Song of the Redwood Tree:

Language and the Loss of Our Forests

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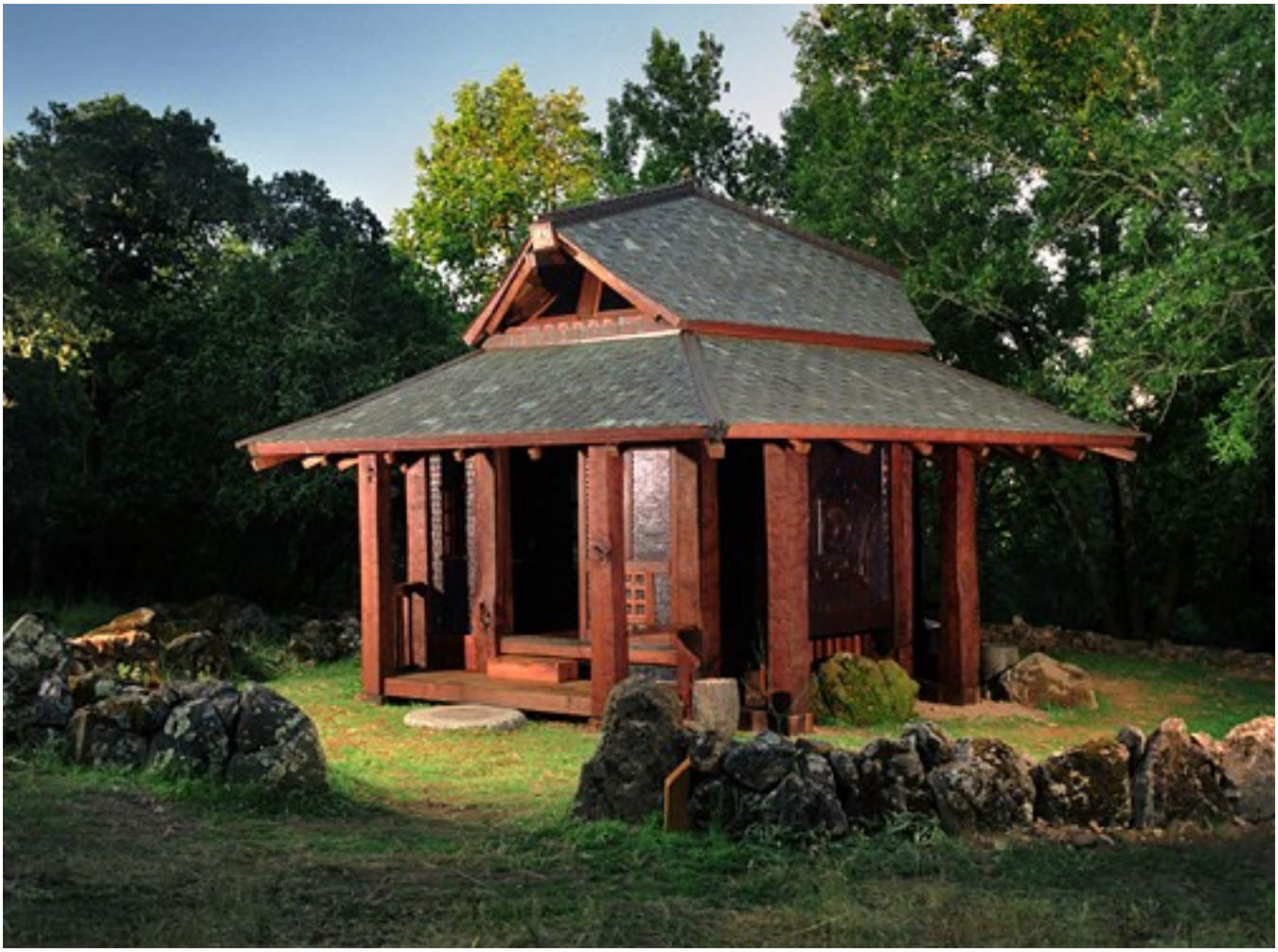

Santa Rosa. July, Late Anthropocene. Except for a few remnant oak, the only shade I find is a parking lot under a half-acre array of solar panels. Along the Redwood Highway, at the edge of the city's sprawling suburbs, the only redwoods are sickly clumps of Caltrans plantings and these enormous sculptures in a roadside culture park. History watching the traffic go by.

