

The Birds: Pathway: Wrenday 2020

written by Jennifer Calkins | January 27, 2020



1.

A common raven *Corvus corax* high overhead.
Not so common, and beneath, where I stand only

A window a mirror
But no blood.

Are you listening?

This essay is a call to your imagination and desire to be free.

Freedom is a word and something else.

2.

Shall I sing again, the mummer's song, the wrenhunter's song, song of the fine line between human and nonhuman—scraped in the sand, scraped in the trunk of the great coast Douglas fir *Pseudotsuga menziesii*, scraped in the granite boulder rolled down and down and a millennia ago come to rest at the edge of the ice front.

Here the glittering woodmoss *Hylocomium splendens*.

Here the seemingly omnipresent sword ferns *Polystichum munitum*.

Keep up your bright swords for the dew will rust them

So far this December I have not seen

In the west, widespread, common . . . it has completely disappeared from most areas east of the Mississippi River during the last few decades. The reasons for this vanishing act are poorly understood.

Bewick's wren, tail perk

*Now the gallows are empty
they search but find us gone*

3.

*Aristotle thought earthquakes were caused by winds trapped in subterranean
caves
We're more scientific now, we know
it's just five guys fracking the fuck out of the world while it's still legal*

For the past several years I have written a wren-day piece
because December is the wrenhunt.

*Haunting always harbors violence, the witchcraft and denial that made it, and
the exile of our longing, the utopian*

Because, always, we need to reach toward the other/animal.

*I will let go of my heart, I will send it away
As far as I can, I can, I can
and still farther, it is a wild muscle, they
say, it beats*

I started this essay in a vacuum. Then, last week I heard a Bewick's wren
Thryomanes bewickii

The creature need not be watched

And two days ago I saw one. *T. bewickii*, tail perked, branch to branch.

Mama, here comes midnight with the dark moon in its jaws

And yesterday, two.

4.

Hellfire burns but it does not shed light

I do not believe the world is ending. But it is burning.

The world is not about to end: we are already living in a different world.

Two Bewick's wrens. Let's talk about utopia.

Tell me,
What are you going to do to be free?

Fire at the gate, fire in the grate, your fingertips are burning

The multicultural radical tradition . . . has always presumed another world

is possible, because it has had to.

I want a freedom that is not laced with violence. I have thrashed against the idea of othering, of hierarchal violence in my work on other/animals. I'm only just starting to imagine alternative worlds.

The dream is real, my friends, the failure to make it works the unreality

Sure, the world is afire, the waves the size of skyscraper haunt our dreams and waking moments, the saline water creeps in and we have nothing to drink, the farm is destroyed by drought and the children are destroyed by illness.

The dog yelps, the rabbit cries, the doe screams. Yes, the animals die in droves. Whatever lives.

Yes

*destroying what Destroys you is more difficult than you
Expect every time*

Ignore the fire at the gate, your fingers ablaze, the storm on the horizon, your trees, your house, your hair lifting

The genius answer to [cliché] is catastrophe

If you make a deal with what is "safe," if you call the imagination naïve, and tell us it is too late, if you choose to ignore that this is not just about an election but it is about the entire structure, if you consent or give into to nihilism, you've made a bargain with the structure.

The challenge of emancipation from oppression lies in rethinking time-as-progress

This structure only exists out of the energy of the enslaved and a genocidal commitment land and resource acquisition. Institutional or nihilist, you stand over an abyss and hold hands with the structure that is inequity, poverty, racism, misogyny, extinction on a scale so vast I cannot encompass it with words.

We need an adequate utopianism

We need to start imagining right the fuck now.

*Everything is a lie and everything is true now. . .
I have seen birds die in the sun that hastens
The death of the leaves, huge plants die too,
And in the small death of multiform worlds
I have seen the appearance of the future truth*

5.

Dear friends and comrades,

First of all, we want to apologize that we didn't manage to write anything in the past 10 days, since the beginning of the war. We had known, that this war would come one day, but how can you ever be prepared for war? [1]

I am calling first for imagination and conversation. Some people are farther along. So there are lights along the pathways.

yes it is likely no one will remember the first ones, because all the yesterdays which vex us today will be no more than an old page in the book of history

I'm only now discovering those lights. I'm so excited they exist.

do you ever think about what it feels like to bury your own city

I'm a broken messenger, and all of my messages are qualified by privilege, my fear and my own personal abyss. But the lights make it possible, they tell me that even in my brokenness I can perhaps be brave enough.

We are not the subjects or the subject formulations of the capitalist world system. It is merely one condition of our existence

Fire rains from the sky and burns the island that is also a continent. The voices I counted on not to be blinkered are cowardly or even more blinkered than my own. I want to share something with you:

A kind of consciousness. . . a being in-difference . . . a political consciousness and a sensuous knowledge, a standpoint and a mindset for living on better terms than what we're offered, for living as if you had the necessity and freedom to do so.

First, the Bewick's wren. *The wren, the wren, the king of the birds*

Second, the *certain slant of light*. The *Shadows that hold their breath*

Third, the swordfern, lifted in the dew. Not rusted, but green as the color green is itself and nothing else.

Can we walk without sleepwalking? I believe...

*when you find
another way of being there is less pain*

there is self-forgiveness on the other side

I'm not trying to create a roadmap. I am trying to create the possibility of stepping outside of the trajectories we think we are on.

Because *Each age tends to have only a meager awareness of its own limitations.*

Yet *It is still possible to imagine a stifling ignorance falling away from us.*

I place one author next to another because the start of the pathway is already there—we just need to follow the lights.

*What if
my own being
broken
is the new law*

Quotes are by, in order of appearance, William Shakespeare, Audubon Society Online Field Guide: Bewick's wren, Ingeborg Bachmann, Anne Carson, Ingeborg Bachmann, Ingeborg Bachmann, Ohia, Honorius de Atun, Boyo Akomolefe, Toni Cade Bambara, Avery Gordon, Toni Cade Bambara, Wendy Trevino, Anne Carson, Boyo Akomolefe, Sylvina Ocampo, Avery Gordon, Subcomandante Marcos, Fred Moten, Cedric J. Robinson, Avery Gordon, Emily Dickinson, Selah Saterstrom, Pope Francis, Barry Lopez, Simone White.

[\[1\]](#) From an email I received on 10-19-2019 titled The Newsletter from the Internationalist Commune and Make Rojava Green Again, #15: In Times of War.

Featured Image Credit: Ingrid Taylar