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The Gospel of Worms

E. Barrie

For twenty-five years
I hungered
For the feminine face of God
Fumbling in the dark
For a teacher with my shape and scent
When I found Her
(After turning over approximately ten thousand stones)
She told me She is not the One
I am looking for
The God I need
Has no face
No shape
Just scent
Just musk
Just ten thousand mutable forms
Writhing through the dirt
Making old things new
Over and over

The God I need
Is as old as the Earth
An infestation of spiral forms
Spinning light into landscape
Composting *littergies*
Churning scum to succulence
Waste to wilderness
Heaping piles of shit to places shit piles once heaped
She said: *make yourself rich soil*
Become a lover
Of earthworm anthems
Slow dismemberment
Ritual decay
Give all your burdens and luxuries
To the tiniest ones
Who know how to transform
How to pray
How to decompose
And make hostile things holy

The new Gods
Are the Gods of humility
Of *humus*, of dirt
Mycelial-weaving, mud-anointing, world-devouring
Dream-braiding
Swallowing the Earth to make sacred things grow
Reverently digging
Churning garbage to gold
Breaking tired promises to wild possibilities
Composting sterility, *digestion becomes prayer*
As night bends to night bends to morning

I grew up on a small farm with a religious family. One Sunday when I was about thirteen, I faked sick. I watched my family thread themselves through the sliding minivan door and drive away to church. When the plume of gravel settled back onto the laneway and I was certain they were gone, I leapt out of bed, shoeless, and ran outside. Our farm was empty and any view the neighbours might have of me was obscured by trees and fog. I was truly alone. Cautiously—but urgently—I removed all my clothes and jumped, danced, and scuttled around, playful as a child and unabashed as an animal. This was the first time I remember feeling God in my body.

In the fifteen years that followed, I faced hardship after hardship, death after death. I felt abandoned by God and betrayed by my body. I sought refuge in scripture but felt edited out of the sacred texts in which I had once seen myself. Feeling unholy and unworthy, I began a 10-year pilgrimage to anywhere I thought I might rediscover the Divine.

I made sacred utterances in Montréal Basilicas. I exhumed God through my ancestry and became a Pagan on the Welsh shores. I sought refuge at a monastery in Nepal. I did water purification ceremonies on Bali and Koh Phangan. Still, God eluded me. Still, I was sick. Eventually I grew tired of feeling faulty and told myself, “*Enough of this God stuff; you’re fine as you are.*” And somehow, I did start to feel fine. So I put God to rest and finally rested myself.

Then, during a recent summer, I had a wakeful dream that I should salvage a second-hand statue of the Black Madonna and build her a sacred grove in the forest behind my home. When I found her, I invited my family on a forest pilgrimage to plant her in a hollowed-out sycamore large enough for me to stand inside. I bathed her in the river, wove her a wildflower crown and promised her I would visit her in her forest home—which I did. Almost daily. And these visits slowly changed me.

Through the course of my silence and walking, visiting and praying, something happened—I started to feel God in my body again. God became sound, smell, and texture—a living relationship between my body and the landscape revealing itself to me through my senses. Each time I walked to Her, I would hear God in the whistle of the trees, the squeaks of tiny furry bodies, and the drum of my feet on the pine-needled floor: *death, swamp, cedar, God. Prickly, wet, warm, God.*

Now, God is not a book, a building, a being, or a modality. For me, God is the journey we take to know God. It is the relationships we weave through searching: how we learn to

see God in the faces of others and in the land. Now, God is the smell of wet leaves, the comforting itch of wild grasses under my belly. It is the slap of laughter with my family, or the way my daughter curls her hand around my thumb in the night. It is the tortoise carcass, the empty nest, the ache of winter, the glory of worms. Now, God is this web of interbeing and the affirmation that I belong to something. Something bigger than I which is also *much* smaller than I. Something changing that always leaves me changed, making me more of an ephemeral, queer season than an arrival at who I ought to become.