Stunned by the transition from coastal fog to inland heat, I nevertheless spend nearly an hour walking among them: old-growth stumps and root wads, huge chunks of wood cantilevered and stacked, solitary and in clusters, salvaged from a watershed I traveled this morning. Washed down from logged-over hills, shaped by water and time, and now again by sculptor Bruce Johnson.

At once sacred and playful, *Root 101* is a tribute to redwood: the material itself, the trees they once were, and the forest they still belong to. The grain smoothed and polished and stained, trimmed with rivulets of copper sheathing, a palpable memory of the ancient woods and the great cycle of life that sustained them. A life we think we've forgotten, though beneath the drone of traffic we still hear its cry of separation. The history isn't over. Not for a long time.

When I began this journey, I didn't know it would be a pilgrimage to loss. I intended to stop and view *Root 101*, then head over to the coast to visit another of Bruce Johnson's redwood creations—*Poetry House*. Maybe I'd write a poem about it. But I wasn't prepared for the knot of feelings evoked by Bruce's work and my own history with redwoods—as an ardent tree hugger as well as a carpenter (a wood butcher)—and most entangling, a writer about them. The poem rapidly grew into conflicted prose and I set the project aside for almost a year. I'd just gone back to work on it, in another scorching summer, when I heard that *Root 101* had been in the path of the wildfire that destroyed more than 2,000 homes in Santa Rosa. A forest fire in a forest we'd forgotten we lived with.

But even the ashes aren't an ending. Up and down the Redwood Highway, the story goes on. Around the same time as my visit to *Root 101* I traveled with some of my neighbors to a meeting room in a concrete and glass building on that same flood plain, on behalf of the second- and third-growth descendants of those same redwood stumps. It's a journey my neighbors have been making for two decades.

In Elk River, home of the famed Headwaters Reserve, a horizontal forest still rolls past our houses on logging trucks. Most people think the Headwaters Deal saved the redwoods. The Spotted Owl was protected, Julia Butterfly came down from Luna, the tree she sat in for two years. The corporate raider who liquidated thousands of acres of old growth went back to Texas

with his profits. The new owners, Humboldt Redwood Company, promised no more clear cuts, no logging of old growth. My neighbors point out that the definition of old growth is inadequate, and "group selection" is another name for death by a thousand cuts, but HRC has been very successful at public relations and marketing. A friend from Oregon, where they are not sentimental about logging, asked: "Do they still cut redwoods?"

So at the meeting at the end of the Redwood Highway, we were not hopeful of victory. For twenty years, despite the testimony of hydrologists and geologists and their own staff, disregarding the experience of residents, the clear evidence of flooding and failing Coho salmon populations, our Regional Water Quality Control Board had continued to approve logging on steep slopes in a watershed still bleeding silt from the last billionaire owner. Regulatory relief was promised and board members offered words of consolation—they felt our pain—before consistently voting against us.

Root 101 might be gone, but its story isn't over. We still live with redwood. Still share the earth with trees. Rootless wonders, we're about to realize we can't make it without them.

PUTTING TOGETHER THE PIECES

In Petaluma, early next morning, I wake to a picture puzzle of a redwood forest. I was too fried last night to even see it. On the bed table, in an unopened box, 300 pieces. A generic park scene of huge trees, ferns, a trail. I'm guessing there are more pieces, part of a larger picture. A few hours later, over on the coast, I begin to find them. Groves of big old second-growth, somehow not logged in the forty years since the Cazadero mills closed.

Down a dirt driveway, in one of those stands of mixed redwood, a house such as a sculptor might build. In one corner of the clearing a big shop building, a crane and large machines. Where *Root 101* was created. Below the house, fruit trees, then a yard and a little redwood structure. Another piece of the puzzle.

