

Yaquina Bay

Rick Bartow



Bear

CASCADIAN zen

bioregional
writings
on cascadia
here and now

volume one

Paul E. Nelson
Jason M. Wirth
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with Theresa Whitehill
editors



Watershed Press
Seattle, Washington, Cascadia
MMXXIII



Platter

Seattle Zen

The crane
some weeks later
took itself apart
after putting
itself together—

how convenient
if we could follow suit,
readying our atoms

for the self's reboot.

Selected Haiku

tall firs falling up

towards the rushing river tree branches an elk

waves climbing halfway up the mountain over and over

doing nothing—
a billion years of beach sand
through my fingers

in buddha's hands a birch leaf

a bee lands
on buddha's hands
fading coneflower

december rain
the old canoe
fills up with water

the small Columbia
this far north
a skein of geese

the shadow of the jay
deeper and deeper
into the woods

snowy cedar
pileated woodpecker
hammers deeper

the whole sunny day
just doing nothing
daffodils

all the songs
in the old piano
sitka spruce

one elk's
antlers
snag the dawn

rufous hummingbird
a tongue of flame
from the firs

so faintly
through wildfire smoke
the ice cream jingle

alpine lake
where we skinny-dipped
now your ashes

its gold eye wide
the heron sees me
as i really am

Cascadian Paramita-ku in Four Seasons

Thinking of the shared properties of Cascadia and Zen, I decided to pair each of the six Buddhist Paramitas, the six perfections, with a characteristic feature of the Cascadian natural landscape. Generosity becomes the ever-present, ever-giving moss of our rainforests. Morality is seen in the stones, and Meditation in the often-grey, sometimes stunning blue, sky of Cascadia. Water asks to be Wisdom, as Wisdom asks to be water. The birds of Cascadia represent Effort, and the cedars of our forests stand for Patience.

The haiku below have the six Cascadian-paramita pairings as themes and as section titles. For each pairing, I wrote four haiku, one for each season, starting with spring, then summer, autumn, and winter.

Generosity	Moss
Morality	Stone
Meditation	Sky
Wisdom	Water
Effort	Bird
Patience	Cedar

I. Generosity | Moss

feel it as it moves
the forest under your feet
you were born barefoot

walking the forest
dreaming Kyoto green
gardens—obi—moss

a clump of green moss
tossed up by a shoe or paw
an island, a home

ice encased moss
hugging a fallen log
through a long winter

II. Morality | Stone

granite face, grey patch
on a slope of late spring white—
upright, so upright

gurgle of pebbles
as waves suck through, singing
we call it music beach

sit on the boulder
placed like a chair in green moss
the school of stillness

boulders, slick as seals
creased with iced water pockets
sluggish winter sea

III. Meditation | Sky

blossoms everywhere
the sky its bluest blue
my son is happy

blue cup of heaven
a hummingbird comes to drink
the iris quivers

ash falls from the sky
wildfires in the distant hills
I cannot settle

riot of color
at the edge of winter grey
sunset in December

iv. Wisdom | Water

thinking of childhood
I watch a forest stream
father's smooth footsteps

the landscape ripples
as I swim into its face—
one bends into one

turtles dream and swim
in the pulsing lakeside tide—
mother and her young

chuck ice shards
across a frozen lake's face
shuck-a-shuck-a-shuck

v. Effort | Bird

ragged crows
cackle across grey skies
heading home

seagull
keeping pace with the ferry
steady as she goes

grey to white
swallows dip and turn as one
changing the weather

white crane on the lawn
slow to walk, fast gaining flight—
a life in a breath

vi. Patience | Cedar

cedar lace
casts shadows on the late snow
the grey side of green

lunch under cedars
wind is a distant river
flowing clear and cool

pine cones on branches
dew drops waiting to fall
only the air holds still

winter cedar branch
draped low by the weight of snow—
this is bowing

Somehow

Not sure how I go through
 morning zazen with troubled groin joint
 one aspect of suffering is lost trust & old friends
 Turtle Old Man has been fashioning
 beads grinding & piercing the little shells
 on a KPFA reel-to-reel tape
 since 1949
 He asks the travelers to bring obsidian
 but Coyote fell to earth the borrowed blackbird feathers failed
 These days Sulphur Bank
 where he landed
 stews with mercury from the abandoned mine,
 a touch of the 20th century
 yellow tailings invisible toxins
 drizzle into Clear Lake for decades
 I keep getting messages from Academia.com
 to sell me scholarly papers about the contaminants—
 (see Kroeber who says Oleyeme,
 headwater of Putah Creek's
 named for coyote "in all
 the surrounding
 languages.")

