

## Three Poems

James Owens

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# St. Valentine's Day Walk in the Farmland

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*James Owens*

Gobs of snow fleas  
like flung handfuls  
of teeming soot  
on the plowed berm—  
ichor of glycine  
to keep the ice  
out, they nuzzle  
in rotting leaves  
and tick invisibly,  
the unlit seconds  
of winter hours.  
A day of drizzle  
and glassy roads,  
they rise and swarm,  
the most numerous  
life in this country.  
They harm no one,  
neither biting nor  
stinging, unhungry  
for our blushing hearts.

# Albedo

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*James Owens*

—25 Feb. 23

Having gathered the frail sun to their matte surfaces, a scatter of brown leaves from the sapling oaks nestles two centimetres deep in the perfectly leaf-shaped beds, their darkness warms into the packed snow's icy glare.

This is the pyre where the bones of nations will burn.

# Neuraesthetics

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*James Owens*

—Kagawong, Ontario

I have never seen columbines along this stream before,  
but here they are, red blossoms in the shade on the bank,  
  
small folded lanterns nodding in a curt breeze, as water  
swift with the slope of its bed ruffles and gurgles  
  
toward Lake Huron, a cool suffused clarity over rocks  
bronzed in the June sunlight and green-striated with streamers  
  
of moss waving in the flow. The flowers wave above in the afternoon,  
and in response my brain reshapes itself to code the memory  
  
in a fine thread of protein, a wisp of me as sleek as the chalaza  
curdled in egg white. It is physical, an electrically excitable,  
  
unique chemical sequence that means these columbines'  
thin stems and the points of blossoms like the bent legs of insects,  
  
this colour of petals, red just emerging wet from a sugary pink,  
clustered around a yellow interior velvety with sex organs.  
  
So a neuronal aesthetics is born, which goes beyond noting the bare fact

that columbines grow here but represents *what it is like* to know them  
through this memory's cross-linking with other encoded wisps,  
a mesh that gleams with specifics, the shine of slick-washed stones  
under the tumbling water, an aspen shivering, birds, the fungal smell  
of dirt licked away where the bank has caved beneath a mat of roots,  
and the linkages also extend through time to the autumn day  
when Erin and I breathed cold here and watched golden-flanked salmon  
punch tunnels through the current, and to another day another summer  
when I sat alone reading Miroslav Holub and sweating, over-dressed  
against mosquitoes thick as pepper-spray in the air, but stubborn to be here.  
Why? Why such complexity and over-indexing in memory,  
the simple, reportable fact, useful to the tribe, woven this deeply  
into the web of sense impressions and association, smell and hue  
and taste of a never repeated breeze, the warmth of particular skin?  
Is it because the aesthetic makes the useful fact richer, more likely  
to be recalled and told and attended? Or is it because  
I find myself imaged in this, where the ramifying signal-flicker  
ghosting in gel beneath an arch of bone seems a compensatory mirror

for the world always slipping over its horizon, already lost,  
  
but weighted, real, incarnate still in detail, drenched in meaning?  
A bit further along the trail, a wooden footbridge crosses the creek,  
  
a few metres upstream from a fallen pine whose branches  
break and braid the fast water to icy lace, where the plank handrail  
  
is littered with maple samarae. And lovers must have passed here,  
strangers to me, who left traces scored in boxy, knife-point carving:

DEVLAND

CHARLENE