

Three Poems

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My poems explore the juxtaposition of the urban and the rural. Having grown up in Berry Mills, New Brunswick, a liminal community that complicates the apparently straightforward division between country and city, I am interested in the ways the tensions between tradition and progress in such communities is often oversimplified, specifically in terms of their responses to climate change. These poems are part of a more diffuse interrogation of anthropocentric aspects of human consciousness which I am currently exploring in my English honours thesis in creative writing. The speaker of the poems uses the metaphor of a black bear to guide his intellect, while simultaneously trying to find ways to reconnect with his instincts in post-industrial Canada. In “Bears of the Vanishing Fence,” the speaker watches a black bear digging through his neighbour’s chemical-filled garbage. Drawing on quotes from an ecological *Quirks and Quarks* interview, “Nocturnal Bear” considers an irony in the heightened fear of encountering a bear while walking outside at night. “People Watchers” draws on an experience of hearing a policeman shooting a black bear in a Moncton neighborhood; throughout the poem, the speaker struggles to suppress the shock of witnessing this recent event.

Bears of the Vanishing Fence

Rural house of turquoise siding across the road.

The wasteland finds of a porch light, bear shapes
 upon my dark window. I woke to rolling garbage bins,
 the exhausted words on the back of aerosol cans.
 The mereology of cynicism reached the country,
 looks like an Air Wick chew toy for a black bear
 to ingest. I watch the bear at three a.m. *That blue
 paint on a cedar home weathered timeless deceit
 my dark window.* The bear rips green trash bags,
 reveals apple cores and the rotting coalition, the
 decomposing neighbours that don't share bread
 anymore. *It looks like the farm house where my
 grandmother was born, the old deceptive home
 that we adore, said she never saw bears before.*
 Our bones and chemicals laying out the asphalt,
 tarnishing bamboo floors of these abandoned
 highway homes; the city limit line fades
 with my attention. I left the bear in the
 window, feasting there in the trash
 and I went back to bed alone.

*Nocturnal Bear*¹

"It becomes inevitable that we will encounter them."

The walk back to my truck after fishing the Kennebecasis into the mud has always felt existential. Like a sundown impostor, I kick the railroad carcass or I kick the magnificent nails, the broken industrial teeth rusting on the side of the train tracks. This is anxious behaviour, and there is honest panic in every step. It is on these walks that I confront the irony of my distress.

"Fear of humans is driving animals into the darkness."

This realisation drags me by the vest through the jagged planks; it shakes me down against the electric transformer and it throws me into the truck, into the highway of white signs and regrown trees.

"It's because we're big and loud and 'novel' to them."

On this near-silent walk, I begin to crave the sense of absence I will feel on my New Brunswick drive. I want to lean into that local void, to lament our dull forest losing colour to a corporation. But I can't.

People Watchers

Weak coffee curls smoke from our palms; it curls across to the
 coughing lady wasting years on her doorstep and down to
 your neighbour's lawn, to the tip of the fear stick,
 the firearm of the policeman who shot the black bear.
 We didn't hear it from your couch. We were mesmerised
 by a nebulous film; a hazy story that I wrote
 could bury our future. We could lay effortless in our
 sleeping clothes all day, people watchers,
 waiting to be paid in
 the cheapest form of stimulation. *He shot it twice.*
 I am heading for the river but you are bound for your
 beach chair; we've been engaged in an age-old freedom;
 you watch the waves
 and I fish for salmon on the weekends—that's how I grasp
 the nature that I'm seeking. *He dragged it to the street.*
 On the water, intolerable self, internal grunting, a reaction
 to the twelve-gauges of strangers' nearby hunting;
 the killers spooked the fish and I need this pursuit,
 I can hear them shoot, they pulled me from a stillness
 and I am locked in an angry kind of current,
 I funnel down under deadpan like a trophy salmon
 in the current just cooling.
 The shooting stops and I am
 ready. We'll meet every morning where
 the dusty daylight peers through plastic blinds
 ready to expose
 and to hide.
 We are safe. *He stuffed it in the box*
and he drove it away.

NOTES

1. Kaitlyn Gaynor, "Fear of Humans is Driving Animals into the Darkness – and Nocturnal Life," interview by Bob McDonald, *Quirks and Quarks*, CBC, June 15, 2018, audio, <https://www.cbc.ca/listen/shows/quirks-and-quarks/segment/15550991>.