Bruce Johnson had dreamed for years of creating a space that would represent the sacredness he found in salvaged remnants of redwood. The dream became palpable with a gift

from a neighbor, another missing piece: a split log from the old forest. When he cut into it he saw the posts and beams of his house. The heavy timbers and the upturned eaves evoke a traditional Japanese teahouse, but it has five corner posts, and strangely peaked clerestory gables. It's both habitation and message, an enclosure and a runic emblem—the sort of house you might come upon in an enchanted wood. *Poetry House*, he called it, and invited poets to visit. Why not, I thought. Am I not a poet of the redwood? Actually, I'm not sure it's a title I want or deserve.

When I went to the woods in mid-life, it was to a canyon of coastal redwood a few miles out of town. My guide was Lew Welch's *Hermit Poems*, particularly his vision of letting *"the clear stream / of all of it"* flow through the poet. I was an abject failure as a hermit, but despite serious lapses I pursued the vision for most of a summer in a canvas tent beside Jacoby Creek—until one September when I woke to the sound of tractors and chainsaws. A clearcut was beginning on the ridge above my campsite. At the end of that day I climbed the steep slope to survey the damage. I returned after the next day, then stopped going. I didn't want to see it and tried not to hear it. By the end of a week I could anticipate the moment when the saw shut off, the forest held its breath, and a deep subterranean *wump* shook the earth beneath my tent.

In October, when the rains began and the logging stopped, I had already moved to a dry barn loft upriver. That winter, from neighbors and friends and public agencies, I began to learn the story of this little canyon and its redwoods. How the first enormous logs were dragged down the river bed by teams of oxen. Years later, how they dammed the flow and tractored the huge stumps—most of the trees had been cut a dozen feet or more from the ground—into the new log pond, then blew up the dam. The ensuing flood delivered them down to the flatlands, where shake and shingle mills and a barrel factory provided jobs during lean years. The post-war housing boom and tractor logging ended the watershed's incipient recovery and by the 1960's the steep hillsides were showing up in the town's drinking water—and as far away as Sacramento, where Jacoby Creek was said to have been a persuasive argument for the 1974 California Forest Practice Act. Five years later, from my loft overlooking the canyon, that legislation looked like much too little, way too late.

Up Creek / Clear Cut / Stump Speech / Rain Song was a rustic thing: 8½x11 mimeograph pages, a cover woodcut printed by my neighbor. Its contents were also rugged: shock and outrage, expressed in a language of undisguised pain, flawed in some predictable ways. Whatever strength it had, like the monosyllabics of the title, came from the deep roots of English—a language for centuries spoken by people intimate with wood and woodlands. From Sherwood—the *shire wood* of Robin Hood ballads—to the Arden of *As You Like It*, forests were a place where magic prevailed and social norms overturned. Even in the aftermath of the Puritan revolution, trees were as integral to their English speech as the wood of the ships that brought them to North America.

But the book was also prose, derived from another English that regarded the forests of the new world as the abode of devils and witches. It reflected a fallen and entirely material world, a language that suited spiritual accountants intent on turning trees into money. We have inherited that language in the discourse of timber harvest plans and the California Forest Practice Act. Weasel words, my neighbor called them. English as a dead language.

In this dialect of the regulatory bureaucracy, I learned that cutting trees is called *timber harvest.* Logging is *management*. Loggers are *operators.* Poisoning unprofitable species with herbicides is *treatment*. Mud is never as plain as mud. If you must mention it, say *sediment*. A damaged watershed is *impacted*. A ruined river *impaired*. A *TMDL*—well, if I tried to explain that total maximum daily load is a tool of sediment budgeting, it would defeat its purpose, wouldn't it? During the European Middle Ages priests spoke a vulgate Latin to protect ignorant souls from things beyond their understanding. Today's regulatory priests speak the language of *THP's*—timber harvest plans—and a thousand acronyms of forest and water accounting.

