

Wild Hearts, Silent Traces and the Journeys of Lament

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I

We live in skittering times, when the old reliables of our own invention are beginning to crack.

There is both sadness and adventure ahead, and there is pain to pay for the somnabulent beliefs in our own dominion.

Children sit in the middle of this maelstrom, full of belly giggles and little night tremor jolts, waiting for us to respond in kind.

Waiting.

“— have you forgotten?

All the children are Wild.”¹

The old pedagogies will no longer do in the face of the ecologies of flesh and bone and breath and air, and the Earth’s dear heart, torn.

“you lived there

— have you forgotten?”²

What we have forgotten is that, below the distended head we carry like a crown, we live there still, we live there now, entrails wound around trees and down into Earth’s moist substance.

An open wound we bear in the belly “— have you forgotten?”³

These children are some of us and we are some of them, wild, full of the ecologies of flesh and bone and breath

and air filled with ancient smells and smoke spirals on the hills.

And the fluttersound of nightbirds, not quite seen out of the wetflesh twinkle corners of the eye.

All around us is the urgency, borne up out of the dark gut and assaulting the head which we came to believe in as a fortress against death, against touching winds, against those little unmarked joys that the whiff of cedar brings without expectation.

That luxurious isolation is over.

Our words bleed out into the Earth’s fleshy countenance.

The open wound that is our fleshy measured life.

“Relentless clock of meat”⁴

Healed over only at great casualty

And we find that we live on an Earth which will take away our breath as surely as it now bestows it.

II

Old voices in old keys in old harmonies are beginning to sing again, composing and decomposing without our notice, echoing within.

Composing and decomposing.

The chest becomes a dark chamber and the breath a black wind dancing out into the Earth's embrace.

Frosting up into winter air, white, and sucked back in to moist tubular shadows.

Our essays are borne up and sung in throats and written in blood and etched on skin, then fading, falling, making soils rich and fertile again.

The pedagogies of precious returning.

The curriculum full again of courses running as they must.

As they always have unnoticed for so long "— have you forgotten?"⁵

"Rainwater moves from mystery through pattern back into mystery."⁶

"We are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us, for it beats in our very blood, whether we want it to or not."⁷

Water trickled into valleys and crevices, hidden from our search for givens that would place all things before us.

Springing forth again the inevitabilities that lace our lives to Earthlife whole and hale.

Our lives are instances of this Earth life, occasions where the whole Earth breathes out and speaks.

We are instance not exception.

We are not exceptional, for the Grey Jay swoop for scraps and the little wet watermelon peel limping to decay on the compost heaped to wasp and flybuzz squirm of returning are also articulations of the whole.

Stillwarm horseshit piled on the compost erupting with peas and potatoes, vague miracles.

More articulate, more reliable, more full of rich integrity than the mumbled numbness of our lucid charts and maps.

"Stubborn particulars of grace"⁸ where the whole is ushered "*here and here and here.*"⁹

Where the whole is held here in harmonies of kinship *here*, with *this one*.

And like whispers to like in ways we did not invent.

Ways which hold us up and measure the echo our footfall, again in harmonies unnoticed.

These children are some of us and we are some of them, wild kin, full of the ecologies of flesh and bone and breath and air.

"An order of memories preserved in songs and stories, in *ways*."¹⁰

This essay is an Earthly event, full of dark soils and the long neck quivers of ducks finding south again as they must.

This is the balancing act of a phenomenology: to retain the exquisiteness of *this* while at once cracking it open, eggyolk yellow sunlight breakfast winterwindows crackled with ice.

This is the balancing act of a pedagogy: to retain the exquisiteness of this child's life while at once cracking it open into the textures of the Earth.

Signs of spring whiffed in the sun now arcing higher.

III

Old green ears are growing again on the sides of hills, in the drips of rainwater moving from mystery to pattern to mystery.

Our hearts somehow know that they are growing *again*.

Something is being stirred in this skitter and slip.

And it doesn't come from before but from beneath, belieing the swoon of memory and the romantic fantasies for a childhood none of us ever really lived.

We encase wild hearts that know of their beating if knowing is placed back where it belongs, in the meat between the ribs and the pull downwards of faint gravities.

"— have you forgotten?"¹¹

This is not longing for long ago, but longing for times now that are old, long-standing.

A longing and a grieving, "opened out."¹²

"Grief is not a permanent state; it is a room with a door on the other wall."¹³

Going down into the flesh wound that droops below the head, wild at heart¹⁴ and silent.

