

Clearcut in the Capital

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May 2011

- with gratitude to Daniel Bernard, Robert Lovelace, and elder William Commanda

because a literature conference brought me, i drank the Kichisìpi¹, barely recognizable after it had been treated by Britannia

while the Kichisìpi flowed through me, on its way to the Kaniatarowanenneh,² i learned of Beaver Pond Forest

20 minutes west of Parliament Hill, old growth forest sacred to Algonquin Anishnabeg Omamiwinini And And And

..me, yes, to me, and perhaps to you

KNL has taken chainsaws to it, a “development” more for idol profit than “housing”

“Ottawa” is on a blind march to the south, to the ways of the CCCorporation

the stunned, stammering forest witnesses this & re-members

there is nothing “clear” about watershed desecration

this home invasion, this hateful stab at the juicy heart of kanata, beaver, brave

may KNL choke on the haunted silence of their cursed condos

& may the pulse of Inuktitut, Cree, Ojibway, Mi'kmac & Algonquin, now spoken in Ottawa, survive treefell & greedstink

¹ the Algonquin name for the Ottawa River

² the Mohawk name for the St. Lawrence River

pact

hydrology is an unbreakable bond, embedded in our moist, lucid cells
in our breaths that transpire to return to the clouds that gave us life through rain
in the rivers & aquifers that we & our neighbours drink from
in the oceans that our foremothers came from
a watershed teaches not only humbleness but climate literacy
the languages we need to interpret the sea's rising voice
its currents bearing the plastic from our fridges & closets
a gyre of karma recirculates in the form of body burden
i hereby petition for watershed wisdom to guide us through the toxic muck
i will apprentice myself to creeks & tributaries, sewers & springs, groundwater & glaciers
listen for the salty pulse within, the blood that recognizes marine ancestry
in its chemical composition, self-organizing, & intuitive pull
i will learn through immersion, flotation, transformation
as water expands & contracts, i will fit myself to its ever-changing dimensions
molecular & spectacular, water will return what we give it, be that
arrogance & poison, reverence & light, or ambivalence & respect
let us listen to the land so that our cities may be revived as watersheds

threefold return

cast into the well that endures blood ambush
encampments, walled cities, whole empires rise and fall
the well reclaims the depths, nourishes Moon and Pig

The town may be changed, Thieves, Toil, Transitory
But the well cannot be changed.

architecture inexhaustible, abundance
Wheel Gentle, Gradual, Honest, Simple, Subtle

ineffectual, careless, disastrous
Ditches, Bent and Straightened

a breaking of the jug
sudden collapse, neglect

trigram exhorts organism, Gray-haired, Broad Forehead
parts co-operate for the benefit of the whole.

swampy lowlands, submerged in mud.
Calculated Waiting, White of the Eye, Shifting Thigh

Deep Heavens in the Waters:
Thunderclouds, Stumbling Horse, Wrecked Chariot
Odor to the far shore.

Dangling, submit to
apprehension and anticipation
Long, High, Advance and Retreat,
in its own time Close to the Grain

strength within, danger in front.
Midwinter Pit, Chasm.

Strength in the face of danger does not plunge ahead but bides its time, whereas weakness in the face of danger grows agitated and has not the patience to wait.

Perseverance brings good fortune.
It furthers one to cross the great water.

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a light will develop out of events
Clouds rise up to heaven:
Hardwood joyous and of good cheer.

it will rain. we're ready. Persistent, Ear.

* poem generated from found language at <http://www.ichingonline.net/>

Mine? Yours? Ours?

Language serves an alibi for industry. From “lake” to “tailings pond” in bureaucratese means death to the trout, water striders, beavers, moose, ducks, and two-legged ones. What is the difference between “tailings” and “toxic wastewater”? The vowels glide from renewable to reprehensible, in the blink of a legislative act.

One lake lives, but 15 others are threatened by greed decked out in business suits. Mount Milligan gold mine near Prince George is the sacrificial blam, sold off to the highest bidder. The pressure to corrupt weighs down like a carton of gold bricks. Bludgeon the birds, the glaciers, the salmon with your company’s commodity. Prosperity is a prostitute with a pretty name and a tired game.ⁱ

What can’t be bought. What can’t be sold. What you inhale, exhale, swallow, hold and let go. Let me pull your ears so you can better hear. What water sings, you can translate into embryos and canoes, dinners and drummers. Urns, rain barrels, organic compounds. Lobe stretches to the shape of heron’s unheard call, pelican’s particularities, goose paths into globe’s map. Whorl encompasses cilia, winter, bear scat. Shit fuels the earth, not the ocean.

Climate crimes. Disasters climb. Tsunami, hurricane, tornado, flood, oil spill in the Peace, bring it on, stupid and tragic and scary and frantic and furious. Foregone confusions. Show down in the face of storm warnings. Slow down if you want your grandchildren to live in the long now.

Forests feed lakes while pine beetles sing the blue-fungus song of warming habitats. Bugs the size of rice grains can eat hundreds of thousand of miles of trees. Chomp. Nematodes know what the businessmen don’t. Can forests dwindle into deserts in three generations? Why find out?

Bucraterese strikes again: “overburden removal” means worse than clearcutting. Nothing left, not even stumps. Just mud and poison and misnamed polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. PAHs. The PAHs stink though. Swallow them and die a slow cancerous death.

Lesions sing the lessons of what’s buried underneath. Silt is stealthily honest, more reliable than talking heads and stock markets.

Let’s cheer for the lake that lives. Let’s fight like ubiquity for the 15 others that stand to die if we forget the lingo of the legislation. “Schedule 2” is code for “murder the lakes.”ⁱⁱⁱ

But the lake reflects us back to ourselves. Maybe we don’t like what we see. Still, we need the courage to look, nonetheless, all the more.

Just because we can't speak trout or salmon doesn't mean we're smarter than them. The dialect of toxic waste that industry releases into their waters shows that.

Praise the aptly named Teztan Biny, Fish Lake, and pray it bodes well for sister lakes, brother lakes, cousin lakes, across the boreal forest, the tundra, the wetlands and riversheds that make up the graced north. It's so peaceful up there, where the shores sing quiet sand, mosquitoes, and wild blueberries, you might hear boulder and pebble hold your feet up.

Crinkly leaves, fluttery grass, a mass of pine needles mark your passage. If you're lucky. If you're not so lucky, then the path of good intentions is paved with cyanide, lead, arsenic, cadmium, ammonia, chlorine, hydrochloric acid, sulphuric acid, mercury, and other mining "by-products." I didn't choose to walk this path, but I'm walking it as I email, type and cell-phone my way through and out of it.

Who gets the reality cheque? "there are at least 10,000 abandoned mines across Canada. This means that there is no company to take responsibility for the clean up of these mines, even when there is contamination." (www.miningwatch.ca)

I didn't need to see the mine to rely on it. I didn't need to see the fish to know it was killed by the mine. I didn't need to see the lake to know that my life depends on its. The chain of command is as subtle and as inescapable as the hydrological cycle. Rain knows where it has been. Groundwater tells the story of interbeing. Precipitation enters me as surely as I need to swallow it.

ⁱ Carrier Sekani Tribal Council. "Metal Mining Effluent Regulation (Schedule 2) still an issue with First Nations." 3 Nov. 2010 <<http://vancouver.mediacoop.ca/newsrelease/5052>>

ⁱⁱ Council of Canadians. "Why is the Canadian Government Letting Mining Companies Turn Lakes into Toxic Dumps?" 3 Nov. 2010 <<http://www.canadians.org/water/issues/TIAs/index.html>>