Ula

Thick darkness
 drinks
 the last tint of sunlight.
 Crows quit raiding the temple food,
 no more *caww caww*
 they withdraw to high roosts.
 Shedding caution
 an owl pushes its beak from a tree-hole
 neck sunk in feathers
 head squat as a
 hand drum.

—Viddūka

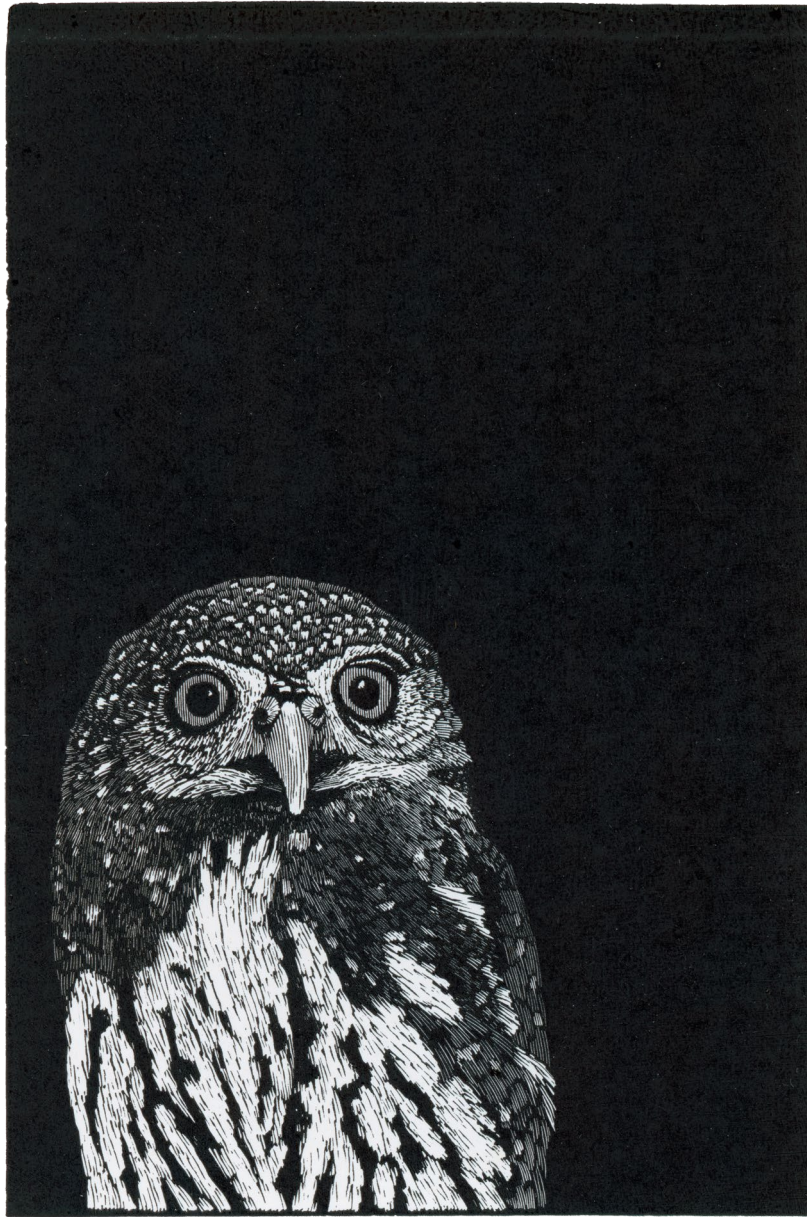
Translated from Vidyākara's Sanskrit anthology

Crow and owl are primordial enemies. One inhabits the day the other the night. A fledgling crow, having never seen an owl, will raise the alarm at a glimpse. In Massachusetts a birdwatcher photographed a barn owl kill a crow and fifty crows retaliate. Viddūka's poem catches the enmity. READ JACK COLLOM'S POETRY too. Owl comes through Old High German, ula. Behind the word is a verb, to turn, turn around, as the owl's head. One Sanskrit term for crow is *ulūkajit*, defeater of owls.

for Kwang Mae Cho

Cold Mountain

A windswept burn zone
 high on a talus strewn mountain
 snow, hail, hard sun, chase each other like dogs.
 Mountain bikes



Northern Pygmy Owl

Richard Wagener

rarely come up this high.
 When they do they don't see what I see.
 There's the occasional cougar
 you can open a book by Ezra Pound—
 otherwise no one
 talks over the fine points
 of poetry.

