

Four Poems

JD Smith¹

Anti-Midas²

Whatever he touched
would turn to dry dirt
or, worse,
a ferment of leaf mold,
great slops of mud,
silt and clay
interspersed with turds,
the rest sand and loam.

He shrank from throne and country
and died convinced of his defeat,
leaving the people to their fields,
which for once yielded
enough to eat.

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² Published in the Canadian electronic publication *Qarrtsiluni* (<http://qarrtsiluni.com>).

Comparisons to a New Climate³

Like a summer's day
given over to scrub and vines
and to such beasts as can live on them,
like a scarcely cooler night
over widening torrid zones and deepening desert,
the mountaintops bare.

Like nothing seen by the cave painters
or the species they portrayed.

Like having conjured fire with an incantation
that brings a meteor.

³ Published in the American electronic publication *Punchnel's* (<http://www.punchnels.com/>).

To Watch the Animals

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd;
I stand and look at them long and long. (Walt Whitman)

To watch the animals
as more than travelers across a field of vision,
more than objects spotted in a vehicle's window,
may start by taking in the way their forms
partake of the same proportions
as the matter they arose from,
how movements make known
a needful task and its doing,
each shape turned on adaptation's lathe.
Viewed long enough, the strangest bird
reveals the purpose of its stilt legs, crooked beak,
its kaleidoscope or plain feathers.
The actions of a single creature
or the collectives of its kind
manifest a decorum free of motion
for the sake of motion
or depthless hunger for being seen.

The bowerbird's estate of bright debris
accrues no interest, nor lies dead over generations.
A goat presumes only to stand on its shed.
Though a cat traps a sparrow in its claws,
packs of orcas rend other whales' calves for sport,
their campaigns will not metastasize into a manifesto
or go forth under a banner's shadow.

Across that distance, a voice may echo
with a wish to draw near, if not meet.
Some would call it an illusion,
which it may be.
Yet to ourselves, if no one else,
we are known by the size of our dreams.

Sequence⁴

By craft I led the black otter onto land,
then calmed it with a drug and other sorcery.

Another raised the knife
and dressed the flesh.
Roasted, it was bitter
like a stone or a scroll,
and it could not nourish me.

In the next dream I tried swimming from myself
and reached only the end of the pool.

⁴ Forthcoming in Issue #20 of *The Other Journal* (www.theotherjournal.com).