

Of Failure and Faith: Credo of a Psychoanalytic Agnostic

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*Our psyches are thus embedded individually and collectively in Gaia's psychosphere,
along with forests and every other living being, in a grand symbiotic sentience
that itself finds expression in this unified field of awareness
that stretches out into the cosmos as far as our imagination allows.*

~ Zhiwa Woodbury

~ First Movement: Failure as Context ~

The Middle-Aged Joggers by David Ruthschman

We gather beside the pond in great ragged flocks, like birds. We run. Knees and backs stiff,
we run – along the available routes, the ones before us, the paved and unpaved paths.

We have failed our children spectacularly.

Sometimes we see ducks, floating in twos and threes. This shimmering, intricate world.

What have we done?

We run faster; we push ourselves. We sweat. We take so much pleasure in our effort, the
running, shards of sunlight on the surface of the water.

The oceans rise and boil. The sky thickens.

They won't forgive us.

We run faster.

Through this presentation, in the homiletic style - bespoke for a 'congregation' of
psychodynamic therapists and analysts - I will attempt to share my identity as a pastoral
psychotherapist practicing at the "dusking" of the Anthropocene. Its intertwining movements
will include failure, in the visage of the emergent climate crisis; communal grief as portal to
possibility; and pastoral psychotherapy as devotional practice. What I wish to offer is a series of
three independent yet inter-related sermons, as it were, evincing an intertwining of
interdisciplinary thought and feeling intended to derange us into an openness toward the
emergence of a new story. In what follows, I hope also to demonstrate fidelity to a trinity of
true-ness or right-ness in which ***orthodoxy*** – right doctrine or right thinking – is subordinate to,

or at least *only as important as*, **orthopraxy** – right practice or right application of truth to life – and **orthopathy** – right feeling or right suffering.

To suggest this last, *orthopathy*, feels like heresy in the context of the psychotherapeutic task. And yet, this is why I begin with Ruthschan's "Middle Aged Joggers:" *The oceans rise and boil / The sky thickens / They won't forgive us / We run faster*. My encounter with this poem three or four years ago was an epiphany of orthopathy. He so succinctly captures the affective realities of confrontation with our collective existential failure as we perceive the dusking of the Anthropocene - failure which, for those who will allow it, also registers as individual existential failure, as we look toward a future for which we, literally, have no reference. Indeed, **we** have done this, and we can barely conceive of what "this" is and what the consequences of "this" might be.

To that end, please forgive me for over-citation from an article I strongly commend to you by bio-ethicists David Schenck and David Churchill, "Ethical Maxims for a Marginally Inhabitable Planet." Schenck and Churchill do an excellent job of presenting us with a succinct and realistic assessment of where we stand after being 'asleep at the wheel' for decades.

Our assumption is that the current devastating trajectory for global warming will continue or deviate only slightly...Hence, a 2.5°C rise in global temperature over preindustrial levels is a strong possibility, possibly as early as 2041. If this is the case, humanity will be facing social, financial, and political collapse on a global scale. There will be death and suffering from immediate climate events of unprecedented magnitude, such as frequent and severe storms, flooding, heat waves, and fires, resulting in famine, food and water shortages, pandemics, wars large and small, and economic and social insecurities on a level only the poorest of nations have ever experienced.

...We can always hope for less devastation, but typical American optimism at this juncture bespeaks either ignorance or denial...(T)he prospect becomes almost unthinkable; we have no reference point.

...How to cancel the assumption that human life will go on indefinitely after our individual deaths? To even pose the possibility is to generate, for most of us, a degree of anxiety and distress that makes it difficult even to continue the inquiry. But that is

precisely the point... At 3°C, no one will be an observer; we must move from observer to felt embodiment of our predicament. (Schenck and Churchill 2021)

And so, they arrive at their first maxim: *“Work Hard to Grasp the Immensity*. Realize how fiendishly difficult it is to grasp the scope of climate devastation oneself. Realize how hard it is for others.” As a hyper-object, “climate” is notoriously difficult to apprehend, so very susceptible to being abstracted and thus, easily dissociated. And so, I add the following recognition from Zhiwa Woodbury,