Not surprisingly, my book didn't stop the chainsaws. Poetry—even investigative poetry—is not journalism. It lives somewhere beneath the muck that others rake. But not even the best reporters can dislodge this zombie English. The pace of lo**g**ging has been slowed by regulation, and even more by scarcity, and some brave journalists have brought light and occasional outrage to the issue. But the soul-numbing discourse of resource governance continues to mask the true condition of our watersheds.

It's not only a problem for redwoods—it's old-growth Douglas fir, unentered stands of madrone, acorn-bearing tanoak. And it isn't only trees, or even salmon, another iconic species that we've nearly regulated to death. It's about soil loss and habitat destruction, about unnamed streams and unseen creatures, the whole web of life that doesn't find expression in the English that's supposed to protect it. As much as greed and blind stupidity, our "environmental crisis" reflects a language problem. So it's also a problem for poets.

POET AT THE THRESHOLD

It's already late morning. Bruce is in the shop, then off to town on an errand of mercy. Moss-covered stones are awakening from the dry grass. A chorus of gangly dandelions sings to the sun: *love me*, *love me*. At the fence line a couple of young firs regard a utility pole—a tree forced to carry messages. Beyond them a madrone poses at a seductive angle. Columns of tan oak with a tall redwood center post hold up the sky. The world is open for business.

Except for the poet. He's sitting on the porch doing nothing. Or more accurately, trying to do nothing. He's traveled over two hundred miles of river and forest to get here but something is telling him he hasn't yet arrived.

It's all that old poetry he can't let go of.

Walt Whitman's "Song of the Redwood-Tree" appeared in *Harper's Monthly*, February, 1874, for which he asked and received the princely sum of $100. The poem declared that Americans had at last found a tree worthy of their axes. Walt had never seen a redwood, so he can be excused for imagining that this one can sing. As she's about to fall she sings an aria welcoming the species about to replace her ancient kind: *Our time, our term has come*, she sings. The Americans, Walt predicts, will be around as long as redwood trees.

We leave the field for them.
Them predicted long,
For the superber race, they to gradually fill their time.

Whitman's superbist nonsense reflects an element of his poetry deeply at odds with the visionary grace of his best work. We go to his poetry for transcendent crossings of the ordinary world, for lines like "there is no object so soft but it makes a hub for the wheeled universe." Or instead of giant singing trees, a catalog of the humblest forms of creation: "mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke weed." "Song of the Redwood-Tree" gives voice to a Walter Whitman, patriotic huckster and self-promoter who projects a rotten bravura at the heart of the American Pastoral. It lives on in our monuments to the glory days of logging, a romantic vision as destructive of trees as the dead English of accountants and lawyers. The only thing possibly more harmful is the romance of saving them.

America was already looking backward, toward its mythic frontier, when John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt popularized conservation at the outset of the twentieth century. Indians and buffalo and other vanishing life forms were all the vogue. Tourism was being invented by Harvey Hotels and railroads seeking passengers. Americas were motoring to natural wonders enshrined in the country's first national parks. A touring car of conservationists, driving the newly built Redwood Highway, discovered to their horror—not the response Whitman had foreseen—that the now sacred giants were being removed as quickly as axes and two-man saws could do the job. Alarmed citizens rallied to the cause, seeking ways to preserve the most picturesque groves. Newton B. Drury, director of the recently formed National Park Service and one of California's first advertising executives, became the League's director and began to persuade wealthy citizens to buy tracts of redwoods from other wealthy citizens who were marketing them as lath and railroad ties.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of The Save The Redwoods League, an auspicious time to note that its bravest leaders were not San Francisco executives but the Humboldt County Women's Auxiliary and eventually the California Federation of Women's Clubs. These great-grandmothers of Julia Butterfly often faced off against their own male relatives, who heard nothing but Whitman's aria and the eagles that jingled in their pockets on payday. To their enduring credit, through a century of struggle, the League eventually preserved some 200,000 acres, which now form the basis of our state and national redwood parks.