—for Amelia Hall

Listening to an Autumn Raga in Springtime

Ali Akbar Khan, 1922–2009

What in the end did humans
 think we'd accomplish?
 Look at the bookshelf
Bhagavad-gita
 next to rakish Mark Twain
 the Harlem Renaissance reader

tips against Antoine de St. Exupéry—
 who told writers remove what's not needed—
 There's beaucoup Gertrude Stein

Shakespeare, lots, and Ezra Pound
 squints in the grass at an ant
 Confucius honed his thought and led him astray
 The thick foxed
 Oxford Anthology
 hard to call that dry
 leathery verse poetry

Here's field guides
 a natural history of the coyote clan
 Navajo myth, masks, eco-warriors
 and Sei Shonagon who made the best lists
 But none of it saved us

A book on Mongol Buddhist horsemen
 what did their art do?
 windy glacier torn cloud grass visions
 bronze breasted girls
 even Dante couldn't see those
 heavenly forms for the glare—
 Some master craftsman
 painted lapis lazuli onto their curls—
 I won't open the book though
 that three eyed
 end-of-world death skull cuts closer than words
 virus terror blood lies war
 dead cities every direction

So to the 300 cubic inch
 Sanskrit Dictionary 1879
 blue frayed oxford cloth ripped at the spine
 MacBook Pro perched on its three thousand year
 lexicon tougher than Marx
 Heidegger Chomsky
 head trips of the West

What in the end did humans
 think writing could do?
 Blanched musical fingers
 begin to play
 faded words, black holes, dying dwarf star doom
 an autumn raga

played by a dead man
 Pasque flower in bloom.

A Milarepa Shrine in Ladakh

Squat stone monk quarters up in the clouds. Headwaters of the Indus. The icy mist comes in shreds, then a quick windblown glimpse: red boulders, white tundra grass, a toothy rock overhang. The valley's known for blue sheep since elderly lamas keep hunters away. But the spring-fed pool iced up a month ago, the sheep drifting down-valley for water. Jackrabbits—the ribong with coarse fur that's truly blue—spring between rocks. And chukar birds flap upwards vanishing into the hillside. All make a living off stubbly orange tundra plants.

On a sloped rim of granite, the whitewall shrine has a hand-painted board, "Elevation 14,400 Feet," same as Mount Rainier or Mount Shasta. Inside, a bare bulb, the sooty winking butter lamps. A larger than life gold-plated Milarepa flanked by two deities I don't recognize looks bemused. He's the one poet from the Trans-Himalaya plateau known back home. Can blue sheep reach enlightenment? Two older lamas in smoke-engulfed robes confer. Glittering eyes near the blackened tea churn.

"Next visit you need to stay overnight."

The lama held my prayer beads
 out to Milarepa
 it's the māla you gave me
 four lapis lazuli beads for counting
 two tiny bone skulls on the hemp cord

Remember these mountains
 walking them together
 many drainages east but cold jags of mist the same
 I admire your good-humored pluck

mornings we swapped dreams

ate watery potato soup for
two whole weeks
back & forth across the milky glacial runoff creeks
scary ice-crusting logs under our boots

Thirty-three years ago and you're dead now
Sharing jokes
halfway up the world's
high slopes

—Kristina Loftin 1952–2015

Seeking but not Finding the Master

Where but the high tundra do you
see such colors

dry crimson, burnt orange, pale green, tawny gray

we have carried Mike O'Connor's ashes
in a small parcel
to fling for the wind

I envied you the cool friendship poems found in China
you envied India's spicier lyrics

us both perplexed
epidemic rage tormenting
our planet

the job's to store seeds, of language, of rhythm,
for the better world, there in front
around the bend, out ahead

Tim Hogan recites mantras
young master, young master, you said

mischief that blue eye
mock reverence on that tilted head

who held two passports mystic songster old Ireland

Be cinder on tundra

ash on the wind

—September 23, 2021

Mountainal

This first-light mountain, its east peak and west peak.

Its first-light creeks:

Lagunitas, Redwood, Fern. Their fishes and mosses.

Its night and day hawk-life, slope-life, fogs, coyote, tan oaks,
white-speckled amanita. Its spiderwebs' sequins.

To be personal is easy:

Wake. Slip arms and legs from sleep into name, into story.

I wanted to be mountainal, waterial, wrenal.

