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Beetle

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Beetle

Cover Page Footnote

none

Beetle

Ears are all we are sometimes.

—Thom Donovan

I shook the apple tree to dislodge the beetles that were eating the leaves.

I shook the apple tree and multiple legs dropped into my ear.

Arrival, the little volt. Sharp points on the segmented legs.

Scratch through the stiff hairs that line the auditory canal.

They scratch the protective wax, oh my long-chain fatty acids. My shed skin.

Scratch down to the eardrum. Its reverb. Where the nerves end.

Down to the eardrum almost immediately.

My little finger is too blunt—it pushed the thing in deeper.

Have I shouted yet? Have you heard me?

I was out in the yard scratching at my ear when it began to bite.

I shouted and shouted in the middle of the city and no one heard.

There was no one there.

It felt like it was going through my eardrum.

Not a single bite but a persistent feeding, mandibles at the valves.

If that is my voice, ok I will listen.

*When I pressed really hard at the base of my ear I could make it stop.
But that hurt almost as much as the biting.*

I am shouting, and I am listening.

I am shaking my head as the thing in my ear mills into the skin.

The reinforced skin where I am divided from the world, the ear the only orifice that must be closed or it signals nothing.

And hears the world that way, amplified, the vibrating hairs, the world that beats against it.

As you speak to me. Or as I am shouting as loud as I can.

With only myself to hear.

*My hands were shaking so much I couldn't use my phone.
I ran cold water from the hose into my ear.*

There is no record of this beetle biting humans, so maybe I am the first.

Yes, I have seen the movies with the earworms.

And I've watched the videos of insects extracted from inside an ear.

The spasm dance of those who dance with their new arthropodic panic

I was not searching for some truth from the animal kingdom.

Nothing transcendent, nothing inexpressible. But something has arrived.

Waiting for a chance at recognition. Or was it revenge?

What if it laid eggs in my ear?

Have I shouted yet?

The larval forms also have robust mouthparts,

They curl into a C when threatened, part of the small alphabet
that chews in my head.

A base in the genome bonded by my sugars.

All those legs are too many, friction in the hairs of the self.

Someone walking inside your words. What does this piercing pain
mean to you?

A small torn bone?

Ok, I just needed to calm down.

Displaced.

The new angel falls away from its paradise, like this.

A bug in my ear, with grinding mouthparts and club-like antennae, and it hurts.

And it made me shout out with pain, and no one heard
because they were all somewhere else.

They were already a history, all those grand losses that can no longer be lost.

If there is another world out there, it will not be a world we have made.

It will be a world we are made into.

*But how does one stay calm with all that pressure on your ear? I slowly pulled my finger
away and for a moment I heard nothing.*

I am my ear. In its labyrinth.

I am what is addressed. Its petite ossicles.

And your ear. The ear you are able to hear me with. The one you lend me.

The Japanese beetle is not known to bite humans. It bit me in the ear.

I shook the apple tree so the beetles would fall, since falling is their first threat response.

It fell into me. Into my smaller ear, which Nietzsche was so proud of, as opposed to my other ear.

But if falling is its first threat response, might it not fall out of my ear as well? So I went and lay down on the steps, with my ear close to the ground, waiting for instructions, and the biting stopped almost immediately.

I could hear it move, re-orienting itself, twitching at the nerve endings.

It was a Japanese beetle, family *Scarabaeidae*. Beautiful coppery wing covers.

It can sense vibrations through receptors under its skin. A sound.

Do I call it skin? Or is it something else?

Do I call it an ear?

It crawled out of my ear and fell, and landed on its back, legs and antennae flailing.

Do I call it falling?

Of course I do.

MONTY REID is an Ottawa-based poet with many publications. His most recent full-length poetry collection is *Meditatio Placentae* (Brick, 2016) and most recent chapbook is *nipple variations* (post ghost press). His awards include the Stephansson Award from the Writers' Guild of Alberta (three times), the Lampman Award, National Magazine Awards and is a three-time nominee for the Governor General's Award. Until recently he was the managing editor of *Arc Poetry Magazine* and is currently the director of VerseFest, Ottawa's international poetry festival.