries still grown in Auburn, on farms that are still run by USAmericans of Japanese heritage and by other ephemeral and seasonal acts of nature which evoke a sense of ancient Japan for me.

In the second book in my series which re-enacts the history of this bioregion, *Pig War: & Other Songs of Cascadia*, there’s a poem which ties in colonialism - but with a twist. The thesis is in part that in this part of the world – other than settler and government violence against indigenous people, ongoing commonplace mass murders by descendants of settlers, and the slow wars against queers, immigrants and people of color – the thesis is that there is something in the soil here in Cascadia that brings out the best in people to prevent large-scale war. (In the Pig War boundary dispute between the U.S. and England, a pig was the only casualty and the conflict went on for 12 years.)

Why no all-out war here? Maybe it’s coming. Maybe it’s the prevalence of water which in many cultures is a metaphor for compassion. I’m not sure, but in one of the poems in the *Pig War* section of the book some of this is investigated. A Cuban native is at the core of the poem, something I found amazing being the first-born son of a Cuban immigrant. A man after

whom they named several islands in that disputed chain of islands and the chain itself. So, I will end with two poems:

**Juan Vicente de Güemes Padilla Horcasitas y Aguayo,
2nd Count of Revillagigedo**

y who is de *San Juan* after whom
de islas de San Juan are named?
& how did Spaniards

get here and who, why, how
did the blood stop
at one pig, how
were the war pigs (for once)
denied
(denuded)

divested of covering
made bare?)

Coulda been war, glorious
here in *Isla y Archipelago de San Juan*.

Cannon balls and musket blasts
to scatter the last of the *Canis Lupis*
the Columbia Black-Tailed Deer, the
rare Northern Sea Otter (for whom

or whose pelt Quimper would trade copper
years before Filthy Jerry cd get his
filthy fingers on it.)

But there's something in the Cascadia water wd
bring out the noble in men
like Admiral Baynes who'd soon
be knighted
who'd refuse Governor Douglas'
August 2, 1859 troop landing order.

Something that'd attract
Spaniards like the Mexican Viceroy:

Juan Vicente de Güemes Padilla Horcasitas y Aguayo, 2nd Count of
Revillagigedo

(Not the San Juan who'd be put in a cell not much bigger than himself. Not the one who'd see the union of jiwa and Divine in the metaphor of Holy Marriage. Not the one who'd write about how the bride hides herself and abandoned him in his lonely groaning. Not the one who'd feel the need to purge every last imperfection every last psychic typo every last lust urge every last of the dominator fixation not mitigated but transcended by The Fire to which Blaser wd allude. Not the he of a thousand graces diffusing, graces unnumbered, those that protect from the thousand cuts that come from conceptions of the Beloved. Not the one whose metaphor'd bride'd leave his heart there in that lashed meat cage maintained by a bit of bread and salted fish. Not the one with the silvered surface who'd one day mirror forth. Not the one on the wing whose Beloved'd one day see the strange islands with the roaring torrents (Cascade Falls?) & whose gales would whisper amour, a love-awakening south wind not

spewed by Spetsx who'd be the rain wind from the Southwest
a two-day canoe journey south of the present scene. Not the
one whose Beloved bride from a mother corrupted would
make a bed out of flowers, protected by lions hung with
purple and crowned with a thousand shields of gold. Not the
one whose bride'd attract young ones & who'd commence the
flow of divine balsam & get him pitchdrunk on fire and scent
and spiced wine. Not he of all-consuming painless fire drunk
on pomegranate wine whose only job was amour. Not that
San Juan.)

This Juan was a Cubano,
born in La Habana.

The third Criollo Viceroy
of Hispania Nueva.

This Juan wd see
the Capital (then Veracruz)
as a slum, peasants
in thin robes, straw hats, trash
in the streets and the first flash
of all those rez dogs to come.

This Juan
(el Vengador de la Justicia)
he'd find & hang
the outlaw gangs
of murderers

& clean the Viceroy's palace.

Light the streets of Ciudad de México
pave highways to Veracruz,

Acapulco,
Guadalajara,
San Blas y
Toluca

find the Aztec Calendar Stone & set
the heavens on fire but found
Cascadia

not worth the troops

it'd cost to own her,

settled

for leading the flock

of 4.5 million future Mexicans

he'd count and a few

islands

to this day

in one way or another

bear his name:

San Juan

Orcas

Guemes.

Dots in a green landscape

as seen from Constitution

where the divine balsam flows

by the kayaks

and the wind whispers

Mary.

The Day the Weather Decided to Die
(After a Haida tale told by Robert Bringhurst)

*On hearing the wooden rumble of thunder we realize that we are
situated below the platform of the sky.*

– Ramón Gomez de la Serna

What constitutes a good family they say and give instructions
to servants under the backdrop of the hugest sucking
sound in history prelude to when the wind'd no longer
rumble from under the skirt of the great Ma no longer
float a blue heron's Xacho-side lumber no longer
sustain.

Age of celebrity tattoo news,
of the rise of Yurok Duwamish Tsimshian Haida
Puyallup Muckleshoot Musqueam of tornadoes
hurricanes earthquakes tsunamis bee silence
Fukushima and Fukushimas to come.

The weather born
out of cockleshell embryo or out of snot, weather that
hunts birds and sends winds out in the skins of blue jay,
weather that steals hats of campesinos (compassions) for
kicks weather that would sprout houses when adopted
by a master carver weather that would be a scholar of
carving.

The weather when painted would sit
facing the sea would weep for owls with spots and the
new northward range of dolphin's neighborhood
weather that would warn of the Big Ones who think of
biting weather whose big fish story is dried halibut and
waits and waits and waits for a shift in settler rituals.

It could start with *today is a good day to die* could start with
the inheritance of the campesino (compression) who
opened up about his daily prayers for humility or when
he the one born in a cockleshell wd dress as wren & sit
way above the sea as a cumulus cloud waiting to see
what his latihan would bring: dance, song, chant or

something more cathartic just beyond his out
stretched wings.

Remember: crow's yr brother, stumps
never lie, we
hold up the sky.

6:34P – 6.25.11