For the *Lobaria*, *Usnea*, Witches' Hair, Map Lichen, Beard Lichen, Ground Lichen, Shield Lichen

Back then, what did I know?

The names of subway lines, buses.

How long it took to walk 20 blocks.

Uptown and downtown.

Not north, not south, not you.

When I saw you, later, seaweed reefed in the air,
you were gray-green, incomprehensible, old.

What you clung to, hung from: old.

Trees looking half-dead, stones.

Marriage of fungi and algae,

chemists of air,

changers of nitrogen-unusable into nitrogen-usable.

Like those nameless ones

who kept painting, shaping, engraving,

unseen, unread, unremembered.

Not caring if they were no good, if they were past it.

Rock wools, water fans, earth scale, mouse ears, dust,
ash-of-the-woods.

Transformers unvalued, uncounted.

Cell by cell, word by word, making a world they could live in.

Orca Wedding

The sea is all distance, a lover
without end or true horizon,
and yet these waters make a home,
circling rocky coasts and croppings,
the middens of an earlier people
hidden in soft earth beneath the fir and cedar,
the rhythms of their gatherings a continuity
they learned from the seasons and the sea.

My wife and I came to this place late in life,
came to be married and then to live here
and to die among what had always called,
the sounding of currents and waves no different
from a mother who makes the first sound
anyone has heard. It is what binds us together
as surely as the Salish waters bind together
the islands where we make our home.

Our first night, before we would rummage
in the woods to gather the makings of an altar
for the mossy slope where we would say our vows,
I stood outside our small rooms and listened into the dark,

listened to a sound I had never heard before
that lifted from below the cliff edge
in the waters I could not see.

In the morning we sat silent beside our altar,
and looked past the world of no horizon.
Then we said what no one else would hear.
This is when the orcas came,
five of them together. They rose
up out of the waters below us
with the whoosh I heard now for the second time.
“Yes,” they sounded—again and again.
Then they made a circle, a perfect ring
to help us seal our vows before they dove
to where they no longer could be heard or seen.

Love has its own way of rising,
letting go or diving deeper still,
though we may never know its root
in the uncertain waters of what we are.
But we came to this place to live as we were able,
and to raise a child who would climb
far beyond our reach in his forest home—
a green-eyed boy who learned the forest’s silence,
and took into his body what an island is,
shaped by the rhythms of what can and can’t be seen,
in the unbroken lineage of the sea.

Pale Shadow

I rise early and walk to where light
enters the forest in silence

tentative as a new lover, my hands
leading me branch by branch

on the uneven path. Overhead,
the powerful stroke of wings

through air causes me to stop.
A sound like feathered oars

as the morning hunt begins,
I can just make out the direction

before the soft whirring disappears.
Two summers past my wife

looked on as an eagle dove
without warning into a flock

of ducks floating lazily near the marsh
at Cusheon Lake. The force of

the attack plunged the predator
beneath the surface as she watched

from shore. Then the eagle lifted its huge
form above the water, shook and tried

to rise, its claws clutching prey.
“There was no way it could

lift off,” she told me. “The killer
and killed had become one body

and the weight wed them where they were.”
Finally the eagle began to row,

he arched his great wings forward
into the lake and pulled against

death’s enormous weight
until he reached the shallows

where water lilies tangle among fallen limbs.
Then he dragged his prey into the soft grass

to hide among the reeds,
his shadow on the water the last

thing my wife could see. There
is a silence that surrounds

this world of shadow and light,
an unmoving invisibility that clarifies

each thing as it is beside the next,
a membrane that shapes the detail,

one by one. It is how it all conjoins.
I walk in the woods beside

the river that rolls its soft tongue
among stones night and day.

It is not words that guide me,
not life or death or change or anything

I can name. It is the stillness before any
name is given and the stillness just after,

the unseen body that lives in the space
between trees, or flows beneath the earth’s

green water. I hold the image of the eagle's
kill no different from the first time I saw

my children bathed in the birthing
blood that helped to keep them

alive. All words, all that die
or kill and struggle to survive

are pale shadows, transparencies
that return to their source at such a time,

the unmoving ground beneath the ground
where we stagger, or stride.

Within Within

Spring is within a plum twig, bearing the snow—cold
—Eihei Dōgen, 1243

No one can say what this life is.
Snow, spring, plum twig, and bearing,
each thing is cold cold cold
and cold cold cold
is snow, spring, plum twig and bearing.

This is within and this is
what is within. Bearing
sorrow in silence
or holding our happiness
for the world
are just plum twigs
bearing snow.

