

Tjawangwa Dema

Variation on the Life of Roaches

Ecological charisma describes the anatomical, geographical and temporal properties of an organism that configure its detectability by a human subject. It relates to the human umwelt: the bubble in which we make sense of the world

- Jamie Lorimer, 'Charisma'

Roach, since I cannot sing
I offer you a spell.
A psalm to sooth all Blattodea.

You are forgiven whatever sin we imagine
weighs heavily against all
who shun the light,

scatter and flit.
Malodorous thing, all must and oil,
to what do you belong?

Let them bring their citrus,
their bay leaves and cinnamon.
Let them cast peppermint, coffee

and bleach.
Roach, you stay brimming,
every boundary a bridge.

What grace I have I gift to you who has no lungs,
bug eyed, broad backed and small headed,
we say *heathen* and mean something beneath that,

though your wings – pleat of leather and membrane –
have scuttled the earth for two hundred
and more years. Each year a span. Indiscrete mob,

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nocturnal hisser, rosewood tinted pest, pet.
Most of all, your life a talent of indiscriminate love
of dark corner, forgotten stamp and damp drain.

Whoever has conceived in space will inherit the earth.
Its wretched cupboard boxes, their poorly limbed tenants.
This that has sent men flying out of their own homes

renders us slow, impotent. Makes futile our efforts
at spotless intimacy. Gregarious flyer, burrower
that makes us retch. Your sound less scurry,

more scratch and hiss. Consider what the men in robes
and the beggar share. Slight leveller, survivor of thirst,
of heat and arctic cold.

You whose name has been blasphemed.
Six-legged harbinger from whom science
mimics mechanical legs, our future hearts –

will no one sing your song?

'Variation on the Life of Roaches' was previously published in *an/other pastoral* (No Bindings, 2022)