

Exercise 1. ENERGIES

To work through that presentation, I'd like you to practice describing a landscape in Cascadia as an energy. We can make a few lists together, based on energies. I have pulled a few that we have already seen, to work with:

shining, darkening, glowing, rippling, and brightening.

I suggest you try applying all those terms to the same image or moment. The one below, perhaps:



Because it may help to name energies, there are invasive maple and elm trees, invasive asparagus and mustard, invasive green cheatgrass, and native goldenrod and sagebrush.

The trick here might be to represent the energies alone, one at a time, using the same image.

You will wind up with a poem on dark energy, picking out all the different ways it is displaying itself; one of glowing energy; and so on.

You can, of course, use glowing or darkening, or brightening (etc) for the same “objects”. Thus, the old cedar fenceposts could be glowing or darkening (for example) in differing poems. If you like, you can use the following image, too, taken at the same time, to broaden your view.



Because it may help to name energies, there is an invasive elm, invasive asparagus, mustard, and mullein, invasive white cheatgrass, native nootka rose, and native sagebrush in the fog. There's a thistle, too, possibly scotch thistle, possibly wavy thistle or edible thistle.

Exercise 2: Colouring.

This is a home exercise.

Name things that are yellow.

Name things that are blue.

Name things that are white.

Name things that are black.

Be specific. Those are your new language. To ensure it's Cascadian, do replace the words yellow, blue, white and black with Cascadian things.

Here are some examples:

Not *The yellow hills above Yakima*. That allows you to speak of the colours in a crayon box.

Use instead: *the bunchgrass hills above Yakima*.

That allows you to speak of bunchgrass and what it is doing environmentally, in comparison to the grass in orchards, vineyards, road ditches, hay fields, parks or lawns.

Or use: *the willow-yellow hills*.

That allows you to bind the hills with the willows in the creeks and wetlands below, the environmental relationship between the two, and the human relationship between them.

Or use: *the gold-finch yellow hills*.

That allows you to bring birds and the energy of birds into a tapestry of the valley as a whole.

All you have to do is make a list, title the list, and make a comment. I'll show you how to do that in a sec.

Exercise 3: Walking

This is a home exercise. The purpose of these exercises is to explore an approach towards Cascadia.

Go for a walk. Name things as you go. You can use an urban or a natural environment.

Example, from my road:

The drug house
The house with the blue door and the black dog.
The house with too many cats,
The house with the year-round party lights and bicycle spray-painted yellow.
The house with the untrimmed hedge.
The house with the marmot living under the front step.
The house with its front door hidden behind a willow tree.
The house with a river of stones being colonized by hawk skeleton weed between it and the road.
The house with the dog that stands on its back legs and turns around and around in circles when it barks.
The house with another rusty truck every year.
The house with the snow shoes nailed to the gable.
The house with the decorative cattle fence.
The stop sign.

These poems are maps. Make sure to give them a Cascadian title. For example:

Fifty Years Ago, This Was a Japanese Orchard

The drug house
The house with the blue door and the black dog.
The house with too many cats,
The house with the year-round party lights and bicycle spray-painted yellow.
The house with the untrimmed hedge.
The house with the marmot living under the front step.
The house with its front door hidden behind a willow tree.
The house with a river of stones being colonized by hawk skeleton weed between it and the road.
The house with the dog that stands on its back lakes and turns around and around in circles when it barks.
The house with another rusty truck every year.
The house with the snow shoes nailed to the gable.
The house with the decorative cattle fence.
The stop sign.

They can benefit from social commentary. Take a look:

Fifty Years Ago, This Was a Japanese Orchard

The drug house
The house with the blue door and the black dog.
The house with too many cats,
The house with the year-round party lights and bicycle spray-painted yellow.
The house with the untrimmed hedge.
The house with the marmot living under the front step.
The house with its front door hidden behind a willow tree.
The house with a river of stones being colonized by hawk skeleton weed between it and the road.
The house with the dog that stands on its back lakes and turns around and around in circles when it barks.
The house with another rusty truck every year.
The house with the snow shoes nailed to the gable.
The house with the decorative cattle fence.
The stop sign.

There are no shoulders on the road.
You take your life in your hands to walk into town.

or, this other last line instead:

Fifty Years Ago, This Was a Japanese Orchard

The drug house
The house with the blue door and the black dog.
The house with too many cats,
The house with the year-round party lights and bicycle spray-painted yellow.
The house with the untrimmed hedge.
The house with the marmot living under the front step.
The house with its front door hidden behind a willow tree.
The house with a river of stones being colonized by hawk skeleton weed between it and the road.
The house with the dog that stands on its back lakes and turns around and around in circles when it barks.
The house with another rusty truck every year.
The house with the snow shoes nailed to the gable.
The house with the decorative cattle fence.
The stop sign.

We are the tourist capital of northern Cascadia.

You could go on. In each case, it is a different poem, with different connections to emotions, and different realizations.

Memory is like that. Oral stories are like that, too.

Exercise 4: Mapping

This is a home exercise.

Write one of the following.

A poem that follows all the white things in the neighbourhood.

A poem that lists the birds that flew over by the hour.

A poem that lists the birds at any moment and where they are.

These are all maps of space, just as all poems are.

No birds? Try cars, or trees, or children, bus stops or farm workers. Make sure to give them a Cascadian title and to follow up with a last line. Perhaps one about energy or history or the news, because

one of the lessons of these exercises is to show the energy that exists in any spot of Cascadia at any time, and its ties with history. I mean, Cascadia is a place, but it's in conversation with people, just as people are in conversation with it.

