

Cascadian Zen:
Bioregional Writings
on Cascadia Here and Now
Volume II



“The Great Blue Heron and The Great Rainbow Trout Yogi in Phenomenal Space, Mental Space and The Space of Consciousness” (1979)

Eel River Watershed

Morris Graves

CASCADIAN zen

bioregional
writings
on cascadia
here and now

volume two

Paul E. Nelson
Jason M. Wirth
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editors



Watershed Press
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Deborah Woodard

I

When I was little, I didn't understand why wax paper rustling in some corner made me fix upon the town like a glint of water or the muffled barking of a dog. It was quiet here, a silence blunt and practical that tied its laces. And Al's was no name but a joke the trapper painted across the cover of the well. I found tin cans and a pair of antlers that almost brought back the tang of your shot, the monotony of its tuft of smoke. When we got in the clear, we'd reach the cabin. I imagined red plaid beckoning us forward, milkweed's limbs akimbo. But I didn't understand why Jerusalem was just a few miles up the road, or why the town was weaker than its well. So I drew down a flap of the gray sky. Behind barred windows hunters rested quietly, made for themselves a different stillness: the woods could never close over these few. I strained my likeness from them—peeling wax paper from a corner pocked with leaves—the way I strained to protect Jerusalem as I thought through the town. When I was little, I didn't understand and stood like the cabin unlaced and cold. A sheet of wax paper rustled inside the cover of the well. I tied my laces.

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I'm stillness like the plastic nailed over the scullery of rats sleeping beside the empty door frame. In the woods, we followed tire tracks. You told me pink checkered sneakers were the dry goods of epidemics, while I thought they were my steadfast red plaid jacket of the hunter. When we bumped fingers against one lichen-covered branch, I imagined a humming in the metal. People only went to Jerusalem if it rose magically from the rats' scudding. A dream brings back the touch of your fingers, degrades the rats, their ointments. We stood in the stillness and waited for guns. No one went to Jerusalem for it was here, under the cover of the well.

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The milkweed pods lent me their pinky-brown sneakers. It's so intriguing—hunter and the rats and my mother had been on overload on the road, with me atop a green mound of rising, a strip of undulant grass. Before we left, I made sure to knot my sweater carefully around Jerusalem, saw how this clearing had been set apart, hidden behind a tuft of seeds. The cabin was hurt by our thinking to sweep her rough boards, knowing them tied to us. Maybe the cabin feared being cleaned like a gun. Milkweed pods, a home, home on the range. A mud-caked pane and the dovetailed bodies of two hawks said that people fled the rats. Grass made vees in the center of some ruts. My mother was imagining red plaid, the side we saw it from, the remains of a different quiet, this sadness as she tied my laces. Then *she* got me a pair of sneakers. Smiling to herself, she stood cold and open. There being, along with the rats, mainly us. There might have been a few empty jackets of the hunter, whose cabin we concocted as sky mended the floorboards.

Edward Dorn

James Stops By

The Great Northern goes out of Seattle to Vancouver, BC. Sometimes the tracks run along the shore of Puget Sound, and where the shoreline cuts abruptly west the rails continue along the arms of land, over the widening valleys of the Stillaguamish, the Skagit, and the Nooksack. All the rivers coming down into the Sound. The countryside is drawn with a perpetual green. There are the haphazard growths of stump ranches, and there are the old farms below those, on the tillable land. There is a slash left by the loggers on the slopes above. On the east Mt. Pilchuck stands grey and torn. Whidbey Island comes and goes for fifty miles outside the west windows of the train. Once in a while the winter storms take up waters of the Sound and cut away the ballast of the roadbed. The train slows then in the cold drizzle and the section crew stand aside. The travelers in the diner car pause over their food or drinks to express a fleeting interest. Every aspect of the land and sky is smudged. The cold, fine substance, more than mist, not quite rain, naturally haunts the atmosphere as it moves in slightly blown waves back and forth across the land and the islands.

The edge of the town is cool. The wet air is heavy today but the sun comes out of the overlap of clouds as it goes down. Then it flashed through a group of hemlocks across the vacant lot. The trees surrounded an old house and the rays diffracted into spikes for a few minutes making the

aluminum-sided grain elevator a bright mirror. Then the sun was gone down into the Pacific, promising for tomorrow a clear day, which never came—and rarely did from such a sign—the light, feathery, rosy clouds of fair weather grew dim gray, the prevailing weather brought other clouds, dark and dense with mist.