Shouting joy at passing cars
or whispering I'm going
to kill myself
is the heat of petals
in winter, the blossoming
of snow drops in spring.

Don't try and don't quit,
that's the best I can say.
People who love you
and people who need you
and people you love
and those you hate
come to the same thing.
No matter how you turn,
you can never turn fast
or far enough. There
is no escaping
the ten directions
or ten thousand things,
even when you die.

So take it easy.
Have a Cuban cigar.
Your shoulders are
wide as the path
is wide, your heart as open
as one blossom
two snow falls
three bows to the east
and four kisses,
one on each cheek.



Winter Lake

The Elk Come

Just days ago, Celia camped in this meadow.
Now fifty or sixty elk chomp grass, trample
the corn lilies, lie in moonlight: ruminates
all around where Celia's tent so lately stood.

At dinner comes the hoarse and high-pitched wheedle
and roar that marks the bugling bull, keeping
his harem together, keeping other males in place,
as corn lily crispens and summer starts down.

Later, during tea and chocolate and apricots under
propane mantles, a hundred heads go *crunch! crunch!*
on gravel road, then jump, or shove, or just ignore
the twanging fence.

In moonbeams like the sun they are, elk spook
into brief stampede. Soon stilled, they huff,
stamp, turn about, lie down—just fifty yards
away, across split-rail and barbed wire.

We listen for an hour or more, afraid to wreck
the peaceable kingdom of bugle, huff, and chew.
Small owl slides by, back and forth, as I make out
antlers, dark mantles, all those big white butts.

Cold and sleepy, we take to the cabin. Wapiti pay
no mind at all. Early morning, rise and go. I walk
down to see what all that grinding's wrought: pellets
everywhere, blue butterflies coming to sip.

Bear sign abides in dried mud, chickadees, chipmunks,
and ground squirrels abound. White-tail faces off
at twenty feet and stamps. All that's left of cow and calf,
of the old bull's hoot and grunt: their beds lie flat,

and the meadow smells of piss and hay, like a stable.

The Pulaski on the Flagpole

What's that on top of the flagpole, anyway?
Upright handle, double blades at right angles:
why, it's a Pulaski! Firefighter's tool
one end axe, one adze,
handle of the type they call "fawn's foot."
To fall a burning snag, split a smoldering
old log, cut out a root, nothing as versatile,
nothing else serves half as well.

Gary Snyder says the most important
thing (and maybe the hardest too) is knowing
your own proper work. One thing G. S. knows
is his way around the woods, another

is this tool that Ranger Ed Pulaski made
a hundred years ago. Wouldn't they both grin
at such a buck-toothed salute
as that one, atop the flagpole?

No one looks for the flag that flew
at Billy Meadows Guardhouse,
no one runs anything up this old pole,
but notes a damn fine tool up there. Lashed
to the flagpole by someone
who knew his own work all right,
and knew its value, too.

Three A.M. at the All-night Logging Show

Well, okay, not really all night. But this operation
starts up around two in the morning, shuts down early.
We're used to logging around here. The ragged
little mountain these guys are relieving of its alder
has been logged before; the next patch over
will go next year. The hill across the creek,
last cut before I came here in '78, will be felled
again in ten or fifteen years, I'd guess. For pulp—
this stuff I'm writing on. Loggers always go

to work early, stepping into their clammy, staggd-
off jeans about the time I turn in some nights. It's not
unusual to hear their whistle-bugs pipe up
at six, and the first loads grumble down the road
before dawn. But this logging in the middle of the night
is a new one on me: the sharp bleats of the bug
and the back-up beeps, the bass thrum of the cables

and higher whine of chokers; the diesel growl of the cutter-loader, the scrape of the carriage, and when they buck, the urgent howl of chainsaws. The spotlights in the window.

They make a mess of sleep, the all-night loggers. Out there working in the face-slapping rain, the limb-whipping wind, the frigid fog. I shiver, pull the blanket higher, turn back into my ragged dreams.

**I Cover the Waterfront
(Ilwaco, December 2018)**

Sometimes it seems the hopes of all mankind lie on display in a small-town bookstore, against all odds still open on a bleak December dock in a time when so much else is going, going, gone.

After the reading I spill out the back door onto the wet green waterfront. Walk up and down in the dripping dusk. The slips still have boats, though the fleet is tiny now.

