



“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

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It's the Tinder site
Saturday Night Fever

Construction zone
cradle / nursery / flight school—
an empty nest.

It's a front-row seat to the dawn chorus, man!
Grab a coffee. Have a seat. Can't you see?

We're all still here.

California Milagro

By the fig, and by the olive... Thus begins
a prayer from the Koran. It goes on
to praise the closest mountain top, in this case
a saw-toothed ridge rearing back so slowly we
walk its precipitous slope, blinking, and are
gone.

By the fig and by the olive, *Surat At-Tin*,
and under the ragged rocks, we imagine angels in the stone
faces so that we can look at them without blushing. We fashion
wings for them out of manzanita and pennyroyal so that we can
enter their arms, the arms of the mountain, with complete
abandon. We invoke the olive and the fig, we wake
in the middle of the night looking through the window
to the next world, lit from inside the throat of the coyote,
a world that intersects ours only in the shadow of stone pillars,
in the splash of a fountain, in the water we take
so carelessly into our throats.

And this is the picnic: the trail that brings you up the mountain will bring
you down again, and if you let it, if you have the appetite or know

where to find it, it can lead you to other paths that intersect
 alleys musical with gravel and the back doors of jazz clubs, formal roads paved
 with the guts of prehistoric lovers... These surfaces can take you all the way
 to the town of Whitehorse, in the Klondike region near the border
 of Canada and Alaska, and all the way back again to Isla Santa Inés

in the Chilean Tierra del Fuego, past the city where people sleep on beds of salt,
 past the milagros of the skylines, the chapels of commerce.

This is your picnic blanket, your Americas. You can take it up, gingerly lifting
 each corner of the tattered twinned continent: Newfoundland, Argentina,
 the Aleutian Islands, shaking out the crumbs, then
 flicking it out—foof!—and laying it back down again. It looks like
 an old favorite T-shirt long since spattered with battery acid. Now
 it becomes a beloved quilt on which to dream, a stage over which
 creatures rove and stumble and flatten themselves into tar pits,
 where 30,000 years ago lovers who wore amulets of bone
 and shell settle along waterways, harvesting the fertility
 of stars, where airplanes hover and buzz, bestowing and removing
 fragmentary bits of consciousness, clouds rise and falter and dissolve, fires
 race back and forth, rockets take off, bombs explode, mountains shift their weight
 from one hip to another, dandelion flowers plump and swell and burst
 under the pressure of water and its claiming.

From here, the banana shape of California is a perfect fit
 for the sleepy torso, and the artful depression that is
 the coastal valleys can be spanned by two fingers pressed
 against the ground in the classic symbol of peace, a place
 any Mediterranean refugee recognizes instantly,
 and with appetite. It is a perfect mimicry of home. California is
 saudades, it is the tragic blood which underlies its colonial
 history. It is the miracle of memory reconstituted, a fertile soil
 and a climate of grace and ambition. It is transparent, adaptive,
 alchemical. Surat At-Tin. Sutra, deep prayer of life, diva

of the rock music scene bending over in her damp skirt, with her
 fault zone visible, politician of the industrial waterways, the Venice
 of the internet, spend your lonely buttons here.

This is the domain of Queen Califia, legendary ruler
 of a race of black women who thrived in a paradise that brought us
 the mystic John Muir, inspired the poetry of Black
 Bart, master thief and social critic. Prayer, deep sister of the soul,
 open up our appetites, place our hands under your skirt. Let this
 picnic nourish, enhance the dream life. Prayer,
 deep prayer of tides, rancheria of sunbaked
 feet stamping the dust, oh thou enwrapped one, rise up
 a little, show me the rush hour traffic of the forgotten, lend me
 your rhythm so that I can sing and in singing, rise. Prayer,
 deep prayer of grotto and of delicious fruit,
 order up for us this one rambunctious twilight.
 So that we may continue through the evening. Then
 and only then, take and feed on us, if you must,
 but let us feel the buckling of the day under its load
 of blossoms, the margin of the soul etched, squandered.
 Let us feel the edges of things of continents, the cool
 of the garden fragrant, and its birth, and the eternal center,
 the heart of stone, the gift of time
 in its aspect water.