From the west the Sound could be smelled, felt on the wrists and neck, cold bands on the body. . . .

Claudia Castro Luna

River Gorge

Brink of rainbow, teeth of mountain,
coyote stories, nectar dreams of mining bees,
yesterdays of yesterdays and whatever there is
already of today entwined in the cobalt garland
of the Great River seen today from Maryhill
Museum's verdant grounds where print masters
have gathered to share their third eye visions
of what this river is, what it does, what it suffers,
what it harbors yet in the churning of its waters.
The artists' plan is to print, using a steamroller,
thirteen large, hand-carved panels
River's plan is to be river, to mind itself,
to flow regal, onward to ocean's azure,
while in nearby amber hills, crickets
chirp among the fallen leaves of Garry Oaks.

The Fishing Trip

Speedometer rising on a flat straight stretch of Highway 16,
crowded-together lodgepole pines either side whiz by
the two-tone Oldsmobile, windy in back.
Dad adjusts the no-draft and Dogfish Woman
adjusts her crown of a shark's grin & fin, tarp
whumping on the roof where lay the great blue tent
& hammers and pins to raise it, big top of summer
in whose gloom we blew up air mattresses,
dusty odour of rubber and sharp rings of the brass nipple
by the Kispiox where dogfish swam & prized sockeye
wriggled at the ends of poles and lines,
tourists filling ice chests with silver bodies of fish,
filleting them with sharp tools
at dusk, the frying pan, the sizzle above the blue flame
of the propane element. Fairy blue, uneven blue, hyacinth.



Bandon

Novato Creek

Nathan Wirth

Rain Water

After days of rain

fresh streams declaim from the forest
and the trees are laughing.

Yet there is humility, as water

chuckles out onto the shore rocks
and their adaptable acorn barnacles.

While other places, whole countries, crack and crumble,

somehow, here, a quenching drench
falling, flowing, flooding to the sea.

The air filled with soothing sound,

the tide and miraculous mergansers supplied
with fresh water.

Rain water.

It rests atop the saline

so they can bathe their feathers.

A system designed for them, for their benefit,

and for a planet, and for a planet's benefit.

A wren perched on swaying salal

sings its discovery of new water.

Rain water. Tasting

like the scent of trees.

Nuu-Chah-Nulth, Good Advice

I've been told it's time
to decolonize my mind,
that all the places I love
carry the wrong rhymes:
Lone Cone, Frank Island,
Catface, Colnett:
dubbed by and for
missionaries, Kingdom-come,
imposing replacement.

Ts'ix-wat-sats, Chitaape
Waa naa chuus
Hilth hoo iss:
more than pretty names,
words that came up out of the ground,
as the loon learns his song from the lake.

Try to cover a mountain in concrete?
Language keeps emerging,
the planet speaking its green poems.
In pavement's petrification
the newcomers postpone mortality
preserve everything in hard grey
stop death by spreading it,
lack logic.
Listen for green,
learn the names.

I've been advised not to study
French or Spanish, rather
to stand still, make roots from words,
take in the language of the place
I've made my home.

Missing Field: Haibun, after Tom Jay

Field is another word we use in place of soil. An old word from an older world, it's maintained the same meaning as its Old English original *feld* more than 1,000 years ago: an area of land, cleared for agricultural use. On its own, field connotes an open expanse and readiness for "use." But since it has been cleared of stones, which typically surround it in the form of a wall, it also connotes a set boundary. Within it we may walk it freely, sow, and plow, but not beyond and not without reciprocal cultivation, stewardship.

Our relationship to field is gendered: both agricultural and sexual, where masculinity enters cyclical time. A fertile field is sown with seed so that it can bear fruit, year after year. It is the receptive/generative femininity of soil upon which men, in particular, depend and toil. The body of the goddess of agriculture (e.g., Demeter), a field is modified by what it brings forth: wheatfield, cornfield, battlefield. A field is where men grow, what they fight for, and where they choose to die. It is there we enter eternity through the soil.

