



JAMIE ROSS

The Alchemical Properties of an Enchantment: Wanderlust and Other Promiscuities

From the late 1990s, when Michael Soulé and Reed Noss published their paper on rewilding and biodiversity, to 2004, when fourteen eminent minds in the world of nature conservation drafted their *Pleistocene Rewilding* proposal, “the meaning of ‘rewilding’ has continued to evolve ... The term is increasingly used to acknowledge that it may not be possible to achieve some specific natural condition from the past ... and instead describes attempts to bring back species and ecological processes that have been shunted aside—to give nature full expression in a world in which it is muted.”¹

A solitary faerie swims moonlit and naked in the Creek of Wolves. Black lilies sprout from his fingertips as he traces maps on the water’s surface. He hums a song that’s travelled three generations to arrive at this riverbed. He dreams of chasing summer; he dreams of his lovers and tying ribbons in their hair. Mountains and fog claim the skyline, shielding the faerie from boredom and mediocrity. In the morning, he’ll go looking for medicinals. In the forest, a chrysalis opens.

Is it possible, in a cacophony of demagogues and witch hunts, for one’s imagination to run wild and rewind? Is it saccharine to hope for a rewilding of the collective consciousness? Can we be romantics as we race extinction? One might argue that the apocalyptic forces at hand cannot be subdued by art, spells, or other incantations. However, if we’re constantly distracted by the ticking of the doomsday clock, how can we silence the din and focus on creating something that is regenerative and chimerical? On the subject of rewilding witchcraft, Peter Grey remarks that the pagan practice situates itself where people and “spirits parlay through the penetrated body of someone who is outside of the normal rules of culture ... [It is] grounded in the land, in the web of spirit relationships, in plant and insect and animal and bird. This is where we must orientate our actions.”² Let’s look, then, for a safe place where such actions may pullulate. If the sanctuary does not yet exist, we can build it at the crossroads.

It is night, and two faeries stand at the shore of the Abandoned Island. In darkness, they can’t see the pod of southern right whales swimming in the distance, but the faeries hear cetaceous exhalations and exaltations breaking the still of the ocean. In the shallows, nautilus seem to float in space, bioluminescent comets and shooting stars forming an underwater cosmos. The two lovers embrace at the shoreline, looking on, enchanted, their eyes flecks of phosphorescent greens and blues.

1 J.B. MacKinnon, *The Once and Future World: Nature As It Was, As It Is, As It Could Be* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2014), 67.

2 Peter Grey, “Rewilding Witchcraft,” *Scarlet Imprint*, June 13, 2014.



The term “ecosystem engineer” is used to describe a variety of animals “that radically reshape the landscapes they live on.”³ It’s perhaps easy to envision the epic landscaping forged by matriarchal elephants because of their size. We are quick to conjure the beaver’s dam—and the bodies of water it reshapes—as an almost cartoonish symbol for industrious fauna. Yet, to realize how vital, magical, and intricate just one ecosystem engineer is, we must consider the bolson tortoise. The burrow of the bolson tortoise descends nearly two metres underground and “often extend[s] to the length of a stretch limousine ... One study found 362 other species making use of tortoise excavations ... The mouths of the burrows are made up of nutrient-rich soil dredged up from the depths. Mounds used by tortoises for years exhibit a much greater diversity of plant life than surrounding areas.”⁴ Such a biodiverse cascade is no doubt the sound of the natural world expressing itself at full symphonic volume.

Above the Golden Delta, stone sentinels loom over the necropolis, brutalism atop bone. Greenery is taking over the mausoleums, the cement softening at the touch of leaves, vines, and moss the texture of velvet. Four faeries, draped in purple robes and gilded tassels, stand entwined in a circle of limbs. They measure pulse, the dilation of pupils, the friction of stubble, how the long light turns their eyelashes into gossamer. Their lips are flush with the perfume of summer, the smell reminding them of the Floating City of Flowers. Just as the seasons make their elliptical paths, and latitudes arc from island to island, the faeries will one day mark a pilgrimage to where there is only sun. For now, the faeries revel in this moment, in each other, in the sighing of the light. Nearby, a coral snake begins to shed her skin.

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3 MacKinnon, 111.

4 MacKinnon, 71–72.



Jamie Ross

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JAMIE ROSS (b. 1987) is a self-taught visual artist, educator, professional diviner and chaplain based in Montreal. His videos have been screened and installed in exhibitions on four continents. Queer lineage, biological and cultural, is one of Jamie's primordial interests and the subject of his recent book *Rousings*. His most recent solo exhibition was at La Paternal (Buenos Aires, Argentina) and he will be exhibiting in the near future at Verticale (Montreal) and at Plug In ICA (Winnipeg). He is based in Montreal.

MARK AMBROSE HARRIS' writing appears in *Nomorepotlucks*, *In the Company of Animals: Stories of Extraordinary Encounters*, and *I Like It Like That: True Stories of Gay Male Desire*. His essay *Beautiful Books* received the *Songes-de-Poliphile* award from *l'Académie de la vie littéraire au tournant du 21^e siècle*. He works as a freelance copy editor and he is a regular contributor to CBC Arts.

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