



Strong Ancestor Exercise

Robert Bringhurst writes in the essay “Solo” from *Cascadian Zen Volume I*, Basket Three Original Mind that:

My local sangha also has a lot of members—rocks and trees, ravens and tree frogs, varied thrushes and black-tailed deer, the ocean, the air, the darkness, the light. One is never really alone. At the same time, one is never truly anything else.

In the beginning of *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, Thomas Merton quotes a Zen saying:

*Ride your horse along the edge of the sword
Hide yourself in the middle of the flames
Blossoms of the fruit tree will bloom in the fire
The sun rises in the evening.*

I took the Buddhist pledge on December 11, 2023, (jukai) with my wife and, from what little exposure to Buddhism we have, we know that the sword and the flames are references to Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom and insight. The flaming sword he carries is used to cut away ignorance. Is it delusional to believe one is not inherently connected to everything in nature? & everyone?

In *Cascadian Zen Volume I*, Wedlidi Speck says:

...the third order of Creation was the emergence of four worlds, Heaven, air, land, and sea. And the houses that occupied those spaces were Thunderbird, Eagle, Raven, Grizzly Bear, Wolf, and Deer, and Killer Whale. All these supernatural beings occupied the spaces. And there were four rivers that allowed each of them to experience each other's' village. And in order for the myth people of our territory here to go to visit the Thunderbird, we had to borrow the masks of the salmon. And when we put



those masks on, we could see the river and travel that river to be able to go above it, to visit. And so, we really pay attention to the meaning of that and the relationship to it. And then finally the chief of all the myth people in this territory was Raven, who took a costume off to become human. And when he took the costume off, he modeled to every one of the myth people that it was time for them to move into a human existence and to build houses, to put their crest on it and begin to relate to the world in a very special way; and to always look backwards to the orders of Creation to find their medicine and their strength from it... It is strength from your ancestry that travels with us.”

It is not a coincidence that indigenous elders and poetry elders and Zen masters all talk about the inherent interconnection between all things, that all things are alive in their own way and that we must honor ancestors. We do not want to be like the settlers, of whom Chief Seattle said, “your dead cease to love you.”

Wedlidi Speck continues in Cascadian Zen:

...And so, it was believed that the first order of Creation was the creation of a family, and that's why our people say that it's Mother Earth and Father Sky, Grandfather Son, Grandmother Moon, the stars are the uncles, and the clouds are the Aunties. And each has an attribute, each has a gift so that when they work together, they create the beauty of that dream, and it is magic...

I envision a poem in which you start with the phrase: “It is strength from your ancestry that travels with us” as an epigraph. Begin with one ancestor, they need not be dead, they need not be blood, and imagine what “skin” they took off to be here as a human being. Or they might now be that being, wearing the skin of a Madrone tree or the feathers of Kingfisher, keeping watch on their descendant who lives here and now in the skin of a poet and who needs their help.

and
you, Garcia Lorca, what were you doing down by the watermelons?



*I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking
among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys.
I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the pork chops?
What price bananas? Are you my Angel?*

Allen Ginsberg - "A Supermarket in California"

Where are your ancestors right now? What skins do you imagine they are hiding in? If you start to think of your ancestors, tears of gratitude may fall as they got you here and they are ready to help you get to the next chapter in your life. You may want to invoke them before you get started. Are they connected to the Muse? Do they have metaphors for your verse? Are they alive in a way that only the poem can reveal? Are they poets who may have a line that you resonate with deeply, or that you find using bibliomancy, that should be in your poem? Be especially aware of dreams at this time of year and when doing this kind of work. Lighting a white candle can help protect you when entering into this territory.