Estranha Forma de Vida

“A strange way to live,” or “a strange form of life,” title of a classic Portuguese fado by Amália Rodrigues & Alfredo Marceneiro

I forget whose business it is to make sure that leaves
are translucent enough in the spring so that an avenue
of walnut breaks the heart of the moon just right, and you can
steep the leaves into a tisane which can be poured over the sleeping
widow, the winning chess player, the freshly sutured highway accident.
I don't know where this busybody got off to, this magician
with a capricious smile, but someone was supposed to
keep the water trickling with the sound of bells
and memories, and remind us to write somewhere into the book
that dogs possess the eyes of people we once loved, and that morning
is morning because of a great deal of light.

The leaves have been turning ahead of schedule, the fruit
going from green to rotten; there is smoke in the air. The evidence
is everywhere. There is something in our blood which will never
be finished. Entire hillsides hemorrhage their load of wildflowers.
Forests coat the ridges in vivid wartlike growths. It isn't even
restricted to machines anymore. We can do *anything*. It is
everywhere. What a strange way to live, to come from such an intricate
fertility, able to synthesize sunlight and compose madrigals, and find
so many reasons to unwrap the package before it's even our birthday,
a dozen ways to vandalize the pantry. We are a byproduct, a sleeping god's
daydream, a god who got up, apparently, and moved on.

What a strange way to be left. No wonder the edges of things
are fuzzy—sex, grief—we were never meant to come to completion, or dance
to the end of the seven veils. Mystery is our only ally, and as solace,
we have violence: a misapprehension of the void. It explains why the soul
is always thirsty, why we have sacred fools who wander the earth, why

we think that age brings patience, when we are not nearly
impatient enough. A sweetness perhaps, the almost
bidden scent of summer grasses stricken with beauty. Those
who think we still inhabit a dimensional world imagine they can simply
wrap it all up again, pretend to be surprised, forbid stem cell
research, use the bludgeon of regret, the Puritan tools
of hard pleasance. But where we stand in the river
it is not very deep. We can wade out further, where the water
is green and lovely. We can walk a ways along the bank
until we remember other things: that snakes
are always surprising, that there is a homeopathic
form of sin on the *tooth* of a rattler, that we die
and that we live, every day, not just once. Yet there is only one
time, or if not, it has hardly mattered.

A Comatose Day in Seattle Chinatown

A gray film of dust over Seattle Chinatown
as withered roast ducks hang from barbecue shop
windows looking like things in a museum.

The traffic is sparse while the Uwajimaya is under renovation.
I find solace in Mike’s noodle shop across from Hing Hay Park
eating the comfort food of wonton noodle soup with beef briskets

as commerce is comatose with so many death sentences
hovering over these grandfathered buildings
Uncle Bob failed to save.

I know, I was here. I lived here incognito for close to a quarter century,
and while not blowing my own horn,
here I wrote the poem “A Moment in My Rented Room,”

which later under the labor of love guidance of Kaya Press’s editor
Sunyoung Lee and the grandmotherly adoration of a Wisconsin lady
Betty Priebe, this book was born and exploded beneath their noses.

And then they called me “Li Bo in drag.” Anything to promote and sell
a book, but not before pizzas and burgers invade Chinatown
while the traditional economy is near collapse.

The merchants cut corners and make rice rolls without the tiny shrimps.
That was once a favorite breakfast of mine from Hong Kong
street vendors as Hong Kong cops play cat and mouse with them.

I am not going to tell you about exploding firecrackers that usher
in Chinese New Year across the world in respective Chinatowns
as if the Chinese won’t go anywhere without this excess baggage

as Laozi would say. The sage also said, “He who travels lighter
travels farther.” And I have traveled mentally ill on these streets
homeless as a blight. There must be something wrong with your family!

