ECHO

a collection of ecopoetic works
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EQUINOX RITUAL WITH RAVENS & PINES
Brenda Hillman

—so we said to the somewhat: Be born—
& the shadow kept arriving in segments,
cold currents pushed minerals
up from the sea floor, up through
coral & labels of Diet Coke blame shame
bottles down there—
it is so much work to appear!

unreadable zeroes drop lamps
as mustard fields [Brassica rapa]
gold without hinges, a vital
echo of caring...On the census,
just write: it exists! Blue Wednesday
bells strike the air like forks
on a thrift store plate,
& the shadow moves off to the side...

In the woods, loved ones tramp through
the high grass; they wait in a circle
for the fire to begin;
they throw paper dreams & sins upon
the pyre & kiss, stoking the first
hesitant flame after touching a match
to the bad news— branches are thrust back
across myths before the flame catches—;
ravens lurch through double-knuckled
pines & the oaks & the otherwise;
a snake slithers over serpentine
then down to the first
dark where every cry has size —

(for EK & MS)

from Seasonal Works with Letters on Fire, 2013)
keep inside the lines & guard rails
not like we six days earlier went inside
the river, how it enfolded
us in green fragrant banks
how we merged with the current
how it motioned us, carried us forward in waves
toward light more light in pools light bent in
silver braids forward on tongues it whispered
us into eddies’ interludes, decanted
sun, the boulders curving into our eyes
in roundward angles, our ankles loose.
Not like that
river stretched the highway homeward
that we traveled,
quiet.
4.

Look closely at the mouth of a beetle: it has large, pinching mandibles; its “maxillae always bear palpae.” Beetles must force their way through the hard substance of the world which resists their scratching mandibles, but there is good news: the earth, in all of its density, is food; it is made of food and it makes food for beetles to slowly, delicately, gnaw.

5.

Beetles are the pebbles of the insect kingdom. They are rocks; they are perfectly formed stones. When beetles retreat underground into their tubular burrows, the forest does not follow but stays outside. The beetle pulls down moss behind itself to cover the small, perfectly round opening and seals the tunnel. The tunnel forms space outside of space. It exists in its own time: the time of the beetle, subterranean, woven into and among tree roots and decaying leaves, beside the secretive paths of moles and gophers. The beetles eat and they delicately groom their antennae; they stretch out veiny underwings. A beetle’s thorax contracts. Its abdomen sways. Its abdomen rests.

6.

Beetles mate. Their ritual is tender. He strokes her hardened outer shell with antennae and legs. His aedeagus contains the sperm; the organ is made of “sclerotized flaps and hooks.”

But the sperm is not loose; it cannot ooze: like the beetle, its sperm is contained, it rests in a discrete packet. To mate is to transfer the packet. It is a gift looked at through the multiplied view of compound eyes.

She receives the spermatophore inside her body. Its enclosure is double. The liquid holds inside its bundle as her canal gingerly dissolves the boundary. The border diffuses; jellies combine inside. This secretion holds its mystery. It keeps itself veiled from the dusty, hostile earth.
Arthropods exposed by beam of blacklight in the hands of gawkers
pick through ruin an arachnid’s neon
green stems phobias of eyes and ex-
oskeletons hidden at dusk look
backwards and retrace the steps taken
to arrive— What once grew here
buried with the aerial fuels of a
suburban fringe you have wanted an
encounter a shady ambrosial arroyo
of nothing says I love you like a dog
tag tapping on a chicken wire fence
jump the enclosure an abandoned
California neighborhood littered with
aluminum cans melted wheel wells
unknown zones of road wrapped over
hills DANGEROUS WHEN WET
means this is nowhere near contained

from “LANDSCAPES FOR FUTURE USE”
Ben Rutherford

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ON A DAY, IN THE WORLD
Brenda Hillman

We had a grief
we didn't understand while
standing at the edge of
some low scrub hills as if
humans were extra
or already gone;—

what had been in us before?
a life that asks for mostly
wanting freedom to get things done
in order to feel less
helpless about the end
of things alone—;

when i think of time on earth,
i feel the angle of gray minutes
entering the medium days
yet not “built-up”: our
work together: groups, the willing
burden of an old belief,

& beyond them love, as of
a great life going like fast
creatures peeling back marked
seeds, gold-brown integuments
the color time
will be when we are gone—

(from Extra Hidden Life, among the Days 2018)
THE BLOOD OF ANTARCTICA
Paul Cunningham

drowning
  at the surface
all of your arms and your labor mimed a lifeblood
    a dead metaphor

across great distances
pipelines, mines across great
distances
ancient ice layers
  rising
  trapped air
chemical analyses
  of red

a kind of blood whistles from Taylor glacier’s
arctic breast of carbon content
  of trace gases
  of wound-blue life

chemical analyses determine the body to be a site
to be hold
to reconstruct
a red glacier weeping its red
weeping the iron of our blood
no refuge from the sun

only the irony of another writer describing blood
as having a “rust” flavor a “metallic” taste

a Georgia creek might also taste of blood
and despite the organic peas mashed against your fork
the iron of your fork might also taste of blood

one day we might also taste
how much Antarctica is us
WAHPETON ON HIGHWAY 86
Genevieve Arlie

Can three months at a lakeside field station restore three years in a Morning-
side Heights apartment? How many Rapunzeled nights there I never sang the woods! Here the sun drops indigo a stone’s throw from my window clear to the prairie, right to the eye-level grass as it thrills to the wind. Woe to those two degrees of visible blue between five o’clock shadows of skyscrapers, horizon forfeit to skyline, excepting a solstice Manhattanhenge I never sojourned to see. Woe to the ash tree that caressed the air-conditioning unit in my courtyard window lushly leafed. Has anybody loved you since? Like Robinson Crusoe, I reverberate birdlike, do better alone.
IN SOME SENSES OF THE WORD
Brenda Hillman

The spirits stand round
in their bristly ovals. They don’t
really know what to do. A bobcat
hunts on the oblong
hill, its tan hunger ruffling
the saturn grasses. A day
brings velvet fog to the warm
ground. The wren with the n
at the edge of its nest
makes all sounds eat
from earth while lost things turn
& circulate. Stuck

in your golden thought, dreaming
of apocalypse or blood, you call
to the dead, not sure now.
You call to the body, much closer than
a place. Your brain makes a chant:

At the edge of the wood
it will know where to turn
At the edge of the world
they might know we’re to turn
At the edge of the word
we may know here to turn

(for coven51 & for CA Conrad)
This book of ecopoetry was created with a love of the earth and collaboration. It is inspired by Brenda Hillman’s work and her planned visit to University of Georgia in April of 2020. This visit and the physical publication of the book is postponed due to COVID-19. In an effort to share this work, this digital publication was created. This book was designed and published by Alex McClay. Special thanks to Mark Callahan, Ideas for Creative Exploration, Jed Rasula, and Eileen Wallace.