The body count here that precipitates mass extinction already includes about 80% of all wildlife, 90% of big fish in the sea, and upwards of 75% of all insects - in less than the span of one human lifetime - while the world(’s human) population has nearly tripled. (Woodbury 2021)

Is this over-stated, exaggerated for impact? Perhaps...but not by much. Simply consider the IPCC’s 6th Assessment Report released March 2023. Taken together, climate disruption and its trajectory along with the advent of the earth’s sixth mass extinction, unequivocally initiated by human activity of the last two centuries, defines the dusking of the Anthropocene. Such a profound experience of failure is a psyche/soul-transforming – or potentially psyche/soul-imploding or exploding – encounter with loss, death, impermanence, guilt and potentially extinction. This is, for me, the increasingly unavoidable context of clinical work.

In the face of all this, what is orthodoxy – right thinking? What is orthopraxy – right action? What is orthopathos – right suffering? It is not the pervasive and growing collective psychosis, the adherence to alternative and preferred realities, including outright denial, that is fueling the urge, apparent across the globe, toward authoritarianism. It is not despair and doom-ism leading to individual and collective psychic collapse, as is fed by some of my favorite post-apocalyptic TV and film, and is made manifest, much more tragically, in spiking suicides rates, particularly among young people. It is not the turn toward anaesthetizing as is seen in the ongoing opiate addiction crisis, nor the manic distracted-ness ever-encouraged by extractive and consumptive capitalism. All of these are perfectly understandable reactions to trauma on a global scale - well-established, time-tested maladaptive human strategies. And they all lead to very predictable outcomes.

Nor does silence constitute orthopraxy. A recent Yale Study on Climate Awareness (2022) provides two statistics that, when taken together, reveal a devastating spiral of silence: (1) a majority of Americans (64%) say they are either “somewhat worried” or “very worried” about global warming; while at the same time, (2) most Americans (63%) say they “rarely” or “never” discuss global warming with family and friends. For those who are able, we must encounter the very real existential implications of the Anthropocene; we must speak aloud to each other what we are perceiving and where we anticipate current trends might take us; we must move from the position of observers to a felt embodiment of our predicament.

At this point, I would like to pivot my reflections with what is, perhaps, an apparent non-sequitur and the germ of an idea: What if climate disruption is a manifestation – indeed, a collective embodiment - of centuries of accumulated, intergenerational human trauma? Such question can only be made sense of when I claim and proclaim that ***Earth is a sentient being.*** I do not intend to speak metaphorically here, but rather literally. For far too long we (of Western petro-capitalist culture) have refused to extend simple sentience to non-human beings. This is the height of arrogance. Because the minds of our non-human kin are not like our minds, we have denied them the dignity of recognizing that they possess – of natures fit each to their kind - feeling, thought, intention, affection, even love.

In his essay “From Extinction Rebellion to Gaian Revolution: A Humane Response to the Climate Crisis,” Zhiwa Woodbury challenges us to contemplate a radical shift in our collective consciousness.

(We) are being asked to acknowledge that the planet we’ve re-shaped for modern conveniences...is none other than Gaia, a living, self-regulating sentient being Herself... (And to further) acknowledge the planet-sized elephant in the room that a living being is necessarily a conscious being...Just as with Copernicus displacing Earth from the center of God’s creation, so with Gaia theory, humanity is being challenged to re-think our place in the natural order of things...One way or another, we’ve got to grok Gaian sentience. (Woodbury 2021)

The leading edges of the physical sciences are discovering what indigenous wisdom has known all along: that the earth is possessed of a coherent consciousness and, in a sense, personhood –

of which, by the way, we are expressions, not masters – creatures, not gods. We have violated Earth over and over for centuries now; and we continue to do so. In this sense, it is easy to understand the travails of the Earth as the metaphoric manifestation of the cumulative trauma of humankind. But if, as systems theory would lead us to understand, we are inextricably interrelated to the Earth as a whole, how could it not be the case that Earth’s disrupted-ness is mirroring the collective psychic burden of generation upon generation of human trauma?

