

THE CHANCE TO LOVE EVERYTHING

All summer I made friends
with the creatures nearby —
they flowed through the fields
and under the tent walls,
or padded through the door,
grinning through their many teeth,
looking for seeds,
suet, sugar; muttering and humming,
opening the breadbox, happiest when
there was milk and music. But once
in the night I heard a sound
outside the door, the canvas
bulged slightly—something
was pressing inward at eye level.
I watched, trembling, sure I had heard
the click of claws, the smack of lips
outside my gauzy house—
I imagined the red eyes,
the broad tongue, the enormous lap.
Would it be friendly too?
Fear defeated me. And yet,
not in faith and not in madness
but with the courage I thought
my dream deserved,
I stepped outside. It was gone.
Then I whirled at the sound of some
shambling tonnage.
Did I see a black haunch slipping
back through the trees? Did I see
the moonlight shining on it?
Did I actually reach out my arms
toward it, toward paradise falling, like
the fading of the dearest, wildest hope—
the dark heart of the story that is all
the reason for its telling?

— Mary Oliver

RECOVERING ROOTS

Reach for the higher
Desert places of your self
All calm and clear

And see
Now all things rise
To flourish and return,
Each creature coming home
To recover its roots.

Recovering the root
means just this:
The dynamics of peace—
Being recalled to our common fate
In the kinship of all creation.

Knowing this eternal truth
One sees all things with
Extraordinary clarity—
Eternity's radiant light.

Blind to this light
Leaders sow the seeds of
Reckless deed and their
Evil fruits.

But when rulers plant
By this constant star
They embrace the world
And serve it fairly,
Guiding the world
On the celestial path,
And pass death's gate
On the everlasting way.

— from Tao Te Ching
trans. by Tom Early

MOTHER EARTH, HER WHALES

An owl winks in the shadows
A lizard lifts on tiptoe, breathing hard
Young male sparrow stretches up his neck,
big head, watching—

The grasses are working in the sun. Turn it green.
Turn it sweet. That we may eat.
Grow our meat.

Brazil says, “sovereign use of Natural Resources”
Thirty thousand kinds of unknown plants.
The living actual people of the jungle
sold and tortured
And a robot in a suit who peddles a delusion called “Brazil”
can speak for them?

The whales turn and glisten, plunge
and sound and rise again,
Hanging over subtly darkening deeps
Flowing like breathing planets
in the sparkling whorls of
living light —

And Japan quibbles for words on
what kinds of whales they can kill?
A once-great Buddhist nation
dribbles methyl mercury
like gonorrhea
into the sea.

Pere David’s deer, the Elaphure,
Lived in the tule marshes of the Yellow River
Two thousand years ago— and lost its home to rice —
The forests of Lo–Yang were logged and all the silt &
Sand flowed down, and gone, by 1200 A. D.

Wild geese hatched out in Siberia
head south over basins of the Yang, the Huang,
what we call “China”
on flyways they have used a million years.
Ah China, where are the tiger, the wild boars,
the monkeys,
like the snows of yesteryear

POETRY OF DEEP CONNECTIONS

Gone in a mist, a flash, and the dry hard ground
Is parking space for fifty thousand trucks.
IS man most precious of all things?
—then let us love him, and his brothers, all those
Fading living beings—

North America, Turtle Island, taken by invaders
 who wage war around the world,
May ants, may abalone, otters, wolves and elk
Rise! and pull away their giving
 from the robot nations.

Solidarity. The People.
Standing Tree People!
Flying Bird People!
Swimming Sea People!
Four-legged, two-legged, people!
 How can the head-heavy power-hungry politic scientist
 Government two-world Capitalist–Imperialist
 Third–world Communist paper-shuffling male
 non–farmer jet–set bureaucrats
 Speak for the green of the leaf? Speak for the soil?

(Ah Margaret Mead...do you sometimes dream of
 Samoa?)
 The robots argue how to parcel out our Mother Earth
To last a little longer
 like vultures flapping
Belching, gurgling,
 near a dying doe.

“In yonder field a slain knight lies—
we’ll fly to him and eat his eyes
 with a down
 derry derry derry down.”

An Owl winks in the shadow
A lizard lifts on tiptoe
 breathing hard
The whales turn and glisten
 plunge and

Sound, and rise again
Flowing like breathing planets
 In the sparkling whorls
 Of living light.

It is not the case that man,
as the being possessed of the highest intellect,
stands alone in the universe.
His mind is also the mind
of birds and beasts,
of grass and trees.

— Chu Hsi (1130-1200 A.D.)

EARTH DWELLER

It was all the clods at once become
precious; it was the barn, and the shed,
and the windmill, my hands, the crack
Archie made in the axe handle: oh, let me stay
here humbly, forgotten, to rejoice in it all;
let the sun casually rise and set.

If I have not found the right place,
teach me, for, somewhere inside, the clods are
vaulted mansions, lines through the barn sing
for the saints forever, the shed and windmill
rear so glorious the sun shudders like a gong.

Now I know why people worship, carry around
magic emblems, wake up talking dreams
they teach to their children: the world speaks.
The world speaks everything to us.
It is our only friend.

—William Stafford

TORQUE

One day all the people come out on the street
and look at each other. Something is at
their throats, or as if a big magnet has hummed
and surrounded them with lines in the air.

Face gazes at face and then
up at the sky—nothing. Backs
arch, arms tighten and pull
out like limbs of trees, trembling.

But there is nothing. And it passes away.
People relax and stand there. The sun
is the same. Down the street a car
revs as usual. Nothing. Nothing.

Suppose this happens. The world looks
tame, but it might go wild, any time.

—William Stafford

THE DREAM OF NOW

When you wake to the dream of now
from night and its other dream.
you carry day out of the dark
like a flame.

When spring comes north, and flowers
unfold from earth and its even sleep,
you lift summer on with your breath
lest it be lost ever so deep.

Your life you live by the light you find
and follow it on as well as you can,
carrying through darkness wherever you go
your one little fire that will start again.

— William Stafford

THE DANDELION

One summer day the boy walked out into the pasture to be alone. The land was flat, but he knew a place where maybe many years ago someone had taken out a big rock, and now there was a little dent in the grass, big enough to lie down in and not be seen. This is where he went, even though he knew it was where everybody went who wanted to hide.

He lay down on his back and looked straight up into the sky. Now and then he saw an insect fly over, and after a while he saw a chicken hawk making a big circle above him, so high it must have been cruising the air for fun, not looking for field mice or dead chickens. He heard animals cough a long distance away. He heard wind in the grass and the faint sound of a screen door closing. He heard a tractor start and then stop again. He turned on his side and closed his eyes. He could smell the grass, and when he put his face down to the earth he could smell something deeper than the grass, a sweet lemony smell at the very roots of the pasture. He felt the sun warm his face and turned toward it again. When he opened his eyes, he saw a dandelion a few inches away, its yellow more yellow than he had ever seen. and as he stared at this silly meadow weed, he saw it breathe, its golden face like a tiny chest taking in and letting out—the dandelion was breathing!

He stood up, faced the direction of the farm buildings and the chores that were probably waiting for him. He had been alone too long. He had almost gone too far with this. He took off, running back toward the farm buildings like someone who just can't wait to see everybody.

— Jim Heynen