

The Animal Communicator

We have no hope and yet
we live in longing...
– Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*

I. The Animal Communicator Lets in the Day

As a small flock of maybe fifteen or twenty shrikes
sweeps into and rests among the slick branches
of her Orcas Island backyard pear tree,
her shoulders sag.

II. The Animal Communicator Discourses with a Startled Mountain Lion in the Pasayten Wilderness Just North and East of Sunny Pass

Nothing animal is foreign to me, he murmurs. Still,
she does not drop the clover and lupine she picked
along the path that afternoon; instead holds them
across her right breast.

III. The Animal Communicator Speaks for Herself

*Sometimes, after I was born, I wake up in this dream
where I am stalking myself to take back
and bury all the words I ever
spoke or sang.*

IV. The Animal Communicator Spills the Word Death

Animals see death differently than we do, she says.
We think of the camp cat that, in 1949 in Bella Vista,
my brother Skip and I pulled entirely apart.

V. The Animal Communicator Gets Down and Dirty

Now you're really going to get it, she says,
as she puts on her headphones
and flips *Start* and *Loud*
on Béla Bartók.

VI. The Animal Communicator Gets Lost in a Rainforest on Bataan

A delegation of walking sticks, golden-fronted leafbirds, lizards,
leaches, lemurs, moreporks, fig wasps, boars, shrews, tarsiers,
vespertilionids, palm civets, anoas, and gray-crowned
scimitar-babblers finds the Animal Communicator
and leads her back deeper into the center
of their own wild moistness.

VII. The Animal Communicator as Sensuoust

Hail had broken scores of panes above the Frontenac hothouse that weeknight.
Before we entered to exhume the orchids, she striped to the waist
to catch on her belly and arms and areolae
the mixture of green pollen
and bitter snowflakes.

VIII. The Animal Communicator Daydreams of Sex

Toothless and densely furred, an anteater quivers
tucked inside a dream of roe tricked
from within a coveted nest
in the Brazilian backlands
of the Pantanal.

IX. The Animal Communicator Loses Hope

Three lazy, white-cheeked cormorants circle up
into the cumulus over Hat Island
to feed their dry eyes
on vapor.

X. The Animal Communicator Plays God

She lifts her titanium ultralight off well before
dawn and flies side-to-side then end-to-end
above the Grand Canyon until she hits
the first brilliant blue.