There is another idea, another layer that I’d like to add here, namely that of *omnicentrism*, which is the understanding that each instance of consciousness, human **and otherwise**, must necessarily experience itself, subjectively, as the center of the universe, and in that sense, so it is. I might even say that each instance of consciousness is an expression of God’s very Self perceiving the rest of the universe – and that each instance of subjective consciousness possesses an inherent dignity and a (divinely bestowed) right to thrive. This applies not merely to all of Earth’s children but must necessarily include and apply to the Earth, which we have come to treat as an object, rather than as the greatest subject we are capable of perceiving.

Obviously, such a radical reorientation to fundamental ideas of consciousness, of inter-relatedness, of the very idea of the self/Self itself has vast implications, to which I will return.

~ *Interlude* ~

Lead in chant of [Humbly](#) (click to listen)

Bearing Witness

by Laura Weaver

Sometimes we are asked to stop and bear witness:
this, the elephants say to me in dreams
as they thunder through the passageways
of my heart, disappearing
into a blaze of stars. On the edge
of the 6th mass extinction, with species
vanishing before our eyes, we’d be a people
gone mad, if we did not grieve.

This unmet grief,
an elder tells me, is the root
of the root of the collective illness
that got us here. His people
stay current with their grief—
they see their tears as medicine—
and grief a kind of generous willingness
to simply see, to look loss in the eye,
to hold tenderly what is precious,
to let the rains of the heart fall.

In this way, they do not pass this weight on
in invisible mailbags for the next generation
to carry. In this way, the grief doesn't build
and build like sets of waves, until,
at some point down the line—
it simply becomes an unbearable ocean.

We are so hungry when we are fleeing
our grief, when we are doing all
we can to distract ourselves
from the crushing heft of the unread
letters of our ancestors.
Hear us, they call. Hear us.

In my dreams, the elephants stampede
in herds, trumpeting, shaking the earth.
It is a kind of grand finale, a last parade
of their exquisite beauty. See us, they say.
We may not pass this way again.

What if our grief, given as a sacred offering,
is a blessing not a curse?
What if our grief, not hidden away in corners,
becomes a kind of communion where we shine?
What if our grief becomes a liberation song
that returns us to our innocence?
What if our fierce hearts
could simply bear witness.

~ *Second Movement: The Communal Work of Grief* ~

Through the preceding elements of ritual – singing and poetry - we have crossed the threshold into my Second Movement: *The Communal Work of Grief*. This is exactly what such work is designed to do: help us to cross thresholds – from isolation into community, from numbness into orthopathy, from dysregulated overwhelm and despondent collapse into a grounded, connected, embodied presence capable of witnessing, feeling, responding.

One of my teachers, Jungian therapist, author and ritualist Francis Weller, frames the dilemma or deficit addressed by communal grief work in this way,

...One of the essential movements that made us human was our ability to hold one another in times of grief and trauma. This skill has, for the most part, been lost under the extreme weight of individualism and privatization...Without the familiar and reliable container of community and family, these times can penetrate our psychic lives in a shattering way, leaving us shaken, frightened and unsure of our next footstep. This is the experience of trauma...(wherein) what confronts us is too intense to hold, integrate or comprehend. The emotional charge that arises saturates our capacity to make sense of the experience, and we become overwhelmed and alone. (Weller 2020)

Discerning souls from far outside our cultural context perceived such soul loss in us and gifted to us the grief ritual as an invitation to and means of remembering our way out of this dilemma. Here is the story of how this came to be, as it has been transmitted to me. Sometime in the 1970's the elders of the Dagara tribe of Burkina Faso looked to North America, to the United States in particular, wondering why it was that we were so dangerous, so violent, so destructive. They perceived that we were *ruthless*, which etymologically means without grief, without compassion, without sorrow for the misery of others. They determined that we had forgotten how to grieve. So, they sent Maildoma and Sobonfu Somé, as missionaries, to adapt and translate their ancient cultural practices around grieving to our culture, and to share those with us to help us remember this lost technology. And so they came.

I have been deeply blessed, beginning in 2015, to encounter, work with and learn from a number of people who worked closely with Maildoma and Sobonfu in their early years in the

States. These include Francis Weller in the Bay Area, Therese Charvét of Sacred Groves on Bainbridge Island, and Laurence Cole of Port Townsend. I have attended numerous grief rituals, responded to the call for a new generation of grief tenders, and apprenticed with these teachers of an uncodified curriculum amidst diffuse and intermingling lineages. To date, I have offered the grief ritual work largely to and with the LGBTQ community, including circles of the AIDS Survivor generation, queer recovery circles, and the Radical Faeries – as well as with progressive Christian communities and the general public. After an unanticipated pandemic-inspired hiatus, I am very pleased to be returning to co-facilitation of in-person grief workshops and rituals.