"Wounds need to be expanded into air, lifted up on ideas our ancestors knew, so that the wound ascends through the roof of our parents' house, and we suddenly see how our wound (seemingly so private) *fits* . . ."¹⁵

But it is too easy to be caught in the Enlightenment metaphors of height, ascendancy, and light.

Ascendancies which *let go* of the entrail wounds and spiral out of sight of the Earth and our fleshy inheritances.

The talk that seems to be no-one's, that seems to come from nowhere, dispossessed, dis-embodied, draping a hidden child robbed of his wildness.

Developmental theories always proceed *up* to higher and higher stages.

(Daddy is tall and strong and has dominion over all things.)

Peeling off layers of flesh as they go, cleaving the abdomen and climbing up into the head.¹⁶

We grow *up*.

We imagine an Earth left behind and a fleshless Epistemic Ego.

Puffed full of Teutonic accuracy and a mathematics cleaned of its contingencies, life gutted like a trout, slit from chin to belly, leaving the head intact, eye blinking, *thinking* that therefore it is.

But consider.

Ecology doesn't move us *back* to a time before, but *back down* to a place filled with darkness *now*.

The flesh wound that droops below the blinking head, wild at heart and silently out among the Earth's ways already, breath and bone and air.

Portals half open, half lit, half noticed.

"Opportunities are not plain, clean gifts; they trail dark and chaotic attachments to their unknown backgrounds, luring us further."¹⁷

The underbelly shadows that lurk our lucid givens, plain and clean.

The taking-away inevitably that comes with our gifts.

The losses laced to gains, coming and going, "a swinging gate."¹⁸

Suggestions, possibilities, provocations, hints, and hopes and glancing blows luring our speech out into the open.

Throats filled with aspiring breath plumed out into the winter air.

The forgotten and frightened asthmatic little boy that giggles under the guises of maturity, vicious now in his wildness, breath denied, aspirations barely understood.

It will take time to forgive myself — I hid and did the right thing in such hiding — and to find the fierceness hidden in the hostility.

It will take time to forgive myself and outlive the hidden fears that lurk in the moist eyecorners.

Breath halts.

Stalking the woods, a deer's antler arcs up out of the snow, framing deadrustle grasses and red berries.

IV

Buried under the weighty heads we carry there is an Earth going on without our re-signing.

Buried under the weighty enclosure of our own words and signs and significations there is a going-out into the Earth's ways.

Embodied ways, fleshy ways, the bounce and bump and muddy squishes that we educate children out of, teaching them as we do to climb up into their heads and join our frightened numbers, our sad enumerations.

The Earth becomes mathematized and things don't quite add up any more.

Our living becomes vaguely incomprehensible.

But once the words and signs and significations begin to crack open and slip and shift, the choices become clear.

And postmodernism (that ugly designation for what comes after our heady confidences) becomes either the beginning or the end.

The difference is so important that our lives depend on it in ways that we can't name.

It may be ushering the totalization of signs.

The totalization of urban(e) theorizing done by those who have nothing else to do, who have no real work to plant them in a place — *here*, not just anywhere — except skittered sign play and who live in places *constructed* of skittered signs.

Where sign refers to sign refers to sign refers to sign and we become wrapped up senseless in this soft cocoon of words.

This soft cocoon of words.

Hanging by a thin ligament somewhere, precariously near the mucous lips of a predator threading its way along the thin branches.

Chomp.

This makes postmodernism the consummation (chomp) of the long history of re-presentation.

Our Earthly flesh becomes pictures out in front of us, readied and steadied for pornographic delightenment and manipulated interpenetrations and the educated giggle of drunken literati who tongue-cluck at the ways of the hand and the breath and the heart.

Accusations of feigned naiveties.

And speech finds its consummation (chomp) in advertising and the semantic twists of political charm.

Speech with no depth that can no longer wind its way into wounds that open out beyond their designations.

Speech which is not only a wafer-thin surface but which elevates the plays of such surfaces to the status of literacy.

Signs that have lost their point, their prick.¹⁹

The male with no fierceness, caged by the confusion of hostility with wildness.²⁰

And these impotent surface plays of presentabilities are finally wrapped back around themselves like a winding-cloth, swaddling the infant from movement or shrouding the unmoving dead.

Laughs begin as the air in this air-locked vault shallows, unnoticeable at first.

Muffling grins begin to pus.

Post-modernism as a last gasp, hopeless.

Not the portend of a last word, but the ugly truth that now we can *never* stop talking, that all we have is the world of words that we have made.

