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## **What is the Necropastoral?**

BY JOYELLE MCSWEENEY

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*“annihilating all that’s made/to a green thought in a green shade.”*

*--Andrew Marvell, "The Garden"*

1. After my first *Harriet* post, in which I rejected the 'Future of Poetry', I saw some commentators dismiss my perspective as lacking political awareness; their comments construed me as denying my own historical contingency, as if I believed myself not to be a figure of human political history but an absolute being outside of time.
2. In fact, "contingency" is too weak a word for the degree to which I consider myself slammed, pierced and annihilated by historical fact, by a single eviscerating historical fact, the millennia-long political and ecological catastrophe whose name has been lately (Adamicly) formulated: the Anthropocene.
3. We think of the Anthropocene as registering human-kind's ravaging impact on non-human species and environments, but the Anthropocene is of course political as well—a single outsize permanent catastrophe made up of component catastrophes: genocides, depredations, the enslavement and debilitation of human populaces alongside the non-human. The rise of capitalist and industrialized logics and technologies has only hastened the pace and reach of Anthropocenic depredations.
4. In the Anthropocene, what seems to entail a political catastrophe is often working simultaneously as environmental catastrophe, and vice versa. For example, researcher Mozhgan Savabieasfahani has found that the phosphorous, depleted uranium and other toxic components used in US and UK munitions during the sieges of Basra and Fallujah have caused a rising tide of miscarriages, fetal abnormalities and birth defects in local children. Her research has shown comparable toxic effects in the wetland birds of Iran and Iraq.
5. With my snout up against the fact of the Anthropocene, with my bill snared in fishing line and the blood pooling in my industrially overdeveloped chest and my meager thighs locked and a bolt in my bovine brain, I find myself reeling through an Anthropocenic zone I call the Necropastoral.
6. I first wrote about the Necropastoral in January of 2011. The Necropastoral is a political-aesthetic zone in which the fact of mankind's depredations cannot be separated from an experience of "nature" which is poisoned, mutated, aberrant, spectacular, full of ill

effects and affects. The Necropastoral is a non-rational zone, anachronistic, it often looks backwards and does not subscribe to Cartesian coordinates or Enlightenment notions of rationality and linearity, cause and effect. It does not subscribe to humanism but is interested in non-human modalities, like those of bugs, viruses, weeds and mold. Marosa di Giorgio: "Esa loca azucena nos va a asesinar." The definitive processes of the Necropastoral are decay, vagueness, interembodiment, fluidity, seepage, inflammation, supersaturation.

The Necropastoral is literally subterranean, Hadean, Arcadian in the sense that Death lives there. The Necropastoral is not an "alternative" version of reality but it is a place where the farcical and outrageous horrors of Anthropocenic "life" are made visible as Death. [The use of the preface "necro-" is thus partly an homage to theorist Achille Mbembe's notion of Necropolitics, itself a repositioning of Foucault's biopolitics against the careers and prerogatives of post-colonial African male dictators.] The obscene: that which should be hidden away but forces its way through the membrane. Obscene event = Apocalypse.

7. The Necropastoral also hosts "strange meetings." I take this term from the English War Poet Wilfred Owen; his body of poems entails a single groaning, sweating field of holes and decay, so porous that Death may fly through it, carrying the boy poet aloft. In "The Show":

My soul looked down from a vague height with Death,  
As unremembering how I rose or why,  
And saw a sad land, weak with sweats of dearth,  
Gray, cratered like the moon with hollow woe,  
And fitted with great pocks and scabs of plaques.

Everything in this landscape works according to Necropastoral principles: spectacular, full of phantasmatic doubles and emanations: "(And smell came up from those foul openings/As out of mouths, or deep wounds deepening.)" Synesthesia is often the method by which one substance (smell) is converted to another (sound), an infernal double produced on the form of another. Finally the poet-figure is himself doubled in the scene's spectacle:

And Death fell with me, like a deepening moan.  
And He, picking a manner of worm, which half had hid  
Its bruises in the earth, but crawled no further,  
Showed me its feet, the feet of many men,

And the fresh-severed head of it, my head.

