Paul E Nelson:

What is the nature of the bioregion known as Cascadia? How is this insight expressed by the people who live, work, practice, and play here? Is there a connection between Zen practice broadly construed and the Cascadia bioregion? If so, what is it? Who have been the teachers in the relatively short term that Zen has been known in this bioregion? What role does water play here more so than in other bioregions and what implications does that have for the people who live here and for their practice? It's these questions and other questions brought on by these that we seek to explore in the work, Cascadian Zen, which is being edited by Tetsuzen Jason Wirth, myself and Adelia MacWilliam and is to be published in the fall of 2023 under the imprint of Watershed Press, which is the publishing arm of the Cascadia Poetics Lab. Here to talk about this are the three editors, myself, Tetsuzen Jason Wirth, and Adelia MacWilliam here on Beautiful Salt Spring Island. It's a real joy to be here with you today.

Jason Wirth:

I love being here.

Paul E Nelson:

Thank you for arranging this opportunity.

Adelia MacWilliam:

It's been incredible. Yeah, we've just had a wonderful weekend together in the heart. I believe Salt Spring is one of the special centers of Cascadia in terms of things that are coming together north of the border. It's very special that we're able to speak about this together here on Salt Spring Island. Very.

Paul E Nelson:

Which has ancestral importance to you and your family, which we just saw this weekend at the exhibit at the Salt Spring Island Library.

Adelia MacWilliam:

Should I speak about that a little bit? Just a tad?

Paul E Nelson:

Yes.

Adelia MacWilliam:

What happened this weekend was a celebration of my family who first came onto Salt Spring in 1905. So, a compilation of artwork by members of that family and photographs and the journey of looking into the history of the place, which, of course, brings us smack up against what went on in the settler's history of this coast and that journey into the land. I think it was a personal journey for me, but I think it's a journey that we're all in the middle of taking in whatever way or we're learning to situate ourselves in place in a way that we never have before with that historical awareness that we're bringing and also how we're living in our every day.

The experience for me was that writing, the act of writing, the practice of poetry, the practice of outside, took me into that journey and that awareness of what the past was comprised of, how it has influenced us, and the secrets that we thought were buried there that are now being unearthed. That's whole sense of unearthing, which I think relates to what we're seeing in all of the writing in the Cascadian Zen volume as poets, essayists, artists who are responding to the land in unique and beautiful ways.

Paul E Nelson:

This book comes out of a panel discussion that happened at the May 2019 Cascadia Poetry Festival that was moderated by you, Jason. Maybe you can talk about that. It was honoring Sam Hamill, that whole festival, and had a panel about translation and had a panel about Zen. The focus became Cascadian Zen. Sam, of course, living in the bioregion since the seventies and himself being a bioregionalist, himself having a poem called Of Cascadia, which ends his collected poems. Tell us about how that panel came together and how the anthology came out of that.

Jason Wirth:

I think the best way to begin thinking about his, keeping in mind that we're speaking together because we'd like to entice whoever's listening to consider reading these two volumes, is to ask: What do we mean by Cascadian Zen? If by Zen we mean that this is a book in which everyone editing it and everyone writing in it has a Zen practice, the book becomes narrow, and ironically quite un-Zen, and of limited appeal. Zen for us is short for any intentional practice of being here and this intentional practice of being here brings us to the other difficult word, Cascadia.

The people who were here quite intentionally before the later colonizers would never have recognized this place as Cascadia, but they were quite intimate with it and their voices and their presence are also everywhere in the book, not just in terms of contributors, but also in its spirit. Zen is an extremely late transplant here, mostly dating back to the 1950s and 1960s, and it's still on rocky footing. It hasn't really found its way into being a healthy part of a spiritual ecosystem yet, but it is beginning to awaken us to the challenges of being in a spiritual ecosystem.