We want to know. We will conduct a survey. Who wants to give
up gambling and get out of this enclosure like a federal minimum
security prison. Go get a massage instead? Ask a cook and who
cooks the books.

What Is Left Out

I am of the earth, in the mode of
red clay,
when stardust wraps me into
a paper birch,
of so many layers
that the truth eludes all.

You can call me “tree”
or by my precise name “paper birch,”
as if a new name creates a new thing.

But I still can be fickle
and be slightly disheveled
in the next possible world,

where poem is a truth-bearer
and none other
has my privileged status,
as I spout from the earth
with heaven as my ambition.

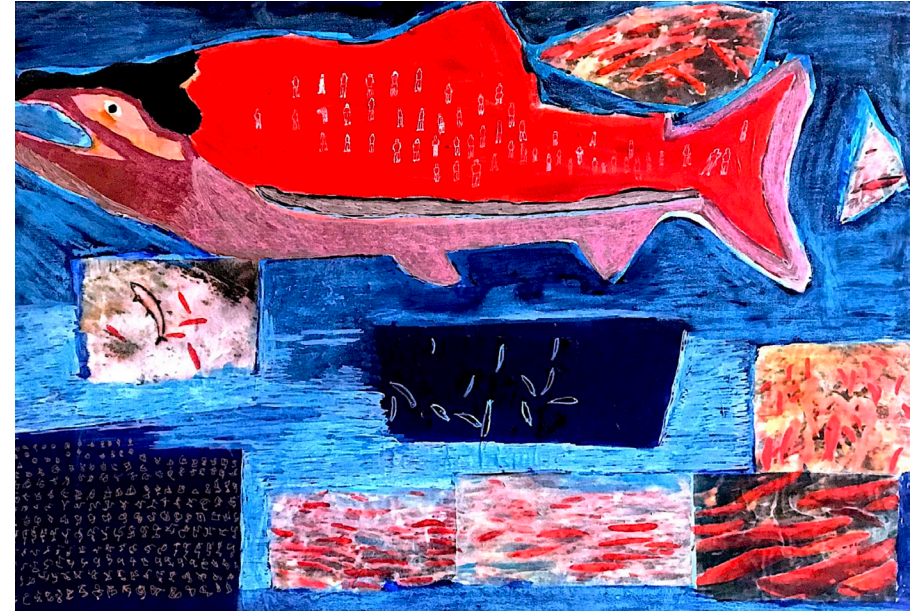
Isn't this how we are all sold the
myths we carry in a schoolboy's bag?
If you leave your books behind,
my friend, you will find the "naked lunch."

A Mirage

All day I saw myself in the distance
suspended between the ground and the sky, as
the seagull of Du Fu, not knowing if his
poems will fly down the ages.

What does it matter when I have even given up wine?
Whose praise do I need?
And I am too poor to take a wife, as
the bridal sedan too is a mirage.

Still, it is better than existing in another's dream.
I have a cold stream nearby where I have set the fish trap.



When Salmon Dream

Two Collages, after Berrigan

1. Suburban

litter of gray hulls and an occasional feather
in a backyard rigged with vines
taking escape access near the bird feeders
untrimmed shit-whitened full of chatter
with just enough opening to mark an idea,
the woman who steps from the house frightens
orange slinks toward the corner of a fence
herself and weeds that have leapt over daisies
a white shape, a cat trimmed in marble
and the expirations of lost lilies and irises
and bent weed straps quake
to spines before time of enough rain

2. Psychologist in Shadow

outside the lump of stone gray reflected
sits motionless larger than the other backyard
of a maple tree just now squeezing yellow
come back from the therapist sullen,

sulfurous and furious with the within
and anything other than expression
when wings burst wide and scatter the water
that's going to come out and won't be laved,
all his pores the edges of fumaroles
in its leaves I worry today that my husband
birds watch, comment from the branches
into the morning shade is one turtledove