But myths often outlive the truths they once represented. Ecology has shown us that preserving fragments of forests may be no more viable than the idea that we'd never run out of trees. Yet both delusions live on in popular culture. Ninety percent of the original redwoods have been cut down since they began to be saved—yet busloads of tourists drive the Avenue of the Giants and gawk at the industry's demonstration forests while just over the ridge mills are turning out millions of board feet of product. Eroding hillsides and dwindling fish populations, the slow collapse of ecosystems, plus climate change—an increase of 2^{o} F in global temperature might mean the end of redwoods altogether—could be a prelude to the endangerment of our own species. Save the humans, says the bumper sticker, but the cause seems to have opened no offices in our region.

Capitalism claims to regulate itself by saving as much as it sells—while its money and lawyers make sure the agencies of our salvation don't go too far—but its products reveal the lie. Our own back yard deck is built of cedar, not because cedar forests are better off, but because the lumber yard's con common redwood was crap, and Trex® was the other option. Advertisements between innings of Oakland A's games tell us the plastic composite is inferior to "real" redwood, but the stuff in the TV picture is so costly and rare that only hedge fund managers and Saudi princes can afford it. The ads are paid for by Headwaters money the feds gave Humboldt County to make up for lost jobs. The County gives it to John Fisher, owner of Humboldt Redwood Company *and* the A's, to make up for trees that he might be prevented from cutting.

So we have idealized *virgin* forests, and we have idealized *clear heart* lumber, two halves of truths that belie the true condition of our watersheds and our own lives. Together with the regulatory language that pretends to balance these lies, they obscure the work of ecologists and activists and restoration councils trying to re-weave our connection to forests. To living *and* working with trees. With wood. With shelter and shingle. Threshold and door. To re-connect us to the silent millennia of human hands shaping wood, holding the wooden handles of tools replaced and handed down generation to generation. We struggle to hold onto that memory so our connection to wood doesn't end in flea market conversations about tools whose uses we've forgotten.

Or people in cars talking parts per million of sediment while speeding down the Redwood Highway to a meeting where the forest ends and the roadside stumps are art.

Our species had agreements with forests. They were the first poems.

IN THE POETRY HOUSE

Please Remove Shoes, the sign says. He takes off his sandals, then can't stop unburdening himself. Folding and laying aside clothing, unmediated except by notebook and pen, the poet slides opens the door and steps into the dark light of wood. The fifth element. Heart wood. Mind wood. Spirit wood. A river of time running through its grain. Riffle and pool and eddy of time.

Feel of oiled wood grain. Touch of tool and hand. Ripples chiseled and planed, carved and rubbed by hand. Edge and trim of hammered copper. A large circle in the plank floor with a pentagon of redwood burl at its center. Raised by screw jack from the floor, the circle is a table where he sits writing. Light enters through small windows of rippling glass.

Sculpted and polished wood reflecting the light of ages. A time when ancestral speakers of this language had moved from earthen to wood houses. When words were still spoken to fires. A time when the pale green light of window glass was sand at the bottom of an ocean. The copper buried under a mountain. The redwood on which his pen and notebook rest, still waiting to be born.

What a poet best learns from the ancestors is when to stop. Then how to go on. To learn from Whitman's original genius, but then be grateful to Robinson Jeffers for giving the redwood tree back to us. "The Summit Redwood" is no idealized tree infected by human sentiment, but a creature rooted in coastal rock and the American vernacular. A single huge snag on a hilltop—hollow, storm-broken, lightning-struck, its power and history witnessed and lived with. Jeffers' redwood comes to us in the way nature reveals itself over time, revisited till its story is inextricably tied to our own. "Only stand high a long enough time your lightning / will come."