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10:14am

12-OCT-2024

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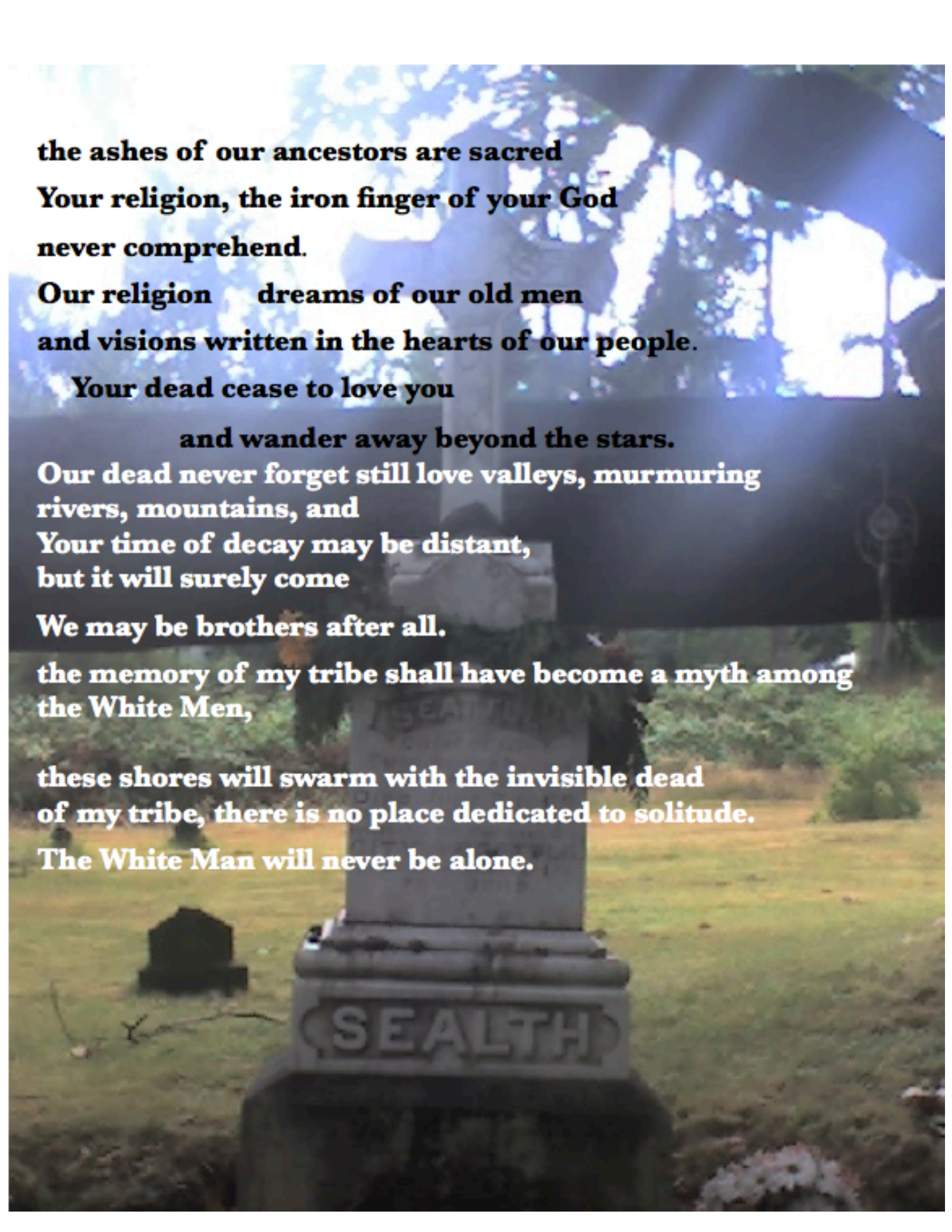
Works Cited:

Cascadian Zen Volume I: Bioregional Writings from Cascadia Here and Now

Zen and The Birds of Appetite, Thomas Merton, New York, New Directions, 1968

<https://www.historylink.org/File/1427>

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47660/a-supermarket-in-california>



**the ashes of our ancestors are sacred
Your religion, the iron finger of your God
never comprehend.**

**Our religion dreams of our old men
and visions written in the hearts of our people.**

Your dead cease to love you

and wander away beyond the stars.

**Our dead never forget still love valleys, murmuring
rivers, mountains, and**

**Your time of decay may be distant,
but it will surely come**

We may be brothers after all.

**the memory of my tribe shall have become a myth among
the White Men,**

**these shores will swarm with the invisible dead
of my tribe, there is no place dedicated to solitude.**

The White Man will never be alone.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibliomancy>

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47660/a-supermarket-in-california>