Still, a good seafood grill, a pub, and Jessie's Fish Market at the end of the pier, persist. I remember charters by the dozen, the cafe at the end of the spit, Doupe's Hardware

as a going concern. But now it's mostly a matter of the riverfront, where the Columbia brushes Baker Bay before dying, or being born anew, into the Ocean itself. And what moves me

is not what's gone, but what somehow remains: the boats, the oysters, the books shiny in the light through the wet window. They speak to the possibility of all things, even in these times, waterfronts do.

As long as little seaside towns live on, giving harbor to half-forgotten craft and vagabonds on a winter's night, I will continue to cover the waterfront, seeking something not likely to be found, anywhere else.

Fishing

Cast your nets wide
in your new paradigm,
may it not be fish you catch

Pescando

Lanza tu red de par en par
en tu nuevo paradigma,
que no sea pescado lo que pescas

Zen

The trees tree,
the rivers river
the snow kisses the lake in ice,
the Olympics blush
one sunset at a time.

The umbilical chord has not detached yet
from its earth—
Apples still grow—
Grapes and berries arrive to markets,
lettuce has fingerprints on its cover of chapters and pages.

Sometimes workers touch our mouths through produce,
our senses revive in peels.
changing clothes by midday, is common in Seattle.

Meditating is normalized,
we shrink our minds so often, to capture them in a possible snowflake.

The rain tea from chamomile, elderflowers, roses and geraniums
is the earth’s afternoon treat and its accoutrement.

Dogs know this is not Kansas, empowered they bark for treats, touch,
toys,
capital sins of indulgence, mirroring our need for nothing.

Seattle-Nahuatl (To “the land of lakes” Aztlán)

FALL

October in Seattle,
the leaves
of space needles
wrestle with the rain
through the window-shopping eyes
of spirits, visions threaded
from above,
desde el Más Allá.

WINTER

Winter snow
shelters
traffic lights

to shine like Xmas trees
on homeless quilts.

SPRING

The city
simmers
herbal flower teas
on its streets
of always water.

SUMMER

Parking garages
sizzle
like refrying bean oil
cars
the cheese-like profiles
of Scandinavians,
happy to park
across the street
from the sun.

Imago Mundi

For the moment what I see, what I will see when the time comes
will be what is seen: just the
sailboat,
summer, crossing the bay
with no reflection, followed by a
cormorant (sated) the
bird delighting in itself, playing at
being a bird, soon to
migrate in silence:
in the sailboat some
bourgeois are getting
drunk
(they are well supplied)
they embrace three
shapely
call-girls,
all three
overweight
paid for by the three
blokes who think the world of themselves:
second rate champagne,

CASCADIAN Zen

Cascadian Zen: Bioregional Writings on Cascadia Here and Now, Volume 1

Cascadian Zen was typeset in Dante and Adobe Caslon Pro with titling in Albertsthal Typewriter and Franklin Gothic, Han characters in Adobe Kaiti, and ornaments in Mrs Eaves. The book was printed on 80# book paper and perfectbound into soft covers, including a tipped-in fold-out map. A portion of the run was casebound in cloth over boards with foil stamping and tipped-on image.

The Dante font in *Cascadian Zen* was customized for the publication by Robert Bringhurst to include language support for the Coast Salish languages, Greek, and romanized Sanskrit and Arabic.

Additional Copyediting and Proofreading: Ursula Vaira

Design, Typography, and Production: Theresa Whitehill, Adrienne Simpson, and Sarah McKinley, Colored Horse Studios, Mendocino County, California, www.coloredhorse.com

The fold-out map, “EcoRegions of Cascadia,” is based on the map that originally appears as a special inset on “The Ish River-Lillooet Country with The Salish Sea Map-Atlas,” copyright © 2022, David McCloskey, Cascadia Institute, available from Cascadia-institute.org; used with permission. The map was customized for *Cascadian Zen* by Colored Horse Studios. Additional cartography consulting was provided by Sarah Lewis MacDonald of Envision Geo, www.envisiongeo.com.

Watershed Press Logo by Roberta Hoffman, www.robertahoffman.com

Printing & Softcover Bindery: Gray Dog Press, Spokane, Washington

Hardcover Bindery: P-Dinh Oregon Bookbinding, Portland, Oregon

About the Publisher

Watershed Press is based on the tenets of bioregionalism—the opposite of colonialism.

We publish work awakening the diversity of place in all manifestations.

Watershed Press is the imprint of Cascadia Poetics Lab.

For information on purchasing books and other inquiries:

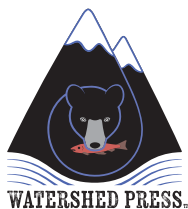
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