"A world made of words."²¹

That our lives are stories and no longer that which the story might be *about* and might fail to fully say.

Nothing left to hold us back from designing all things.

Full announcement, self-possessed: our ascendancy is complete.

And at that moment, the nightbirds turn away and scatter,

The eagle's winding arc widens, soon to be unseen.

The frightened deer no longer venture to this pool to drink deep draughts of cold water.

Ecology reminds us that if *this* is what postmodernism is (mis?)understood to be, it is a sign of impending death.

V

Or perhaps it is the totalization of signs to the point where the pus-y facade *cracks* open.

Perhaps it is the totalization of signs to the point where the *difference* between the surface signs and the hidden depths becomes unavoidable in our signing.

We must now talk about the fact that our lives are different than our words, that our children are different than what we say, but that, in the midst of such difference, kindness ensues, and like speaks to like without our earnest intervention.

And to talk of such Earthly belonging, our talk becomes hesitant, stuttered, skittery, single-sentenced.

Like this.

And "whatever remains unsaid in us is forever angling to come into view."²²

Caught and glimpsed but not captured.

"Poetry is a tool, a net or trap to catch and present; a sharp edge; a medicine, or a little awl that unties knots."²³

It squirms in our nets.

It squirms in our nets.

Yellowslit eyes and a heartbeat you can taste in the air, surge electric nickelspittle fear.

Postmodernism as a sign of life bubbling under the signs.

And this paradox is good news, something we must learn to live with.

It is a herald, a clang, a bell, an echo.

And it sits in the belly, not the head, below the wheeze of discursion.

If this reading is the right one, postmodernism is inhabited by a vital pedagogic impulse.

That under the burgeoning edifices of educational theory and the slick tricks of practice and the earnest reflectiveness of the practitioner, children are giggling and dancing out into the flesh of the Earth's ways.

That under the edifices our own lives giggle and dance, wild kin to the new ones.

Deeper hints that our edifices may be forms of ecological disaster wrought on the wild heart of children.

Wrung into the wild heart of the Earth.

Words and effort and energy wasted.

There are 107 developmental strands to the proposed new Alberta Language Arts Curriculum Guide.

Think of what is required to sustain such a beast, to feed it, to keep track of it, to dispose of its waste.

To move its taming bulk into the wild areas of language and the wild heart of children.

Think of how convinced we must be that the edifice of signs will suffice if only we are effortful and artful enough in our accuracies.

We all feel the urgencies all around us.

Things beginning to slip and shift.

And we run faster as a result, multiplying our divisions in the sad Enlightenment hope of outrunning our fleshy inheritance, needing to keep track of every meticulous articulation and subdivision of our own unsustainable invention.

Losing our love of language and our sense for its aromas, our ears for its harmonies.

It may be that this life bubbling under the signs needs not a word from us, not a word.

That like might *already* speak to like without our earnest intervention, needing only our gentle attention, mindful to the ways that whisper within and without.

In the little sidewalk crevice dirt, a dandelion whispers up and burps a million seeds, unseen.

We need not feel guilt for the Enlightenment parade and the measured steps we ascended.

That silent, gentle force that turns plants to light is the silent, gentle force that dragged us up in to our heads.

What we need is lament and mourning and grieving for what we have done in the name of our own ascendancies and aspirations.

We need loud wails and drums beaten and quiet halts in the midst of things and prayers shouted out into the exhaustible air blue arch.

We need re-mem-bering of our love of the Earth signed in the breath and beating in the blood whether we know it or not.

VI

Ecology keeps whispering in our ears that the sealing off of signs from things is the sealing off of things from signs, so that signs are no longer readable as signs of anything else but further signs.

Notice that these dragonflies *hover* and they can halt the inward curvatures of sun, and round the sky, waiting, ancient things, buzzed of swamp and moisture and Earthy smells, *insects*, built in ligamented sections, hard, brittle, flat black and bright green, this one, hovering.

Its hovering is a sign that there are flowers nearby.

But it will finally *light* somewhere in recognition that it does not contain its life in it hovered signing, but relies for its life on the moment of inter-section.

Leaving behind faint pollen traces that belong there, borne to new life, unable without this inter-section.

Beyond the signs to signs to signs to signs there is *already* an Earth which works perfectly well without our tracing words and in whose harmonies we already live.

Our forest turns to winter and the heartache can be felt only in the traces of the work done there, in the traces of the breath spirals exhausted there in gathering wood for the cold's delight, in the marks on the hands and in the heart.