



## BLOEDEL RESERVE POETRY PROMPT PART III: ZEN SAND GARDEN

*G.C. Waldrep, December 2020*

There are three sets of prompts, keyed to three different locations in the Bloedel landscape: the hill overlooking the bird marsh; the benches on the bluff (behind the Residence, overlooking Puget Sound); and the Zen sand garden, by the Japanese guesthouse.

Directions: complete each instruction, in order. **Do not turn any page until you have completed the instruction(s) on that page.** Be outside when you begin, on-site. **Please take this printout with you, together with a pencil and a pen.**

You may work at one, two, or all three locations. You may skip prompts if they seem too difficult for you (although it's more fun to at least give each a try). You may respond in sentences, prose paragraphs, fragments, or verse—whatever feels natural to you.

The goal of this exercise is to sharpen your attention to both your inner landscape and the outer landscape that is Bloedel, to bring those two landscapes into relation with one another—which is how we actually experience any landscape, all landscape, without always being aware.

(This is part 3 of a 3-part set of prompts, at three locations in the Bloedel landscape. You may complete it on its own, or together with the other two parts.)

### III. Zen Sand Garden

*The Zen sand garden is beside the former Bloedel guesthouse (designed like a Japanese teahouse, but also with hints of First Nations longhouse construction)—point 26 on the official Bloedel Reserve map.*

xiv. SOUND: Please spend at least one minute (count it out if you must) contemplating the arrangement of rocks and sand in the Zen sand garden. Try to clear your mind of everything else.

Now listen. Can year hear the traffic passing on the 305?

One of the people driving by is your third cousin, whom you have never met. You don't know who she is, and she doesn't know you exist. Where is she going? What is she thinking right now? (1 stanza or paragraph)

xv. THE BODY: The American poet Theodore Roethke, who taught at the University of Washington, died here, where you are looking, in what was then the Bloedel family pool, in 1963. Roethke's most famous poem, about his father (a greenhouse owner in Michigan), was entitled "My Papa's Waltz."

Describe your parent(s) dancing.

If you have never seen your parent(s) dance, then describe how this makes you feel.

(Use simile or metaphor if necessary.) (1 stanza/paragraph)

xvi. THE UNDERWORLD: In 1982, landscape architect Richard Haag redesigned this spot to become what he called a “Garden of Planes.” Haag is responsible for the checkerboard pavers you see. But on the site of the pool, he installed two pyramids, one pointing up in the usual way, the other pointing down, into the ground, like a funnel into the earth. Prentice Bloedel disliked this and dismantled the pyramids in 1986, replacing them with the Zen sand garden you see now.

When was the last time you stepped into a gash or hole in the earth? (a basement, a house foundation, a pit, etc.)

What, if anything, did you take from that place? What, if anything, did you leave there? (1 stanza/paragraph)

xvii. OTHER THINGS THAT AREN'T ABOUT YOU: A meteor is flashing overhead right now, only you can't see it, because of all the daylight. There really isn't much more I can say about this, or that you can say about this. Things go on all the time; we miss most of them.

What is something you lost or broke as a child, that you still think about today, and/or regret?

xviii. MUSIC: You would like to hear some music, here, right now, in this place. Describe the music you would like to hear, if you could. (1 stanza/paragraph)

xix. WEDDINGS: Bloedel currently permits two, and only two, weddings on the grounds each year, because of the strain a wedding places on both the natural environment and the Bloedel staff.

If you were at a wedding here, right now, would you be happy or sad? Why? (1 stanza/paragraph)



## IV. By Way of Conclusion

xx. ROOMS: Richard Haag (who was only one of many landscapers and landscape architects the Collinses, Bloedels, and the Reserve have employed over the years) described the parts of the landscape he helped shaped as “rooms”: the Garden of Planes, the moss garden, the reflection pool, and the bird marsh. He had other rooms he had planned, that were never “built.”

Describe the room where you were born, or—if you have a child—the room in which your child was born.

If you can't do either of these things, then describe a natural “room” *you* would build here, at Bloedel. (1 paragraph)

xxiii. FINALLY: You find out, belatedly, that your great-grandmother, when she died, left you a small wooden box. You receive it in the mail, heavily wrapped in dark paper. Once you've unwrapped the box and opened it, you find inside a single candle, with no note or explanation.

Do you light the candle? If so, what happens when you do?

If you don't light it, what do you do with it, and why? (1-2 stanzas or paragraphs)