

Equinox at the Headwaters

Sever

2018

We had travelled far that day, even though it was the equinox. A car is not a healthy thing to have a relationship with, and though travellers have always come to love the things that bear them across the face of the earth, burning gasoline is not a good way to celebrate the balancing of the seasons, the beginning of the return of the sun to our hemisphere. But we live in the wasteland, and nowadays, people have to go great distances to connect all their disparate parts.

We were headed to Úytaahkoo, the mountain that rootless ones like me know of as Shasta, to find the headwaters of the river that the Spanish colonizers called “Sacramento”. The place was not treated as well as it should be. An asphalt parking lot and easy sign posts made access banal. An informative placard gave the spring its scientific explanation. Nonetheless, there it was, a veritable river erupting from the womb of the earth, surging up around the rocks at the base of a steep slope, gathering in a pool, spilling over a fallen log and running its way downhill, to join with countless other tributaries in a long journey to the south, to the Ocean, in one vision, or in another, to a series of dams and irrigation channels to feed a delusional Machine that believes it constructs itself.

It was raining that day, and the heights were lost in dense mist. We knelt, wetted our hands, filled our water bottles, and carried them a ways, accompanying the river on its path. Evergreens collected the cloudspray and released it half-time in fat drops. The earth soaked up the rain and passed it on to the river. Not a mile downstream the river was already fattened, running white over the stones. When we came around a bend, I looked into the waters and the face of a coyote appeared, staring at me. “Move in,” she said.

I thought of the way coyotes move back in to the wasteland, preying on the rodents that are more tolerant of the Disaster, eating beloved housecats, haunting suburban nights with their ghostly yapping. They belie the victorious narrative of Civilization, breaking through the acoustic barriers that block out all the other voices, the endless voices of the world. They rewild, not in a “Desert” that Civilization has relinquished (Civilization never relinquishes), but at the interstices where the grinding of the gears can still be heard, where the radio voice still booms out, “There is no other way but Onwards.”

I realized that the Collapse has already occurred, maybe it happened decades ago, but the State continues to shout out its marching orders, to direct those who follow it and, in a way, those who fight against it. States can manage collapse indefinitely. And in truth, no State has ever collapsed, but that those who suffer it give it a little push. Sometimes we are the protagonists of

the destruction of the State, rising against it at its most powerful, and surviving the clash when so many times before we have been slaughtered. Other times, the State is weakened by its own hubris and sickness, and we topple it when it is already off balance. But not even a weak State fails if its subjects choose to remain weaker still, spectators to entropy, waiting for the God-Kings to leave this earth on their own volition.

We are entropy, devouring structures with razor teeth, or we are nothing at all.

The coyote said to move back in, to reclaim the wasteland. It is time, long since time. The Collapse has already occurred.

Moving back into the world is not survivalism. It is not creating a commune on stolen land. We cannot, must not, move in the way settlers have always done, taking the land as a gift at the exclusion of all others who are a part of that land, an invitation to put up fence. I don't think it's a coincidence that phrase, "move in," is ambiguous, with a beautiful meaning, and a horrifying one. We are capable of both.

We must learn the other names of the land, the names of all the peoples, the beings, who live there, presently or as ghosts. We must learn what ecosystem has no space for us, either biologically or socially; moving in as settlers only spreads the Disaster. But in whatever place we can do so healthily and respectfully, we must find our way back to the world.

The world of Civilization and the world of the world are overlapping, one atop the other. There is no moving out of the one, but there is a moving into the other, putting our feet down, eating from it, dying into it. The battles in the streets of the city of the Machine are important. They set the whole thing trembling. Yet the tower is already tumbling, and we are within it, tumbling too. If everything is falling, then nothing moves. Only when we have our feet on other ground can we see the tower fall, and not fall with it.

I have never written of these things before, that the religion forced upon us calls "hallucinations," that an earlier, more charitable albeit infantilizing paradigm referred to as "daydreams." But part of the experience was the compulsion to share it, to talk about it. Here it is. Take from it what you will.

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