

Prolegomenon to the Inhabitation of Trees

Having once in Alberta
heard references to “tree huggers” I was
moved to try it. Just to
see. The experience was
 cold
 rough
 hard
with a hint of damp.
Like a construction site on a wet day.

I felt quite alone.

✘

I had found myself a spot, high in the crown of a Scotch pine, which
swayed.

“*Homo sapiens*

is not a species much acclimatized to
the inhabitation of arboreal space,” remarked a crow, perched on the topmost
spire of the neighbouring spruce. “We, *Corvus brachyrhynchos*,
have no word in our language for *fall*
(at least, any that declines grammatically beyond chicks or eggs).”

The crow jeered

“*Caw*,” which, I recalled reading in
O’Grady and Dubrovsky’s *Contemporary Linguistic Analysis:
An Introduction* might be rendered in English
as “fly to a higher branch.”

✧

Come up into my tree,

I plead—
the tree on 120th Avenue with the yellow leaves,
where your grandfather's lengthy tangled beard
perches often on a branch,
like an epiphytic wort,
in a cloud of smoke,
which floats there
bottled in the walls of leaves.

Therein perch I with my guitar
playing a lute song accompaniment
carefully rehearsed for the occasion
and imagining a voice
singing it, the song.

"Come again, sweet love doth now invite" it
was called,
and the cars drove by
as if the tree were a home in time and they outside.
Up into my tree, I beseech her
to climb,

into my tree.

✧

Why inhabit the tree?

The thesis:
Because of the language we speak
with household things
with pots and pans and armchairs, windows
reflecting ourselves inside in lamplight,
and our guests of an evening.

To make the tree, its bark and leaf
ours, a thing of home, of home's warmth,
a homely household god
encompassed close within with us.

And then the antithesis: the wild
life of the tree:
its roots surpassing history:
foreign entirely to us. The tree outside,
the tree with-out of time
which contains the universe,
the opaque, unfathomable tree,
tongue of the world that swallows up
our life inside it.

Synthesize,
let the floor of your world
rise up from the ground.
Let your body branch out and acquire leaves.

Embrace
vegetality.
There are risks, of course (that tree I fell out of
before Alex's wedding made me limp for months), but
they are shared, and it is time
for us for once, finally, to take the initiative—
to stop leaving everything to
the civic-mindedness of trees.

Reply to Tim Lilburn's "Quill Lake" but Addressed to Trevor Herriot, Who Was There That Day Too (after Bede and *Beowulf*)

Into this Heorot, Herriot, where the flaming sun-hearth beats against gleaming tables of sand—
into this Heorot it is no mere sparrow that flutters in under the eaves—no mere sparrow out the
long dark where the ice lies thick on the blackened twigs, the berries sparkling, magnified in
their crystal coatings against untracked snow—into the brief mead hall wherein we shelter,
raising high our horns whence the bright mead trickles down across our beards.

No, Herriot,
this is a parliament
you alone could denominate—
an echo chamber of phalarope, killdeer,
widgeon, godwit, sandpiper, avocet, curlew, dowitcher, willet,
and the proud galleons of pelican ruddering the sky's ogives,
their distant isle like a wire basket of golfballs
though peppered with cormorants.

No, this pod, this siege, this fling is pouring,
haemorrhaging through the gap beneath the ridgepole,
the sheer weight of the voices
waves of them, pressing against our hyoids,
crescendoing till it is a
seethe of sound far transcending Ockeghem or Ligeti,
then wheeling once above the burnished tables of sand
lifted blindly on shimmering beach thermals,
spring's briefest blink across the land
then out again
in a torrent, leaving behind
a blue silhouette eidetic on our lidded eyes,
their crushing universal polychord
imprinted on our minds.

The Summer of Storms

Languid the evening lingers low an hour.
The sunset's stalled in the drowsy, yawning sprawl
of Office Depot open late, the flowering

Air is smeared and purple stains the asphalt.
The velvet suit lapel of the parking lot ionizes dusk.
Small breaths of ozone rise. Fall.

Beyond the sheers of Albert Street, light is tossed,
on Taylor Field broadcasting its coppery voices
along pneumatic tubes of mist, is lost,

and disarrayed in the tangled vapours. I sense rejoicing
emanating from the crackling radiance of the arc-lights there.
The cashier and I plunge the wall of moisture.

It is hard work to breathe this opiate air.
It takes concentration. To focus, she takes my hand.
We are children. Around us steamy haloes layer.

They form isobars. Our concentric outlines are decanted,
from air the sky has spiked with chloroform,

a cloud amoeba slumps, swallows up the land
Reverberant with rumours of the storm.

Weeping Birch

The birch in dire need of exfoliation, dermabrasion,
curling gold leaf of the bark's illuminated lettering
mouthed in the pure mood of the day.

How the sky decides.
Deicide? Not deicide?

You sit on the lawn.

The winds are all around you.

Fruit bats hang from the trees, their noses arching
up to savour each draught.

There is a golden fish in the sky, and scales
raining down as infill for the gleaming world:
laminating a background to the Byzantine Christ of the birch.