It is precisely its boundedness that makes field useful to scientists like writers. The field of view describes what a lens can image, and what it excludes from view. Mathematics and physics abstract it most usefully as

a conceptual area wherein we can map the remote effects of forces and objects interacting: magnetic field, gravitational field. All things within a field interpenetrate and modify one another. The contents of a field—whether physical, verbal, conceptual, or spiritual—compose an observable energy that defines and reveals the form of the field itself.

Boy steps off the fence
Lonely freight train rattles West
Cottontail abides

Jerry Martien

ELK RIVER

Salvage This

A citizen comment on federal law permitting "salvage logging" of old-growth forests

This poem needs to be
saved from itself.
It is way over the hill.
Words on dead wood.
Long ago it
ceased to be profitable.
You would be
keeping it
from being taken
by its own
dark and useless purposes.

There are words in here
over a thousand years old.

They have conspired
with other creatures
and been spoken
time and again

with air
that has been inside
the leaves of trees.

These words
when spoken
are an ancient forest.

Some of the words
are no longer producing
return on investment.
Truth. Love.
Compassion for all beings.
Hey—
call the operators.
Haul them away to the mill.

But say—
isn't that a trace of
human wisdom
in among those words?

And down there isn't that a
vole digging for buried
meaning in the
decay and duff of a
culture that long ago
knew how to say, Enough—
don't be taking
what you haven't created
and can't pay back.

There is blood here.
An owl is eating the vole.

There is life here.
These words are
inside the trees again.

What happens
to our words
happens to the forest.

What happens to the forest
happens
to us.

We should be cutting
lies instead of trees.

Now the Ice

—*Glacier National Park*

Thousands drive here / participate in their / vanishing.

We fly / rent a car / take each other's pictures in front of photogenic pale
greeny-blue lake / white water cascading down rock. On the mountain
flank / small figures along the trail / pilgrims to a / disappearance.

The Americans they will say / worshipped Nature / worshipped Money.
A restless practical nation so engaged in / present business / they lived by
burning their past / their future.

At the park interpretive center the young ranger assures us it's not really
/ glaciers / their effects are what visitors want to see.

Above the lake / remnant of a million winters. Ice / on rock / carved by
ice / with rock.

1908 George Bird Grinnell says to the President / protect these 150 magnif-
icent glacial peaks from mining / development. Crown of the Continent
/ says Grinnell. Bully / says TR.

Says Great Northern brochure / America's Alps. Visitors arrive by
coal-burning locomotive / motorists tour in gasoline-powered automo-
biles. Stay at Prince of Wales Hotel / built by a business buddy of William
H. Taft.

Who got 160 acres / Blackfeet land @ \$25 / acre. We get tourism / reser-
vation living / 27 diminished masses of ice.

First week of August / up to our freezing knees / binoculars scanning the
distant shore. White ribbons of water fall from the crags / splash against
rock / into thimbleberry / huckleberry. On the high slopes / mountain
sheep / more pilgrims / soon grizzlies / coming down for berries.

To the ranger I say / I'll tell my granddaughters / come visit soon. Later /
might be too late. Yeah / he laughs. See 'em while they're / hot.

*water never so blue
as the blue of their melting*

Design

—for Charles and Clem

Three old poets come to a bridge in the forest. Admire its pole construc-
tion. Its craftily fitted joints. Made in a shop, Charles says. Delivered here
and assembled. The timbers flex with our weight. Lookout Creek rushing
beneath us.

The trail winds among trunks of old-growth Douglas fir. Standing and fallen. Decomposing into duff. Spared the clear-cuts of the surrounding mountains, the millions of years go on. *Refugia*, Charles says. Places where life goes on.

He bends down and picks up a big leaf of prehistoric lettuce. Hands me a piece. *Lobaria*, he says. Ancient lichen, pockets and ridges like the landscape of another world. Now I see it in the canopy above us, scattered on the forest floor. Green and gray. Thriving and dying.

A fungus and an algae hooked up with a bacterium. It can photosynthesize, reproduce from spores or broken pieces of itself. Takes nitrogen from the air, feeds the forest. How the forest goes on. Charles hands a piece to Clem.