How do we speak to it? How do we speak from it? How do we honor what it has been? How do we hear its voices? How do we begin recovering ways of speaking that were systemically not heard for a long time so that only colonial voices would be audible? That's all there. It collects various points of disclosure in which we can awaken to where we are and when we are. Our intention is not only to celebrate this place—there's also some difficult voices that we want you to hear as well—but also to awaken the reader to what it is to be here and think from here and speak from here in all its promises and all its difficult responsibilities and all its needs for restoration, be they spiritual, cultural, political, economic, or ecological.

Paul E Nelson:

The here being Cascadia, being a bioregion and bioregionalism being a way of living that seeks to be completely sustainable, seeks to see its boundaries as those created by nature and not necessarily by generals of armies sometimes looking at maps. Cascadia starts in the south at Cape Mendocino according to David McCloskey, who some people call the father of Cascadia and who's been involved in the Bioregional Movement since the 70s. He believes the bioregional starts where the San Andreas fault goes into the ocean and creates the Cascadia subduction zone based on the work of Bates McKee and other geologists from active in the 50s and 60s and 70s, that it goes from Cape Mendocino, Cascadia does, all the way to the Aleutian Trench and basically Yakutat, Alaska and inland basically to the continental divide. There's a huge part of Oregon that he doesn't consider part of Cascadia as part of the Great Basin bioregion. But this is the place we're talking about when we say Cascadia.

The map is available at [cascadia-institute.org](http://cascadia-institute.org/) and it's an incredibly evocative map. You look at this map and if you have any sense that there's something lacking in the way that nation states are construed, if you're not a jingoist, you look at this map and think, this is really where I live. Because it's a place perhaps not totally synonymous where with where salmon go, but where much of the flora and fauna is similar and certainly has a lot more common with each other than places like Akron, Ohio or Toronto or Austin, Texas.

It seems to me that building affinities that way seems like a very natural thing. At least, it does for me. One question that has been brought up in this Cascadia work has been, is this another attempt at the United States at colonizing Canada? Adelia, do you get some resistance? You're smiling at that one.

Adelia MacWilliam:

Actually, that question hasn't come up for me in working on these volumes because there's been great attention paid to including people north of the border. Mostly, what's come up in terms of the writers is the common concerns and the actual differences are not so much border as they may be in the sources of the work. If they're members of minority groups, that particular perspective, certainly, the indigenous voices which pay no attention to the border. So no, I haven't felt that at this point. Though there are a few more of you south of the border than there are up north. Well, but I like to think the Canadian voices are strong and free.

Jason Wirth:

They are strong and free. But I would like to say something about mapmaking in general. It's critical for our volume. The Cascadian map is a post-colonial map. It is not recolonizing. Canada and the United States are colonial ideas. They were and still are mapped along colonial lines. If they're saying, “Is this a colonizing attack for one colony to take over another colony?” It is absolutely not. From a bioregional perspective, we do not recognize the US/ Canada line because it is a colonial line.

What is a colonial map? We should be very clear about this. It is an inventory of what you own. It marks what belongs to you. And who is this *you*? The colonial appropriators. John Locke wrote about this in one of the founding documents that governs how the colonies operated on both sides of the colonial border. How is it possible to make something your property? How can you appropriate something without consent? You do so by “improving” it with your labor and thereby make it your own.

But a post-colonial map is not what belongs to us. *It's where we belong*. It's always been Cascadia in the sense that its inventory is of our sustaining conditions, including its mountains, rivers, cultures, languages, climactic forces. These things are things to which we belong. It is an absolute refusal of the ontology and politics and economics of coloniality.

Paul E Nelson:

There you have it. Talk to us a little bit about this notion of the Zen part, which does not exclude other systems of inner work, other spiritual traditions. How would you describe that part of the title Cascadian Zen?

Jason Wirth:

Like I mentioned before, Zen is just short for any intentional place-oriented practice. Zen itself is not an idea. It's not a philosophy. It's not an ideology. It's not a set of belief commitments. It is a practice. It is a practice of doing what? The falling away of your ego. The ego that falls away, of course, is also the coloniality of that ego. It is an awakening to *now and here*. Now, you don't need Zen to do that. There are other ways. This place has been “Zen” in many ways long before such a word ever would have been used here. “Zen” for us names an intentional practice of belonging. However, it is easy to say that we belong here, but the book is not simply to convince you that we belong here. It's the *practice* of belonging here and that is multiple and varied.

