

Ken Belford / TEN POEMS

COMMON KNOWLEDGE

I'm writing by hand on the english channel
because there aren't enough
words to carry us.
Used and unused waste flows through.

Organs have common relationships
and I, bearing a name others answer to
am washed up with words,
all over, done for now.

It seems there was a change of hands
outside school on common land in public.
What letter spreads the word
that first bruises shore with meaning
then briefly slips away
in the unstoppable flow?

RATS

after Donna Haraway: an alien romance

Freak scholars programming languages
write in wanna-be knowledge in Harvard.
In the academic industrial complex
the answer is yes and no.

For profit, Femanica drives
rats to classes in her big, dirty car.
These creatures designed to suffer
won't leave us alone.

Her Jesus is a dull rat and
living memory isn't sentiment.
I want a chance to get a disease.
Go fuck gene therapy.

Caterpillars die in her veins.
Wouldn't touch a wild rat
but writes email through
a rat's brain in Nylon city.

Says nature doesn't stand for anything.
Receptor girls and boys
make so much industrial noise
I wish I would have stayed home.

Categories line up at the light
 where two footed knowledge walks.
There are animals white men can't see.
Who is the gene genie that mothers the rat?

Hard hatted angry men
 with the faces of wolves
 rip through feral lands on machines.
I like to write with the lights down low.
Stranger, certified being,
 come into my home.

FOOD SECURITY

This is the potato that I worked so hard for,
That I walked to the market for, that I paid for,
That I carried home in my bag, that I peeled
and steamed the way you like it.

This is the potato you never ate,
So it sat on your plate
While you filled your face
With industrial shit
in front of the TV.

This is the potato you blame,
that I never bought again.

HATS

I'm walking downtown and it's minus 15.
I've got a hat for everything. I need my hat.
Coming up the hill toward me, an older man,
face battered, eyes me up. He's pushing a bike
and shoots me a look. I can see he's on the job
and looking for a break so we stop and talk
about men who know how to make things.

He's wearing an ear flap skull cap, brain bucket,
reflective vest, work gear, good gloves and boots.
His bike's in useful shape.
And off the axle, a welded ball joint bed frame
with modular plywood cart,
tiny oxy cutter saddled onside,
everything right.

He's lugging a 30 gallon glass lined water tank
salvaged from a wreck downtown,
pushing it up the hill, living on welfare,
worked all his life, it's obvious.

Gives his finger to the Premier. He's working
for another, fixing houses for
the ones who didn't make the grade,
doing the real work.

LAND SCHEMAS

Sometimes scandalized, always unfinished,
disgraced and libeled for sure;
possessing enormous machines
while mouthing off about trust,
colonizers are wired to scum.

I've heard enough of
their denouncements and lies.
They are undoing the heart,
going in to cut.

The north moves north.
This song is an article of evidence.
Myths sustain the agenda,
donuts are the fuel of ragers
and fantasy is the glue.

There's grime on the streets
and I want to know how
they got the dirt on me.

Most leaves don't touch
but some appear to like it.
Power is against the good
and I am a variant
caught in a contradiction,
modeled by another, needing to separate
and grow distinct, to give up

and go back to the bush
where love's spongy congress gathers cause.

At first glance into the heavens,
I saw an unlikely elemental ancestry
set in motion. The head and shoulders
of a faceless charioteer drawn by stallion.

Who else but Pegasus could this be?
So that I, the animal's husband,
would then know
the stem of such descent?

My father farmed, his brothers too, his father too.
His hands husked chaff, instinctively he
disliked weeds and this bad blood
he saw was not his type and suddenly
he was out of love for me.

There were fireflies in the pasture
in the night and against the moon,
multitudes of breeding and broody birds.

To confide in the earth is to bury,
to whisper and shade,
to hide in and cover with dirt.

Vessels are made of soil, mold, dust and clay.
Away in the burrow out of earshot,
the earthworm snuffles toward connexion,
an intentional conductor
zeroing in on the return path.

SALMON

Nearby and side by side,
they are not connected to you.
They are individuals, singular creatures,
earthlings like you.
Don't hound them with hooks,
pester or molest them.
Some are late and some are early.
Some are extinct and the rest are old.
They pour out of the ocean.
You can't send them back.
Believe in them.
Don't exaggerate their size or invest in them.
Forget reliance. All you can do is guess.
Don't agonize over them
when they beat their brains out.
You will put them off with your words.
They have no opinions or answers
and don't belong to you. They long for the depths.
Stubborn and irritable, they have no appetite or thirst.
They have faces and wear stripes.
The dogma of ascent means nothing.
Don't throw dirt on them.
Under the sun, in this world,
they stand on the bottom.
Onlooker, gaze at this river and be thankful.

THE SUICIDE ECONOMY

I was a poacher before I learned to be a guide.
I used to be a guide. There's still a fringe of land
away in the distance.

I don't know a thing about money
but I know I've been skimmed
by the supply chains.
To get a grip on it, make a fist.
To be happy, leave.

I had two gardens. The dark lords banned one,
fenced the other and called it procedure.
This isn't a happening when
fleshy academics with lasers
demonstrate the conversion of forests
to garbage.

I'm not secure
and I don't know a thing about impartial purpose
or the objective range of binary data
and offshore servers.

So I write poetry
and keep my bees away
from corporate manoeuvres —
that way they can at least
have a chance.

THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Systematically

Fresh violence. There's a high risk
the guidelines worked out last night
aren't in order today. As a rule
payments are heaviest in the morning.
The system's nervous.
It's all worked out
so that depending on
the length of the line-up
and the design of the setup,
assessments are made, collected
and combined
into an orderly tax called style.

Distorted

Mangled and bent,
screwed up, doctored and
distracted guy goes by
making faces, muttering
twisted meanings.
Unlikely discordance:
hit or miss
dressed up deformity.

Information

Listen to these accounts even if
you don't understand them.
I'm an advance man. It's a fact.
Some lore, some tips, some bits.

THE JOURNEYMAN

I'm a working class poet, a child of farmers.
I worked in the mills and sorted lumber.
I never taught school and I'm not celebrated.
Can't change that and can't change this.
There wasn't money to send me to school.
I know how to put up hay by hand, how to
make my handles, how to sharpen and shape,
how to join timbers where scholars don't live.
Little is known of me. Only a few are like me.
I'm Canadian and the author of these poems.
I'm not invited to read in the universities.
They don't know who I am. I learned to write
in the middle of night after work was done.
I'm thankful we didn't have a bible. Nothing
to read but I knew I was a poet. None of us
were merchants, none studied the law, none
the healing arts. My father wanted to write.
He sold the farm and we moved to the city.
I found poetry there but don't know how
I found it. I'll never be a sucky white boy.
I was 58 or 59 when I wrote this in 1741.
There were times I had no store food so I
lived from the land. I'm an unregulated voice
from the Nass. Alfred Purdy noticed me. I'm
ingenuous, have genius and don't sing when
the harp comes around. Remember my name.
No one protects me. I owned my own boat
and made my own home. That's why poetry.

REMEMBER, SUPPOSE, SAY

We got more than we asked for
when we turned back the clock.
This is a story about detail,
about how some loves cool and collapse
as they expand.
The idea takes getting used to
but it all started
in the form of an unexpected correspondence
from across the valley.
Nothing explains it
but I closed the door and walked away
until I couldn't be seen anymore.
What happened, what force,
what dark energy?
What was going on
before everything stopped working?
In the afterglow, the encoded information
of those early days raises new questions
about getting around
problems like remembering the question
and getting the last laugh.
I did good work back then,
in the beginning.