8. The Necropastoral is a strange meetingplace for the poet and death, or for the dead to meet the dead, or for the seemingly singular-bodied human to be revealed as part of an inhuman multiple body. It is a sublime site: a site of soaring flights and subterranean swoons. It is also a strange meetingplace in the sense that diverse anachronistic poets meet in the Necropastoral, twinned in their imagery, motif, themes, spectacular strategies. Wilfred Owen, say, and the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, with his vision of an ill, toxic Antilles whose fetid scum finally rises to surreal and spectacular effect. And Raúl Zurita, whose mass graves in *Song for his Disappeared Love* (trans. Daniel Borzutzky) are belatedly fertilized by "strange baits," the dismembered bodies of the Disappeared falling from the sky. And Kim Hyesoon, whose Pig speaks the following lines (English translation by Don Mee Choi) in "I'm OK, I'm Pig!" a phantasmagoria which gives a saturated, single voice to the mass of Korean pigs buried alive to meet the prerogatives of US-led industrial conglomerates:

A horde of healthy pigs like young strong men get thrown into the pit. [...]

They boil up like a crummy stew

Blood flows out of the grave

On a rainy night fishy-smelling pig ghosts flash flash

Busted intestine tunnel their way up from the grave and soar above the mound

A resurrection! Intestine is alive! Like a snake!

Bloom, Pig!

9. The Necropastoral is also, then, a method of reading for resemblances, for uncanny channels and doubles which leap across the supposed sureties of national and linguistic and formal boundaries and break literature's affirmative and humanist contract, exhibiting obscene and impolite qualities and pouring out illimitable occult energies. This raw and uncanny energy is the revolutionary force of the Necropastoral, shed in bursts and bouts which are their own spectacular political event, not yet refashioned as utility, a maximal aesthetic expenditure. Even in works which do not have an overtly ecological focus, the outlaying of a distressed and metastasized aesthetic field which forces up motifs and affects and spectacular mutant growths for the sake of bringing into aesthetic immanence a suppressed political event is the signature of the Necropastoral.

10. I want to close this discussion of the Necropastoral in the political mode, with this passage from Mexican poet Dolores Dorantes *Estilo*, translated from the Spanish by Jen Hofer. Dorantes's relentlessly spectacular work takes as its subject the mass murder of female workers in Ciudad Juárez—many of whom come to work at the maquiladoras or twin plants opened by US firms just to the South of the US-Mexican border. The dead women rise up as a field of energy, as a "we," multi-bodied and revved up by twinship and

looking to pull the addressed interlocutor into their infernal double zone. They wish not for redemption or removal to paradise but to make the fact of their depredation before and after death spectacularly, undeniably visible, to irrationally repeat as farce and pageantry their exploitation and annihilation, on their own terms:

12.-Orfebrería incrustada con dolor sobre el cielo, queremos dar la vuelta. Queremos que nos tengas bocabajo. Tus códigos ardiendo. La zona que no puedes pisar. Queremos que nos sostengas blandamente. Hilera de fosas y secuestros para tu consumo. Rostros intercambiables. Piernas de muñeca. Cuando tú quieras el cielo abre la boca. Cuando tú quieras el cielo se voltea y te esconde por encima de nuestros arsenales. Nos cubrimos nuestras caras de niña. Somos la guerra.

12.-Goldwork inlaid painfully onto the sky, we want to turn around. We want you to have us face down. Your codes burning. The zone you cannot tread. We want you to hold us up pliantly. Line of graves and kidnappings for your consumption. Interchangeable faces. Doll's legs. When you wish it, the sky opens its mouth. When you wish it, the sky turns and hides you atop our arsenals. We cover our girlish faces. We are the war.

11. An edition of Dolores Dorantes *Estilo* is forthcoming from Kenning Editions. *The Necropastoral: Poetry, Media, Occults*, a collection of my essays on this and related topics, which casts its net through poetry, prose, plays, film and visual art, from Roberto Bolaño to Matthew Barney to Harryette Mullen to Chelsey Minnis to CA Conrad to Warhol to Bataille and back, and forth, is forthcoming from the University of Michigan Poets on Poetry series next winter.

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61 West Superior Street,  
Chicago, IL 60654

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