

Light Gaps/Dark Gaps//Andrews Forest/Tumamoc Hill

I have been dreaming of dark gaps in the desert heat
& light gaps in the freezing shade of temperate rainforest.
I have been yearning for the regeneration of our sorry lands,
But where does one begin? How does one jumpstart it all?

I retreat into a cave on a volcanic hill that is shaped
Like a horned lizard, to fast as a lizard would,
& so I hibernate & hold fast to darkness for seven years.
When I surface, I crawl to Andrews Forest in the Cascades
Until I reach above tree line & behold a meadow of obsidian
Flakes & chips gleaming in the full sun. Dazzled,
I roll back down into the shady canopy of cedar & hemlock
& sleep, fermenting among the leaf litter & the truffles
Waiting an entire winter for some lightning to strike.

When it hits, toppling one hemlock & two cedars, a flash of
Unrehearsed sunlight lances into my lair & awakens me
To vine maple & buck brush rising off the ground.
Below me the fireweed & devil's club push my body
Off the forest floor & launch me into the sky.

I land hundreds of miles away, in a stinkin hot desert
Where it hasn't rained a drop in more than a dozen years.
Dropped from the sky, weary, I've suffered too many gs
During my brief time propelled through the heavens.
Where I've landed, there appears to be hardly any cover
Just the chaos of a scree where nothing sane ever grows.

So I crawl toward the only gap of darkness I can see
Under the contorted trunk of an ancient ironwood tree.
There I fester another seven years until the sky finally rains
& rivulets drizzle down the trunk where they find me
& a few cacti ready to receive them. In a matter of seconds
Our ribs, swollen with water, expand, while our root hairs
Grow as long as Repunzel's locks trailing down the tower,
But deeper & wider, down to the base of Tumamoc Hill.

The ironwood itself leafs out & blossoms, attracting
A hundred thousand bees which suck its nectar,
Move its pollen, & make its fruit. I am wrapped
In a weaving of tendrils of vines whose warty roots
Lay hidden beneath the tree, whose leaves dart out
From their bulging buds like the tongues of snakes
At the sight of packrats leaving their flooded dens.

Every seed that has been dormant for a dozen years
Is now germinating, leaving sprouts around my head.
They are covered by emerald aphids, visited by moths
By night, hummingbirds by day, until they go to seed.
There, in their fecund shade, my beard turns green.

When it finally comes time to tell what the trick is
To get the beaten & broken places back in the running,
I try to speak, but a pygmy owl & another more spotted one
Burst out of my mouth and across my lips, leaving nothing
For me to say for myself. One takes flight for darkness,
The other, for light.

Field Notes/End Notes to a Prose-Poem

I have been pondering what conditions help jump-start long-term ecological restoration, and if that were not enough, how direct contact with the particulars of this world--- a world--- can jump-start our efforts to regenerate the human spirit.

It seems that deserts and temperate rainforests are the scratchboard opposites of one another, for one sprouts with light, the other with darkness.

Light gaps: hubs of regeneration in the darkened depths of temperate forests of the Pacific Northwest

Dark gaps: hubs of regeneration in the light-saturated expanses of the Sonoran Desert in the Arid Southwest

Andrews Forest in the Cascades and Tumamoc Hill in the Sonoran Desert

Are kindred spirits, sites that foster long-term ecological reflection and ultimately, long term ecological and cultural resilience.

How the desert monk retreats to the darkness of a cave to seek vision

How the forest monk climbs to the light of a mountain promontory to seek vision

Field stations and monasteries; they're much the same. Cloistered in a cell.

What does the sign say across from headquarters?

"Exotic species wash-off station

For boots and tires..."

I didn't know other exotics beside bus wore shoes and tires...

But that's why we come to field stations and monasteries and other sanctuaries:

To wash ourselves clean...."

Gary Paul Nabhan, Andrews Forest, December 2009