But of course it doesn't end there. The poet next learns from Jack Spicer how to parse this lesson of Jeffers', how make it new. *Language* lets us see Jeffers' redwood through surreal juxtapositions of life and death, trees and parking lots: "Trees and the cliffs in Big Sur breathe in the dark. Jeffers knew the pain of their breath and the pain was the death of a first-born baby breathing." Spicer explicitly warns against a language of Whitmanesque monuments, of turning redwoods into bronze: "If they had turned Jeffers into a parking lot death would have been eliminated and life also. "

Not ending there, he puts it even more plainly: "True conservation is the effort of the artist and the private man to keep things true." So the conservation of trees and the conservation of language are twin tasks of stewardship. Restorationist and poet are engaged in the work of re-connecting us to our sources, root and branch of our deepest woods.

And it's still not over. The poet must move beyond Spicer's formulation of the task, beyond the "artist as private man" toward a vision more balanced and communal. For many centuries in this region the relation between forests and "wood products"—houses of split redwood, canoes carved from fallen redwood trees—was governed by cultural agreements about value, arrived at by the exchange of shells. We are probably not going back to the use of mollusks for money, but the survival of people and forests will require that we find some equivalent form of those agreements. Here, in this house of redwood, is the next form of that endeavor.

THE POEM INSIDE THE HOUSE

Bruce Johnson worked on his house for a long time without having a name for it, until he came across a poem inscribed in the guest book of the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center and realized he was building a "Poetry House"—or as he put it, "an empty space where attention resides." He invited the author of the poem to collaborate on the project.

The work of Elizabeth Carothers Herron has always evoked poetry's wildest roots and deepest language, and she embraced this project. But she found difficult to get into. After many months of contemplation, she accidentally called it *Poet's* House and that happenstance

possessive noun, by the logic of contraries, was her entry into the poet's necessary dispossession. "From a state so personal," she wrote, "it passes through itself and shape-shifts to something larger, something I cannot call my own."

Once it started, the poem grew large and feral, even refused to be typeset. A bookbinder was enlisted to gather the 184 pen and ink pages into a volume which now resides in a wooden box inside the house. During the house's construction, friends were invited to take words and phrases from the book and inscribe them on the house's beams and inner walls. Except for the paper ceiling lamp, most of the words remain unseen. Like prayers on a prayer wheel, Bruce Johnson says, the words have an ongoing resonance. Like a deeper building material, Elizabeth's words hold Poetry House together.

Poet's House weaves the deeply personal with the cosmic and universal—or as the poet might say, through her self and out again. It's a culmination of her work, and of qualities that make her a cultural treasure of our region. With a voice that ranges from lyrics of inner life to the georgics of domestic living, and from dispatches of war to a fish kill on the upper Sacramento, she is able to create something like a whole human attention—as when we endeavor to speak of what is most near and dear to us.

Poetry comes from a forest where the roots of words, like mycelia in the soil, have been talking to other roots for a long time. In an opening in that forest, we find the poet's house. The poem brings us to its door. When we open and enter, we find instead we have come out into another space. And we've left our usual selves at the door—along with our usual descriptions.

The Poet's House might sometimes be owls
over the fields of night
or rests in music—
an echo, a footprint, the emptiness
inside a cup—
and the words are the cup.

In the unfolding of the poem, as we read it phrase by phrase, we re-enact its composition. Like words on a floor joist, unseen by the person seated above, the poem is continuously at work.

Poet's House is a performance, constantly being re-composed and performed again. (Some of the words I'm quoting are from a chapbook, others come from performance notes.)

The work being done by the poem is the unending task of all the arts: to keep things true, as Spicer said. To reconnect us to the blessed particulars of the world and the great mystery that speaks through them.

> *Fallen petals, lost sandals, winter storms, rush-hour traffic, forgotten endearments, evening news, the war you hear from the backroom of your mind, the baby crying on the plane all the way to Chicago, stars strewn to the edge of the universe, the first windfall apple.*

The flow of words, like the flow of polished wood grain, brings us to our senses. Words re-attach us to the earth, and we are re-embodied with them.

> *The Poet's House is your name*
> *forever floating on the summer dusk,*
> *an incantation*
> *to conjure you out of the mystery of your lost shape,*
> *calling you back to this earth house, this house without walls*

Embodied, then disembodied, the poem takes us away and brings us back—forever changed. "Arriving and leaving, forever at the threshold," it recalls listener and reader to our own shifting essence—"you are pollen and ash, seed and stone."