Paul E Nelson:

When we look at the book volume one, which is coming out in October of 2023, we see that it's divided into three baskets. Basket One, the Buddha Way; Basket Two, Empty Bowl, which is an homage to Empty Bowl Press; and Basket Three, Original Mind. I'm going to ask each of you about one contributor in particular. Maybe two for you, Adelia, because I want to cover the notion of Zen as it might be practiced by a contributor in the volume, Wedlidi Speck, who comes from part of the world that you're familiar with and is an elder who has been at events that you've facilitated. Maybe you can talk as to how he might fit into this broad notion of Zen and his contribution to the anthology.

Adelia MacWilliam:

I've been drawing this comparison recently between what we find among indigenous elders and the wisdom there and could we use the word Zen to include all indigenous wisdom. Right? Because that would be what Wedlidi exemplifies in his practice.

Paul E Nelson:

And then I would also ask you about another contributor. This one, Basket One, someone like Daphne Marlatt, who is not a Zen practitioner per se, but is a Buddhist.

Adelia MacWilliam:

Vajrayana.

Paul E Nelson:

Vajrayana Buddhism. Your thoughts about Daphne and her inclusion? In fact, she begins the whole book.

Adelia MacWilliam:

It's Daphne's exploration of place. It's so remarkable in her sensitivity to the details. Again, historical detail, exploration of the politics within that and the music of the place. The asking questions, the probing that she does of what she's exploring. Staff who's going to walk down to the fishing docks and speak to the fishermen and laugh about how they speak to her and the patriarchy that's in there but also the relationship with the fish themselves and then the poetry moves on to looking at the fish returning up the river. The speaking perhaps their inability to continue to do that as time moves on.

Daphne's sensitivity is across the board related to her practice, not just her spiritual practice, but her writing practice, which is what takes her in there and changes her relationship to place and our beautiful experience of getting to read what that is. It brings it home to us. We come home to our place through her work, through her practice.

Paul E Nelson:

Which also includes allusion to the indigenous part of Cascadia, which preceded us here. Another person in Basket One is someone who you're very familiar with, Gary Snyder, who you wrote a book about. His *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, and his use of Dogan as a main source and also, in this context of the ecological crisis we find ourselves in, Snyder, is also probably the quintessential bioregional poet. He was there at the beginning of the Bioregional Movement, helped shaped it, and this volume wouldn't be complete without his work. Maybe you can speak to the importance of him and how he shows the way really with a sense of the prophetic. If we look at Turtle Island and some of the things he said in 1974, which only become more true in all the years since then.

Jason Wirth:

I think Gary Snyder exemplifies the set of lines that connect the first three baskets, the Buddha Way, Empty Bowl, and Original Mind. I will start with one and three, the Buddha Way and Original Mind. How are they related? Original Mind is the cultivation of what some of our indigenous elders might call Indigenous Mind. It is cultivated through rigorous practices and initiation rituals in which you try to awaken a quality of consciousness that allows you to have the heart and wisdom to be responsible for the land, to be responsible for all its creatures, human and non-human. You are responsible for it because you are *of it*.

Original Mind is also the bioregional approximation of what it is to have a poetic mind. Projective verse, I think, is also caught up in the kinds of psychic discoveries that resemble or belong to a broad sense of Original Mind. Original Mind is sometimes called primitive but primitive in the sense of primal, originary. It is not at all pejorative, but rather something to be realized. In Zen, we say the mind before your parents were born. Who were you before your parents were born?

Basket one is to cultivate this mind with Buddhist practices. Gary Snyder studied Rinzai Zen in Japan for 10 years. Many of the people in the first basket have a Buddhist practice, but it is also somehow caught up with this awakening of primal mind. Snyder, of course, relied both on Rinzai Zen and later Soto Zen, but he also had an appreciation for indigenous practices and writings. He exemplifies the coming together without conflation of these two place-aware practices.

