

The Birds: Wren Hunt 2019

written by Jennifer Calkins | January 22, 2019



1. I saw...

I saw an ant pitta near Papallacta.
I saw a mot mot near Mindo
I heard an owl in Seattle

What we love barely exists

I was with the dog when the owl whooo'd, once twice three times and more.
The air was cool and wet, the giant trees kept the street in darkness. The
day was not over yet it was ending. We stopped. The dog pricked her ears
and looked toward the sound. I told her the sound was from an "owl." "Owl"
I said and pointed. She looked at me and looked where I pointed and looked
at me again. And then the owl called and she stared as though she could see
what I could not make out in the cacophony of evergreens.

What this all means: is nothing.

Oak was king of all trees, wren king of all birds and soul of oak

Yet St. Stephen's Day is upon us and it is time to hunt the wren

*Whoever destroys a wren or its nest
shall never see the face of God*

2. The wren...

The wren, the wren, the king of...STOP

We'll hunt the Cutty Wren," said John the Red...NOPE

It's up with the kettle and down with the pan

Give us a penny for to bury the...STOP

*Is muar an trua an dreoilín i mbarra 'n chnoic,...YES
an bháisteach sa tarr air, an síon is an sioc,
ag imeacht ar na bán-taibh, a chosa do bhí géarrtha,
agus bríste gan bhásta air 's is fuar é a dhriuch.*

*D'imigh an dreoilín anonn thar muir,...AND YES
ó lúib na carraige uainn do rith,
is mó duine a' faire air ó Luan go Satharn,
gan ball ná baile aige ach scáth an tuir.¹*

But why kill him. Did the wren betray St. Stephen, as he hid in a bush? Or the Irish when they came to plunder the Viking² camp? Breadcrumbs on a drum head, the rocks crushing the creature.

Or was it the majesty of the creature's song—of many creature songs—that rendered it king of the birds, king of the past year, to be undone by Samhain?

They butchered the bird—I butcher belief. It is all in good fun. Or rather to keep myself warm in the winter of this, our new year. Year of the scorched mattress, of the unraked earth, of the oh so surprised by the newest storm. Year of the “ongoing revelations” and the “unprecedented.” Good luck in your surprise.

What can you do? We on earth/play at being people

I have more questions. Who was the king, if king he was, before being stoned and tied to a stick? Wren, winter wren, dreoilín, dryw, roitelet, laouenan?

As the scientists say (and I was one before and am now again) once the winter wren was a single species, *Troglodytes hiemalis*, and ranged in its day from Japan to the west coast of North America. Now...

*hiemalis³ Winter wren
pacificus⁴ Pacific wren
troglodytes⁵ Eurasian wren*

Were the woods and fields, the sedges and trees, occupied by Eurasian wrens when the wren boys sang and hunted and tied them to a stick? Were they *T. troglodytes*, once *T. hiemalis*, or *T. troglodytes* and never *T. hiemalis*. Were they wren? Were they winter? Were they something or something else.

If I speak of Nature, it's not because I know what Nature is...[it is]

That Nature does not exist

I keep asking the wrong questions.

“I am the fire” says the fire. “My body is a graveyard” says the landscape.

3. I indulge...

I indulge myself

I tell myself *Thryomanes bewickii*, the Bewick's wren, is my wren hunt wren.

Another little bird, this time burdened with the name of a man. (Once it was a *Troglodytes* too).

Presumably the bird does not know it—but I will not draw a conclusion on that. The knowledge of the bird is unknowable to me. No anthropomorphic tricks, no objective tools will allow me to fully peer inside its store of understanding.

And so I am impoverished.

But at least I know of my ignorance.

Once a man said animals are “poor in world.”⁶ But he was wrong. He mistook language, or what might be language, for something else. He mistook the limit of world as the limit of his own skull.

He was poor in world because. His world did not include the idea that animals (others) were world. That feathers themselves make world. That nest is an exquisite creation and a bower a sculpture.

Sometimes I encounter a Bewick's wren (I will call him/her/they “wren” now) in my neighborhood, in my yard.

“In my” X = a term of human property. A term bounded by fencing and roads. A wrenless term I imagine.

But I could be wrong. Perhaps that wren knows the limits of my world.

4. St. Stephen's Day...

I heard the wren on St. Stephen's Day, or thereabouts, somewhere above my head. That buzzing call.

An external observer may be able to see that there are other things which the system cannot see

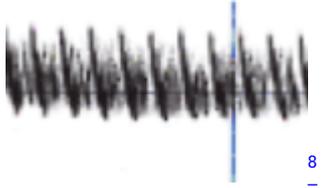
Again, I am writing about the wren. (I've done it so many years I've lost count). At the same time I am trying to unbind myself. From my own skull, from my own narrow hole. But language and thought constrain me

no one will hear our true voices,.../we will not recognize one another

This is what I wish I could say:



or this:



Because the winter wrens, the Bewick's wrens are speaking. Shh. Listen.

he investigates the pig-sty; then explores the garden fence, and finally mounts to the roof and pours forth one of the sweetest songs that ever was heard.

I'll stop talking, I'll stop asking question. Go outside you lazy creature of the earth and listen. Go find the wren—the wren is everywhere. Go find a wren to give your year something other than “our great military delivered justice” or “profanity sparks furor” or “woman in vegetative state, apparently assaulted, gives birth to baby boy.”

Go outside

Find that one bird and her buzzy call. Only that one bird and his deeply complicated song.

Go out, breathing exhaust if you must, wet to the bone and shivering, or hot as all get out if your St. Stephen's Day is the end of your summer. Go out there you lazy piece of shit and listen. For the love of god/s/esses/all that is holy. Whether it is sound you hear, or sound you feel, or the sight of the wide open beak to the sky, tail up, find your wren and perceive him/her/they. There is nothing else I can tell you. Because you must. Because we all must. Because the wren hunt is here. Because it is the first step to a sort of salvation.

Quotes are by: Alberto Caeiro, Alison Titus, Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, GennadyAygi, Hannes Bergthaller, Richard Siken, Robert Ridgeway, Simone Weil

[1]

<http://www.irishlanguageforum.com/viewtopic.php?p=15077&sid=c6e22b786ed653451fbd9b923c7faefb#p15077P>

*Pity the wren on top of the hill,
with rain on its belly, the storm and the frost
going into the fields, its legs cut,
and broken without bands on it and it wet from the dew.*

*The wren went away across the sea,
ran away from us from the snare in the stone,
and how many people watching for it from Monday to Saturday,
with neither a patch nor a home, but the shade of the bush.*

[2] More properly Norse seafarer. Because they may not have seen themselves as the pirates the Old English word "wicing" would indicate.

[3] <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/103885731/104334569>

[4] <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/103884879/104335354>

[5] <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/103883277/132200296>

[6] Martin Heidegger

[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rvdwamHv_fk

[8] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfMUrXf4LU0>

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