And once again, it doesn't end there. Our disorder isn't going to be fixed by simple rearrangements. As readily as the poem brings us to our senses, it is obliged to derange them. The things we think we know, as Coyote stories remind us, are the things that keep us from knowing who we are and what we're really doing. The poem repeats the caution of the 13th-century Zen monk Dōgen: *Do not suppose the ash is the future and the firewood is the past.* Order may be found in what we thought was disorder.

> *The poet's house is in the stacked twigs and chaotic debris left at floodtide*
> *where water rats make nests, curl up and listen to the wind.*

Like our inward house, our public and social order, too, is fragile and precarious. "*Come, Coyote,"* the poem says to the trickster spirit: "W*e need your luck / for the world spins on the rim of chaos."* Our way lies "*through the broken gate, the Doorless Door of the heart.*" The outer and inner journey are inseparable, and equally perilous.

The poet also invokes Mnemnosony, mother of all the muses. Coyote, always pressing forward, says *imagine*, *imagine.* But don't forget: *Remember*, *remember*. Don't lose our history. It could be what is about to happen.

Hope and heartache sleep together, each day
a book we close before we sleep. Waking
we rub our eyes at the miracle of return and renewal.
We weep. We open our empty mouths.

And so, when the next line returns us to the world, we are back in the wet particulars of a familiar forest.

In the redwoods, calypso orchids, fill their empty purses
with cool damp air. Deer trails, scat, ferns and fallen branches.

On the forest floor we return to the foundations of what we know. *May we love fearlessly*, Elizabeth Herron prays for us. *May we find the true nature in all things.*

Poet's House brings us back to our place in the world. Lets us see it and not look away. This is the necessary reordering to which all of us—readers, listeners, poets, speakers at meetings—are called by Elizabeth Herron's words. They should be inscribed at the entry to every forest trail, inside the walls of every public building.

WORDS IN THE WOOD

I step out and slide the door closed, put my disguise back on. I face Poetry House and bow—not a thing I usually do, an involuntary reaction to this powerful knot of words and wood. A confluence of Form and Energy, as Bruce Johnson characterizes his work. The house is solid and feels deeply rooted, yet it's designed to be taken apart and moved. Like Elizabeth's poem,

exactly right as it is, yet changing each time it's performed. Wood and words together again, a living lesson our culture urgently needs. Nothing less will save us. Nothing less will save the forest.

In a glass and concrete building, not far off the Redwood Highway, at a meeting of the Northcoast Regional Water Quality Control Board: my upriver neighbor Kristi, whose grandfather's apple orchard is buried in silt; Andy, long-time organizer and videographer who documented the redwood wars and hundreds of meetings like this; and Vivian, married to a fisherman and Watershed Conservation Director of the Pacific Coast Fishermen's Association. After nearly two decades of reports and hearings, the five board members are set to approve the *Elk River TMDL Action Plan*, a nearly unreadable document that has been gutted of every protection we've fought to include: an end to winter logging, a 10-year moratorium in the most severely damaged sub-watersheds, a 2% annual harvest limit—meaning they have to wait 50 years before logging a parcel again. All that is gone, replaced by dead language.

John Fisher's timber boss and a lawyer are explaining the meaning of zero, said to be the amount of erosion that Elk River can assimilate beyond the 640,000 cubic yards of mud now filling its channel. "Zero can't mean zero," the lawyer tells the water board, and they nod agreement as if confirming the number of angels in the room. Finally, the member from Red Bluff cuts through the imaginary math to the real issue: Humboldt Redwood Company's profits. "I'm afraid we're not leaving them enough trees," she says. Agreement is unanimous.

The river, the fish, the inhabitants, get some restoration money and a long ride home.

