

SPEAK FROM HERE TO THERE

TWO POEM CYCLES

BY

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P E E P A L T R E E

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CYCLE ONE

Speak from Here...

Echoes and Refrains

1.

We co-exist. The York gum bark is stripping itself off,
shiny skin underneath exposed to the sun. Late summer –
summers that won't end – and it seems to be a statement,
much more than restating a habit, a well-researched fact.
Tim is home-schooled by Tracy who is making a full-time
job of it. He goes to the city for sports once a week.
We co-exist. But the rest of the district is closed off.
Though animals and birds pass through and we say hello.

JK

2.

The late actor's wife,
the famous poet,
lectures me humbly
on the etymology of hubris –

All Greek to me, she says.
Nothing in our dialect
for it – by “our”,
she means, generously,

America, though here
in deep winter,
I walk my cockapoo
under the gentle tyranny

of the prideful
humility of the Midwest –
a collective hubris.

My daughter calls
from another city,
crying for her loneliness,
but laughing at the absurdity of it.

Together we wonder
where we will build a kraal
for our clan, with its own boneyard
for our scattered dead.

KD

3.

We live on the boodja of the Noongah people. We are actually at the crossroads of three tribes. South from here, the Avon river used to flood but it's been trained out of its old shape.

We don't see ourselves as owning, but keep the scramble bikes and rifles out. Trees planted, an effort to restore the bush.

Gestures? Tim was driven from school by the children of neo-Nazis.

Literally. Out in the bush, they run concentration camps in their heads – not yet ripe enough to export, but with their home-grown flavour.

JK

4.

Another quarrel
with my father-in-law.

I speak but my wife carries
the heat in her.

We won't buy the strip of land
he wants to collect,

all stone and acacia
in the hills over Kingston.

I am trapped in the middle
of generations of neglected promises.

But he knows the land well.
His grandmother kept her slavey name

while she lived as a gatherer
of herbs and insects to heal

the ailing and curse the prideful.
She never drove in a car

and climbed breadfruit trees
when she was eighty.

If only her oil-green fingers
could heal the sores in our Anancy ways.

KD

5.

I look for healing in music but the seeing and listening are confused.
Between the notes of all genres I hear the colonial whispering: theft theft.
Tim was born in America. Americans claim him as American. Of the soil.
I am not sure whose soil. But Tim listens to Son House and Robert Johnson
and tells me there are truths in there meant for him to hear. He is twelve.
He has pictures of them on his wall. He told me today he's heading for Memphis
as soon as he can. There's something there for him to find. But he loves
the parrots and echidnas and kangaroos here. He loves our conversations.

JK

6.

I am a lazy thinker –
it was not always this way.
Once, I relished the pain
of thought. I waded into

the impossible equations of home
and wrote a book
with the hubris of one who knows.

These days, I walk with Hopkins's poplars
scattered over British soil in my head,
and I feel a deep sadness,

not for the land stripped bare –
all seared with toil and all that jazz –
but for the man, lonely and full

of untasted lust for the farrier,
bent over, broken. These days,
home is the small space

between Lorna and me,
how we fill it with meaning,
and hack our way through the undergrowth
of betrayals, a path enough for hope.

KD

7.

I always clean the bottom of my boots before travelling – to make sure I carry no soil pathogens from one zone to another. It comes from living in a dieback region where a single spore might bring down a forest of trees and metaphors. But I don't think like that outside reality. I don't make analogies or fear travelling to "far-from-home" places. I have spent a life on the road, but less so now. It's still life. And I am well-suited to staring at a square inch of dirt for hours – watching the ants crawl over the grand narratives that feed this "isolation", amuse myself with a late, revived surrealism that has nothing to do with images and everything to do with denying the ballot box.

JK

8.

Even if I feel the sun on my skin, every day, if...

— Ibeyi “Oya”

And now the flurries...

Yesterday I thought of the solstice,
the hope of brighter days ahead – for once it comforted me,

which is how I know my body
is making home in alien places, again.

You say you seek healing in music.
I say the eyes of those two Cuban sisters,
Ibeyi, carry the elegant guile
of Oyá, a certain haunting, and their voices:
such frightful beauty in their harmonizing!

The snow will cover everything –
then there will be an interim of silence.

KD

9.

This helps me to piece things together. This, your innermosts and exteriors, your quotidian and special insights. In the solipsism of the bush, they are input and more – the snow falling on your day counterpoints the ash of burnt offerings that has coated the denials of here, your silence muffles the crack of a bullet detonating against the complex foliage that bulldozers would take out if we didn't resist. The whole lot, vanquished. I've been translating some of Petrarch's *Rime sparse* expanding memory's parameters, the dead of summer.

JK