Sitting in the middle is Empty Bowl. That title, named after the famous press founded in the 1970s, is a Buddhist term. The empty bowl is the bowl that you use for begging. Buddhist begging takes you outside of yourself, outside of the perspective in which everything belongs to you and is about you. It is to make you vulnerable and attentive before the world. You ask of the world its graces, rather than walk around as its commander saying, “And this is mine and this is mine.” The Empty Bowl basket, holding the Buddha Way and Primal or Original Mind together, collects writers, some of whom published with Empty Bowl Press, some of whom didn't. What they share is a practice and a general ethos of a particular part of Cascadia, in this case, the greater Western Washington area.

The three baskets straddle Buddhist ways, indigenous ways, projective ways, and other ways—all these ways that we're calling Zen. Snyder exemplifies weaving these strands together, encouraging us to continue giving the minority report on official consciousness in a time in which official consciousness is a globally disordered, psychotic consciousness with all its mappings. Our Cascadia map with its baskets is a minority report. But it is telling that in our crazy times, it is the earth that is the minority and humans that are the majority and that is the sickness to which we want to provide some medicine.

Paul E Nelson:

Two launches for the book are going to be happening in 2023. One October 6, 7 and 8 at two venues, the Spring Street Center, 15th and spring in Seattle, and also the Richard Hugo House, and then a launch in Cumberland, British Columbia, November 24th, 5th and 6th of 2023. More information will be forthcoming as soon as these events are a little more organized in the near future.

For Founders Circle members of the Cascadia Poets Lab, there will be early opportunity to purchase gold passes, all access passes to these events. As a last thought, what do you hope the book will do in the world? Well, if you could wave your wand and it's magically successful, what effect does it have on the bioregion, on the continent, on the planet?

Adelia MacWilliam:

I think it's encouraging people to be more thoughtful about their relationship to the earth at this time and that whatever practice they're doing that's going to bring them closer, to walk softly, to walk closer to the ways of the ancestors, to be careful of our culture, to be aware. By reading, by responding, perhaps engaging in our own practices, there is a subtle change that is going to take place through just being with the book, spending time with it.

Jason Wirth:

If I had a magic wand, I would declare that what the book wants to be, good medicine, is what the book is, good medicine. What makes good medicine good is that it heals one bioregion for all. Part of our practice for doing this is the three of us working together, putting down our egos, whether they be individual or political. Even the subtle ego of this insane, magical line that draws a totally arbitrary and brutal wound into the middle of Cascadia. But I hope that the good medicine that helped us sustain this work is the good medicine that is received by its readers. That's what my magic wand wants.

Paul E Nelson:

Do you think it's because of the content of this book that it was so harmonious to create it so far? With the brilliant design work of Theresa Whitehill, which will become patently obvious once people hold the book in their hands, do you think the content has had an effect on us as editors?

Jason Wirth:

It is medicine. We went to the medicine patch, and we collected medicinal herbs. Yes.

Adelia MacWilliam:

Yes. I would say without a doubt. It's been transformational to be engaged with the work of the poets and the artists that are included in this volume. In both volumes.

Paul E Nelson:

And to be their caretakers in presenting this to the world.

Adelia MacWilliam:

Yes.

Paul E Nelson:

What a joy it is to work with you both to Tetszen Jason Wirth and Adelia McWilliam. Thank you for your time and effort and for the joyous ride this has been. Thank you.

Jason Wirth:

Thank you.

Adelia MacWilliam:

Thank you. Thank you to both of you for the beautiful idea.

Paul E Nelson:

Cascadian Prophet supporters include Diana Elser, the sponsorship dedicated to her parents whose practicality, humor, and love of family life reflected their experience in and love for the Eastern Missouri Breaks and Western Ruby Valley, Montana landscapes that define their childhoods. Steinbrueck Native Gallery located near Pike Place Market in downtown Seattle, featuring fine art of the northwest coast from emerging and established artists. A link to their site at cascadianprophets.O-R-G.