As the trail descends into a gully Clem stops beside a yew tree. Holding a centuries-old branch, his hand reaching around it. The English longbow, he says. Battle of Agincourt. Laughs at the French general whining about the rules of war. Clem admires a good tool.

Then devil's club, Charles says. Pointing at the spiny stalks thrusting up through the forest floor around us. With wrapped burlap for a hand-hold, he says company goons beat the Wobblies when they ran them out of Everett and other mill towns. I touch one, its spines sharp as needles. Ingenious, I say. A moment of silence for the IWW.

At a wide spot in the trail three old poets looking up at a spider's web. Strung between yews on either side, an artful airy construct, its author in the middle of it. Pollen from the firs has dusted the spider and every strut and strand with gold. All that beauty. Useless now that it's visible. Poor guy, we all agree.

He'll never get his dinner with that.

—H.J. *Andrews Forest*

Tom Jay, Expanded

Far upriver. November. The show has closed, the reading's done. Someone offered the use of this cabin.

Then a publisher asked: Would I review Tom Jay's book, just out from Empty Bowl? Of course, I said.

The morning I left town I learned Tom was in hospice.

My days begin by the woodstove, move to a sunny porch looking down to where the Salmon River joins the Klamath. A place sacred to the Karuk, I learn later.

I read familiar poems and essays, other old work that's been added, ending with "Salmon of the Heart." A doctor has told Tom how sperm find their way to the uterus.

I thought, "Jesus, salmon!" and knew I was one once. It was as real as this: I could remember the slow torture of rotting still alive in a graveled mountain stream. Humped up, masked in red and green, dressed for dancing, I was Death's own delight, her hands caressing me...and this is the part I can't remember: whether she wept or laughed as we rolled in love.

At the meeting of rivers a fisherman has brought his kayak out of the Klamath. He casts into a pool at the mouth of the Salmon. Reels in line. Casts again.

Here and there, yellow and red leaves on the steep mountain across the river. A warm dry fall. Moon almost full. Salmon waiting for rain.

Next time I look, the fisherman and kayak are gone.

The book still begins with Tom Jay learning he's a water dowser. Everything else, new and old, follows from that divining. Words. Salmon.

Casting sculpture and bells of bronze. Seeking elemental sources.

The last time I saw him, wearing his habitual beret and plaid jacket, he was headed to a meeting carrying his duct-taped copy of Eric Partridge's etymological dictionary, *Origins*.

We were at the Andrews Forest, writers looking for language to describe the places we live and what is happening to them. He would have a word for us.

The first thing I read of Tom's, 1980s, "Land, Earth, Soil, Dirt: Some Notes Towards a Sense of Place," one of those rare gifts that turn up in the mailbox of editors whose little magazine pays in copies:

Human awareness is the blossom in the fertile mix of two soils: the soil of language and the soil of place. The 'soil' of language is not merely metaphoric, it is mortally real...

When we speak of living here, we should remember that perhaps the most important thing we will do here is die here.

For years I didn't get the book's title. The Blossom Is Ghost at the Wedding. A short poem, "Love," finally showed me. Despite what poets say, love is not a flower. It's a root. The rose is love's afterthought. A book review is an elegy.

In the last hour of my last day on the river, the sky a pale rose, two fishermen cast into the pool at the mouth of the Salmon. Across from them, the mountain rises from the river. The Karuk call it Stairway of the Dead, they sing a song to guide those ascending. Tom Jay is on his way there.

When I look at the river again, there's only one person fishing.

Live with this book.

Interview with Paul E. Nelson in September, 2015

Paul E. Nelson: Cascadia culture is a little bit libertarian. What are some other qualities that you would ascribe to that?

Jerry Martien: Well, I think there is some place where the libertarians and the anarchists meet, but then they part company around money, I think, and probably neither is realistic about how to deal with it. But I think the anarchists have the best shot at it because they're sworn to collectivity, and no bosses. And again, they're working toward an economy that fits ecology, that fits place, and that fits people. And people with money tend to be insulated from those facts. I noticed that when I was a kid; people with money just seemed clueless, and you can see why they need it because they'd be helpless without it. Imagine a Rockefeller without money, he'd just be another schmo on the street, and people would beat him up.

