

Jim Thompson's Spiritual Poetry Class #56

Wednesday, May 26, 2021

5 pm PT

Dear Friends:

Three powerful poems with no prelude this week. Swamped getting ready to head to the Treaty People Gathering (<https://treatypeoplegathering.com/>) in Minnesota to join the Stop Line 3 action.

No class the next two Wednesdays. Next class will be Wednesday, June 16, 2021.

Here are the poems — two cool things about the first and third poems & poets, to be revealed in class.

- **Vanishing** by Brittney Corrigan
- **Antidotes to Fear of Death** by Rebecca Elson
- **Imagine the Angels of Bread** by Martín Espada

Here's the link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81374816274?pwd=eG1PRUxoWC9iTjFaTHFBNTBrNkIvQT09>

Passcode: **704824**

Note: This link and passcode are good for classes through July 28, 2021.

+ + Jim

Vanishing

—Brittney Corrigan

Nearly one-third of the wild birds in the United States and Canada have vanished since 1970, a staggering loss that suggests the very fabric of North America's ecosystem is unraveling.

—The New York Times (September 19, 2019)

As the world's cities teem
with children—flooding
our concrete terrains with shouts
and signs—as the younglings balance
scribbled Earths above their heads,
stand in unseasonal rain
or blistering sun,

the birds quietly lessen
themselves among the grasslands.
No longer a chorus but a lonely,
indicating trill: Eastern meadowlark,
wood thrush, indigo bunting—
their voices ghosts in the
chemical landscape of crops.

Red-winged blackbirds veer
beyond the veil. Orioles
and swallows, the horned lark
and the jay. Color drains from
our common home so gradually,
we convince ourselves
it has always been gray.

(continued)

Little hollow-boned dinosaurs,
you who survived the last extinction,
whose variety has obsessed
scientific minds, whose bodies
in the air compel our own bodies
to spread and yearn—
how we have failed you.

The grackles are right to scold us,
as they feast on our garbage
and genetically-modified corn.
Our children flock into the streets
with voices raised, their anger
a grim substitute
for song.

ANTIDOTES TO FEAR OF DEATH

—Rebecca Elson

Sometimes as an antidote
To fear of death,
I eat the stars.

Those nights, lying on my back,
I suck them from the quenching dark
Til they are all, all inside me,
Pepper hot and sharp.

Sometimes, instead, I stir myself
Into a universe still young,
Still warm as blood:

No outer space, just space,
The light of all the not yet stars
Drifting like a bright mist,
And all of us, and everything
Already there
But unconstrained by form.

And sometime it's enough
To lie down here on earth
Beside our long ancestral bones:

To walk across the cobble fields
Of our discarded skulls,
Each like a treasure, like a chrysalis,
Thinking: whatever left these husks
Flew off on bright wings.

Imagine the Angels of Bread

—Martín Espada

This is the year that squatters evict landlords,
gazing like admirals from the rail
of the roofdeck
or levitating hands in praise
of steam in the shower;

this is the year
that shawled refugees deport judges
who stare at the floor
and their swollen feet
as files are stamped
with their destination;

this is the year that police revolvers,
stove-hot, blister the fingers
of raging cops,
and nightsticks splinter
in their palms;

this is the year that dark skinned men
lynched a century ago
return to sip coffee quietly
with the apologizing descendants
of their executioners.

This is the year that those
who swim the border's undertow
and shiver in boxcars
are greeted with trumpets and drums
at the first railroad crossing
on the other side;

(continued)

this is the year that the hands
pulling tomatoes from the vine
uproot the deed to the earth that sprouts
the vine,
the hands canning tomatoes
are named in the will
that owns the bedlam of the cannery;

this is the year that the eyes stinging from the poison that purifies toilets
awaken at last to the sight
of a rooster-loud hillside,
pilgrimage of immigrant birth; this is the year that cockroaches
become extinct, that no doctor
finds a roach embedded
in the ear of an infant;

this is the year that the food stamps
of adolescent mothers
are auctioned like gold doubloons,
and no coin is given to buy machetes
for the next bouquet of severed heads
in coffee plantation country.

If the abolition of slave-manacles
began as a vision of hands without manacles, then this is the year;
if the shutdown of extermination camps
began as imagination of a land
without barbed wire or the crematorium,
then this is the year;

if every rebellion begins with the idea
that conquerors on horseback are not many-legged gods, that they too drown
if plunged in the river,
then this is the year.

So may every humiliated mouth,
teeth like desecrated headstones,
fill with the angels of bread.