Meander/Erasure

for humanity to progress, we must take responsibility
for thoughtfully guiding each other, and especially
our individual selves to move forward, the definition
of which may not be simple if we have become satisfied,
to like ease, and if we are inclined toward natural
history, we might think a stream's meander is a
perfectly good metaphor for life—not a straight line
not even a wandering line which stays the same, but
a kind of mess of shallows and rivulets that spend
some time along tussocks of grass before undercutting
the shoreline and carving out a new passage, or by
leaning into turns in the water flow so much
that eventually those bends pull into an oxbow and
finally tie off the loop, making a new channel

that pulls water away from where the loop
had been: the curve that once watered plants

at its edges is no more, and the plants suddenly must
adapt or perish: a meander's metaphorical weight

like its hydrological power, lies in its
inevitability, its movements and pressure: it seems

life always meanders, however much one might
wish to channel it, time and biology and weather

working as they do: even strongly built canal walls
are constantly under pressure from the water following

the variable attraction of gravity, the whole
wobbling spinning turning that we have to learn

to stand upright against in spite of our progress in spite of
then the very material of which we are made

cogitate well are always thinking, but heaven knows the
extent of the meanders inside a skull: I have found

that people need no encouragement to push each other
in any direction: the convention of having four directions

is obviously a construct meant to reassure that we
humans can quantify and delineate the world:

of course not: we can only draw lines around our
understanding so as not to succumb to the flood of data

which is sometimes a better metaphor for our lives
and for "progress," or at least for time passing

what I mean to say is, I was sidetracked; our professions
probably have little to do with the ultimate application

that adapt, or perish, according to the sweep
of events, carrying the curve of our lives

around the corner, until we connect what we are doing
with what went before and the final flow takes us away

Lost Stream

Forgotten one, you remember what you were:
mossy banks, fringes of fern, rivulets, riffles,
cool passage for salmon. On a map
of old streams spilling out to the strait
you were one of hundreds
of capillaries threading through earth
muscled with rock, lavished with forest.
Then the city donned concrete
masks, civilized grids. Smothered
into park, you were culverted, diverted, yoked,
locked into pipes while we romped above.
But you refuse to be choked
under clearcut, brushcut tracts. Playing fields
soak back into marsh. Bog permeates playground.
One by one, oaks topple in sodden soil,
upended roots like tangled claws.
Submerged roads around you
ripple in wind. Water above seeks
water below. Deep underground,
you gurgle, chortle, ready to rise.

To a Sooty Sparrow Dead on the Side of the Road

Sleep bird border unbound
when I have never dreamt
but seek as seas do to rise
up over rocks of no return
we / if we can be we /
find a way to wing this
not sleep perchance but
death that deeper connects
across terrain of fields
just about to sift night
through boughs at their
borders unguarded sleep my
bird I would if I could
be party to your parting
a part kept apart but
close beneath your closed eyes

Solstice Dream of a Spring to Come

After last rain
picked first
blackberries fallen
full bodied into
round dark
some animal
scuffed the inside
its poker face
sharpened to a
glow though
the pie I knew
would be
sweet and
heal something
I had forgotten
on the far side
of the receding hill
I saw was
our only refuge

Fucking Poetry

Fucking poetry
I have given you everything
The ache of each arcing
Curl slash and curve of letter form
Forming words from mere sounds
As round and round anxiety you whispered
More and more anxious
Go you are healed

You are free
Go

Fucking poetry
And where are we now?
In the long silence of not reading
We create in our writing minds texting
Nothing but invisible wind bodied forth
In outflung boughs of electric currents
I'm a sucker forever for the wallflower
For paths diverging in snowy woods
And the sharp cry of the killdeer
The merest whisper
You are poetry
Fucking poetry

Fucking poetry
Even in the apocalypse
You are writing me
Because this is what we
Did the last apocalypse too
Singing into the fires which kept
Some few remaining coals glowing
Long into the aftermath
The shattered night we
Sing through and so
We go on singing
Because we are
Poetry too and
This is all we have
Poetry fucking
Poetry

CASCADIAN zen

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

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

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