Paul: The Occupy movement. I'm reminded, when you start talking about anarchists, of how the Occupy movement governed itself, and I look at the Occupy, and I read a short editorial in the *Washington Post* that said they won. People said they needed to have an agenda, they needed to have goals, this and that, and all of a sudden, we're talking about Bernie Sanders leading Hillary Clinton in the polls, in New Hampshire, and having what's described as a very radical program that also happens to have a majority of Americans in favor of the things he's espousing.

Jerry: No, I think Occupy did win, in the sense that it's still going on. It was going on before Occupy. There was this opening, a big crack in the dominant economy, and people moved into that space. It was brilliant the way they did it. The people in Zuccotti Park are great artists, great situationists. They saw that here's a great demonstration of what's wrong with things, and look, folks, it ain't working, and let's talk about some other things. We have so little experience with anarchism, with practical anarchism. I don't know what other people's experience was, but I'm

sure this happened in many places. You could see one person crossing his arms in front of his chest and blocking consensus, and some really good ideas died because of that. But it's just because people don't understand that their personal opinion doesn't necessarily matter that strongly, in terms of what's good for the group. But that's the diehard individualism that still infects our thinking, and our decision-making. It's okay, I grew up under individualism and I love great characters who won't give in no matter what. I always think of Harry Truman, who went down with Spirit Lake on Mount St. Helens. Yeah, go, Harry Truman, go.

Paul: But that individual—

Jerry: But I wouldn't want to be in a meeting with Harry.

Paul: Not in a bureaucracy. Not on the Sewer Board. You probably had a few guys like him on the Sewer Board.

Jerry: We do. We still do. I can't believe it, some of the same people.

Paul: When you mentioned individualism and you talk about it, obviously as a pejorative, it ultimately comes to this notion that somehow we're disconnected from everything else, and that gives us the right to pollute, and thinking that no one lives downstream, and ultimately it's toxic for our own health if we believe that.

Jerry: Well, it's partly because we're all immigrants here. I see it in the history of my own family, how much collectivity and tradition, and connection to place is lost over an amazingly fast time.

Paul: I'm reminded of this cartoon that went on Facebook, and it said, "America: my immigrant ancestors didn't travel four thousand miles to get here, just to see the place overrun by immigrants."

Jerry: Right. Yeah, I know, and I've always said about these people who want to close California's border, "Yeah, we should've closed the eastern border a hundred years ago." Then the Okies couldn't have gotten in. I love the Okies. I grew up with them, and they're good people.

Paul: Yeah, but do you think there's a higher degree of recognition of interdependence in Cascadia than there are in other bioregions on this continent?

Jerry: I hope so. I think that's been part of the lesson. The hippie communes were one brilliant failure after another, and there were many other kinds of models of collectives and cooperatives. The tree planting collectives, they always set great examples. So there has been learning, I think. We have seen a lot of these things go. I keep quoting Paul Goodman, the great sociologist and dramatist. He said, "These things are supposed to fail. We're demonstrating what's possible. It all looks chaotic and crazy at first, and we find out that even chaos is orderly." Okay, I get it. My older son who went to that free school, ended up studying chaos at Santa Cruz, and now he's in charge of air quality in San Francisco because he likes to study chaotic systems and finds great order there. I think, wow, what a brilliant thing, and that he's able to put it to use, and to put up with the kind of bureaucracy that he has to work with in order to make some of these things effective.

Paul: These little experiments that have happened in the last forty-five years, is a great time frame of the height of what it might've been called the seventies, which didn't probably end until 1974, right? But did all these kinds of experiments prepare us for, ultimately, the crash of capitalism? Or is that just me being optimistic?

Jerry: I hope so. We've predicted this many times.

Paul: That's what people say, yes. The sharing economy. They say, yes, that's sharing economy, Jeremy Rifkin, Airbnb, that all sounds nice, but Airbnb is also a corporation.

Jerry: Yeah. How would you like to share your life for a few bucks? There's an awful lot of bullshit in the New Age movements, and the new thinking, but there's even more bullshit in the old thinking, so what can we expect?

Paul: I understand. I told Caroline Myss that the New Age is about taking the *I-Ching* and making it go cha-ching.

Jerry: Cha-ching. That's good.

Musqueam Coast Salish



Spirits of the Cedar

Susan Point

CASCADIAN zen

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

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