Shopping Cart Pastorals and a Nature Poem

Gary Barwin
Niagara Regional Rhyme Gland Laboratory

Recommended Citation / Citation recommandée
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by
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Chair Coffeemaker Shopping Cart Car Horse Deer Swallow

I think about how our modern notion of what is “other” blurs inanimate objects with animals and vice versa. For much of culture, outside the hospitable firecircle of the human, the light fades quickly, only a few animals allowed as pets or as marvellous outliers of the non-human to sit beside us. (And this not to mention, the humans we leave out in the cold, which is another discussion.)

Perhaps much of modern culture places animals into the same category as robots or other automatons: task-accomplishing machines with only the illusion of agency and/or emotion. Since the animal is commodified in the way of the inanimate, it is easy to place it in the same category as these other emotion-simulation machines.

And, ah, we so often look on even the most emotionally mute of inanimate objects with love, intimacy and affection. They may as well be living beings for as much as we love them. Our emotional connection, our longing, our delicate feelings for our shoes, toasters, chairs, or our designer table is often so palpable and powerful, that the categories between animate and inanimate often begin to further blur.

And though our toaster doesn't have agency or even life, we may feel that we love it like a non-human living thing. In the past, they gave names to swords that they loved. Names to ships. Now we feel some of our objects pass into our emotionally intimate world. How different is a deer leaping over the fence into the garden than a sullen, left-slouching shed, a silent chair, innocent and blinkless, forlorn, discovered in early morning in the shadow by the hedge?

This is the capitalist non-human spirit world. We are like consumer shamans, surrounded by the non-human ghosts of things we may love and own.


They are more than arbitrary linguistic categories. We are able to colonize the animals and objects of the world with our tenderness, our hunger, our desire.
Nature Poem

even on the sidewalk
I want to be a nature poet

this summer light is nature
so is the air and
the rain-soaked road

scooping up after my dog
the bag warm as my dog’s insides
is nature

yes it’s nature inside
and out

here in Hamilton, Ontario

nature inside and out
this poem
GARY BARWIN is a writer, composer, multimedia artist, and educator and the author of 18 books of poetry and fiction as well numerous chapbooks. His work has been widely published and performed both in Canada and internationally. His most recent books are *Moon Baboon Canoe* (Mansfield, 2014) and *The Wild & Unfathomable Always* (Xexoxial, 2014). In spring 2015, two new books will appear: *I, Dr Greenblatt, Orthodontist, 251-1457* (Anvil) and *Sonosyntactics: Selected and New Poetry of Paul Dutton* (WLUP). A novel, *Yiddish for Pirates* will appear in 2016 from Random House Canada.

He is 2014-2015 Writer-in-Residence at Western University, has a PhD. in music composition and has taught writing courses in many places including McMaster University, Mohawk College, through the Art Forms program for street-involved youth and currently, at King’s University College. He lives in Hamilton, Ontario and online at garybarwin.com