



Salvage This (Graft From It)

There is an art installation just north of downtown Seattle known as the Neukom Vivarium. It is a Western Hemlock nurse log growing in a controlled environment where the light, soil and moisture are designed to replicate what it would be getting where it was born, in the Green River Valley, southeast of Seattle. “Nurse log” can be defined as a fallen tree that provides “ecological facilitation” as it decays.

There are many ways to salvage poems from our own failed works, or to use the “ground” of another poem to launch our own composition. Today we’re giving you an opportunity to try a couple of methods which come in handy for occasions such as the daysong.

Our nurse log poem today is from longtime bioregionalist Jerry Martien of the Eel River Watershed in Northern California, near Eureka. His poem is from *Cascadian Zen Volume II* and does pertain to trees and their neighborhoods:

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.



Martien’s critique of capitalism and love for the more-than-human world shine through in this poem. One could easily graft from many of the lines in the poem. What about:

These words
when spoken
are an ancient forest.

That language precedes us and will survive us is at the core of this section of the poem. Language is also a high energy construct, a source that is both inside and outside of us, or one that we have gotten inside of! Your Personal Universe Deck would come in handy to get going on this task, though the line you choose should have some juice to get you going as you “graft” from it. See: Mammal Grafting.

The second method one can use and that could be employed in a daysong situation is the Phrase Acrostic. See: <https://paulenelson.com/workshops/phrase-acrostic-workshop-handout/> This would mean you’d start with a phrase from the poem, write it one word at a time down the left margin and let your consciousness go into the words as they are revealed to you in your mind’s ear:

These
words
when
spoken
are
an
ancient
forest

Now that the global temperature has exceeded what we once thought



of as the threshold, 1.5C, the ancient forests that remain ought to be protected by any means available, though people like Julia Butterfly knew that a while ago. She knows at the core of all of this is disconnection: “When we’re disconnected from the Earth and we’re disconnecting from each other, we make choices and don’t realize how it’s truly impacting all of us, and that means all the beings, everything, and the future generations.”

Your act as a poet connects you at very least with those who have used the language you speak for a couple of thousand years. May you graft your way to a deeper understanding of self and deeper connection to all living things everywhere. It’s not too late.

peN

13-JAN-2025

Casa del Colibrí

Works Cited:

<https://art.seattleartmuseum.org/objects/32046/neukom-vivarium>

<https://www.americanforests.org/article/nurse-logs-healers-of-the-forest/>

<https://paulenelson.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Day-Song-as-Vision-Quest-.pdf>

Cascadian Zen Volume II, Watershed Press, Seattle, (2024)

<https://paulenelson.com/2021/03/15/mammal-grafting/>

<https://paulenelson.com/workshops/phrase-acrostic-workshop-handout/>



<https://apnews.com/article/climate-change-warming-hot-record-2024-disasters-12f899f071fcdbd051ad49a872611e92>

<https://allthatsinteresting.com/julia-butterfly-hill>