After the corporate raider had liquidated thousands of acres of redwoods and driven Pacific Lumber into bankruptcy, a Texas judge rejected a bid by a local group proposing to manage the forest cooperatively and sustainably. Instead he accepted the bid of John Fisher, scion of the wealthy Gap family and already the owner of Mendocino Redwood, whose brother Robert was co-chair of Governor Brown's Strategic Growth Council, a keystone of California climate change policy. The Fisher offer was based on flawed estimates of money and trees, and despite Robert's credentials, carbon sequestration in brother John's forests has continued to decline.

But for the judge, the cooperative's proposal was simply unimaginable—as if it had come from a foreign nation and no translator could be found.

The poem inside the walls is still working on that translation. For a moment, from our seats in the back row of the windowless meeting room, I could see it: *Poetry House*. Inside the house I could hear new ways of talking about forests and rivers, a new poetics of regulation. The Golden State was founded on resource extraction, and its agencies of public trust still routinely issue permits to trash our forests and rivers, so this miracle may be a long time in coming. But the transition to this new regulatory ethic has already begun at the local level. In the 40 years since I camped beside Jacoby Creek, the City of Arcata has expanded its ownership to include the entire watershed and is pledged to sustainable management. The forest is logged to support its recovery, and there is heated argument about this contradiction, but poets walk in the woods and speak for the trees far more knowledgably than I was able to do.

Ground-truthers, these poets call themselves. They work for advocacy groups like EPIC, and they sue the bastards. Or they affiliate with Earth First and engage in direct action. Over in the Mattole Valley, they call themselves Forest Defenders. They've assembled a structure of logs and rope that blocks access to a grove of old-growth fir that Humboldt Redwood wants to log. It has been compared to a giant wood rat's nest. Rigged to a tree platform, if it's moved a person may fall to their death. Last summer some of these young poets joined with elders and indigenous people to carry a redwood log from Mendocino over the coast range and up to Elk River, more than 200 miles, stopping for ceremonies at critical and endangered places. It was an act born of a dream that saw this as a way to save trees. A beautiful and impossible poem, it would follow the Pacific Northwest's great forest all the way to Alaska, preserving our last best defense against a warming planet. The Ghost Dance was just such a poem.

I heard the poem as recently as last week, at a local water district meeting where commissioners faced a crowd of people questioning their plan to extend development into the forest. The talk of converting woods into housing took me back to Santa Rosa and the fire that burned through *Root 101*.

I left Bruce's place around mid-day, drove north along the coast, a cool summer fog rolling in over the highway. All the way home and through the following year I thought about Poetry House and Elizabeth Herron's poem. Our TMDL went to Sacramento and was approved, a better definition of zero was promised next year, a state-sponsored restoration group fell apart, and a feasibility study ate up the remaining grant funds. Logging, some of it clearcut, continued in the upper watershed as we struggled to give form to the energy for change—to marry the memory of loss to the imagination of what is possible. It's even more difficult than it sounds, and it's taking longer than anyone imagined.

At the end of the next summer I stopped again along the Redwood Highway, walked among the charred remnants of *Root 101*. Enormous sculptures had burned down to bare earth, melted copper, and powdery ash. But many of Bruce's sculptures were still intact, some only partly blackened, as if licked by a dragon in its wrathful passing. They would go back to the workshop. Off in the distance, half a dozen new houses were under construction where the fire had cut across a subdivision. Already sheathed with wafer wood, joined by new glues and plastics, waiting for the dragon's return.

Along the trail through Headwaters Forest Reserve, where the liquidation logging stopped, second-growth redwoods grow out of enormous stumps, trees that were cut not long after Whitman's "Song of the Redwood-Tree" appeared. Two or three together, sometimes half a dozen or more, I can easily reach around some of these offspring. Others are more than twice my arm span and over a hundred feet tall. Sprouted from knotted growths of burl, clones of the mother tree—"they grow like weeds," the loggers like to say—some will split and fall, others may break off because they're not well rooted. Some have almost entirely taken over the parent tree, its age-old bark barely visible above the forest duff and salal, black from a long-ago fire, blue where it's slowly being consumed by mold. I stand and listen for a long time.