And that's oral history.

Exercise 5: One Mind

This is a class exercise

1. List what your body sees, these 2 images.



We will get multiple views here.

This will be a poem we make together, a map of this body territory, with variations on the pattern,

“Harold sees a skull on a hill.
Harold sees a moon with a mouth.”

3. We will give it a title.
4. We will move the lines around in an order that stresses the energy we want to give forth.
4. We will end it with:

We are of one mind.

We should get a poem out of that! If not, we can try:

But we are of one mind.

This continues into the next exercise:

Exercise 6: Exercises on Word Replacement. ‘

This is an at-home exercise.

Here are some abstract words.

Understanding, Imagination, Calibration, Interiority, Emotion, Government, Ownership, Support, Freedom, partition, universalism, baptism, realism, optimism, organism, mechanism, naturalism, imperialism, magnetism, fanaticism, skepticism, theism, aphorism, euphemism, pragmatism, metabolism stoicism, adaptable, arable, communicable, explicable, flammable, malleable, insurmountable, navigable, pliable, palpable, renewable, transmutable, viable, delicacy, intimacy, intricacy, primacy, privacy, authoritarian, utilitarian, acquiescence, effervescence, efflorescence, evanescence, incandescence, iridescence, luminescence, blissful, bountiful, deceitful, distasteful, frightful, fruitful, graceful, healthful, meaningful, merciful, vilify, mollify, pacify, stultify, intensify, exemplify, ossify, altruism, criticism, egoism, empiricism, mutualism, ostracism, organism, boundless, careless, senseless, fruitless, effortless, peerless, relentless, remorseless, timeless, worthless, ecology, theology, sociology.

Pick ten and replace them with a moment of energy in Cascadia.

On this model:

Understanding: **I wanted her to accept that I was understanding.**

Becomes

I wanted her to accept me as a hawthorn twig dipping to the weight of a lazuli bunting.

Intricacy: **I loved the intricacy of his speech.**

Becomes:

I loved the way his speech became a series of sagebrush twigs lifting and falling together in wind.

Exercise 6:

This is an at-home exercise.

Call and Response.

(Pick one approach.)

Approach 1

1. Find some wood. Perhaps it's a board. Perhaps it's a stick. Tell it something you want to go out in the world. it can be a secret thing.
2. Take it to some flowing water. As you go there, record three things you saw along the way. Record something about the water and the shore, or the weather.
3. Throw it in the water.
4. Record three things you saw along the way.
5. Come back the next day. Your thoughts have flowed away with the wood, yet you are your thoughts coming back. Record three things you saw along the way. Record the place where your thoughts are now, or where they were. Record three things on the way back.
6. Make a title. Something like "How I learned to...." would start it well, I think.
7. Make a last line. Something like "And I'd hoped to..." might end it well. Your call.

Approach 2.

1. Lay thoughts on sand.
2. Leave.
3. Think of them later.
4. Come back to them.
5. Repeat a number of times.
6. Every time you come back, the time before adds to the density of the thought.

here's an example:

I laid a stone on sand.
In the dark, the moon laid with my gift.
The next day, I walked through the sagebrush to my thought.
Now we were all there: the sand, the stone, the moon, the sagebrush and my thought.
The next day it rained. I went back to think.
Now we were all there: the sand, the stone, the moon, the sagebrush, my thought, and the rain.
Then I told it to you. Now they're all in you. I see you there. I'm walking towards you right now.
You are my thought.

Exercise 7

This is an at-home exercise.

Repeat the above, but using memory instead of a stone, and a person instead of the physical world.

Here's an example from my book The Spoken World. I am visiting my friend, the poet Robin Skelton.

Closing the Gap

I knock on the door to let me in
and tip my hat and scuff

my shoes as I cross the lintel and greet
the man, half ghost, half spell,

who shakes my hand and claps my back.
He once was you. You have forgotten that.

He takes my coat and gives me drink
and talks of souls who find no rest

on autumn earth. He has gathered here
the shapes of thought, the spheres of art.

Feathers, candles, salt, black bread
answer quiet with words and words with me,

who he has answered, who I have called
across the rain and through the door

to this cold comfort and the lure of words
that will release what has been bound

and bind that which is lost. Found,
I find at last that I am home.

The door that closes
is the door that closing opens.

and another

The Spoken World

Since every word is a splinter
of the word God spoke,

or speaks, because the world is not
past but with us,

pheasants startle out of grass
in the dead vineyard,

a hawk sits on taut wire, cicadas cry,
the sun beats down,

although it often
seems it's yet to come,

the sun that rises over larches
rose yesterday,

and once again we will face it,
if not wiser,

touched by the sense that we belong
on earth

and what we say might
reflect our place,

it should be no surprise that broken
bones can be healed,

children whispered into life,
a lover's sadness cured,

by words. It should be
no surprise, but is,

at least, relief, that something
of this world still unfolds within music,

as we unfold in bars
and staves, breves

and cross breves, in time and measure,
the blossom from the black

winter bud, the fruit
from the blossom,

the laden branches touching grass.
Why then should we not speak, together,

of what is most intimate:
the way we move

together, and, moving,
still. It is a spell

we cast upon the forest trees,
the house that breaks

around us, the black air
rising up, the dizzy stars.