These are not bereavement support groups; nor is this group psychotherapy. What is offered is ritual work in ritual space. To be clear, this work is inspired and informed by the Dagara tradition; it does not intend or pretend to be a replication of it. Rather, it is a reaching toward new cultural expressions that will fit our time and our need. Its elements include chant, poetry, drumming, movement, the practice of beauty (creation of shrines), the remembering of the (our) ancestors, stream of consciousness writing, active listening in small groups, courageous speaking in large group, engagement with the earth, and various micro-rituals. These elements are utilized to create a “sudden village,” rapid and deep somatic, affective bonds among participants to embody a ritual container in which individual and collective psychic energy can be nurtured as embers in a fire. In its fullest expression, the experience culminates in an extended, highly structured grief ritual, usually lasting two to three hours, in which the entire village is continuously activated through chant, movement and mutual support. The point of the ritual is to create a container within which participants can move into active grieving as a shared communal experience.

That is the “whence” and the “what” of communal grief work, but it leaves us with the question of, “Why is it important to engage this work?” And that brings me to the *gospel of grief*, which tells us that the mark of a mature soul - an integrated and grounded psyche - is the ability to hold grief in one hand and gratitude in the other. If we know only grief, we will fall into cynicism

and despair. If we know only gratitude, we lack compassion and are susceptible to toxic positivity. Mayan Shaman Martin Prechtel says that the ability to laugh and the ability to grieve “live in the same house, sleep in the same bed.” Indeed, what if, as Ross Gay suggests, joy is what effloresces when we dare to share our broken hearts with each other? If we allow ourselves to grieve deeply and fully, it will bring us back to life. Prechtel again, “The spirits need us to feed them, and we feed them with grief and praise; grieving is part of praising life, and it makes Spirit fat!” John O’Donohue tells us that “life is growth in the art of loss.” Grieving is a fundamental and essential human capacity. We are initiated into grief at some point and then have a forever and deepening relationship with grief. Indeed, loss and grief are the chisel that sculpts the human soul. Why so many citations? Because these are not *my* ideas. This is the witness of the poets and the mystics, the crones and the sages, through the ages.

Grief is a lost art, and this loss is a crisis of our collective soul life. Our forgetting of the critical importance of grief as the shared work of community - and **not** a privatized experience - has everything to do with the cultural, political and ecological crises in which we find ourselves. Occurring beyond and outside of therapy - beyond and outside of language - communal grieving begins to reweave our profoundly frayed social fabric. I have recently adopted the descriptor ***grief mender*** to honor this sense of stitching the wound and reweaving the fabric. At the same time, grief as communal practice opens a threshold across which we can move from psychic collapse into a (re)vitalizing responsiveness. The point is to move out of our heads, out of the analytic and into our bodies, our hearts, our souls – to experience connection to the village, to the earth, to our ancestors. All with grief *in our hands*, as the solvent to erode what immobilizes us and to liberate us into action that flows from love.

Yet, when we speak of “revitalizing responsiveness,” it is still too easy for us to hear this within the worldview of the privatized, siloed self – as a liberative moment in our personal improvement projects, albeit within the context of global crisis. It grows increasingly evident to me, however, that the communal work of grief opens a potentiating portal into the experience of the indigenous self. Weller speak of grief ritual as “dropping us into...an encompassing

surround of darkness and mystery...a sacred terrain...deep within the earth.” He is pointing toward an ancient, primordial territory - one that we carry deep within our very genes, a territory that we have largely forgotten in our domestication. With practice and willingness, grief ritual has the power to derange us, to re-establish the connection with and deliver us into this territory. In this landscape, it is possible to experience a sacred, spiritual encounter - beyond sectarian belief systems or even the absence thereof – with others, with the Other, with our own enduring indigenous souls, ever and still native to this earth.

~ Interlude ~

(silence or chimes and light a candle)

There is no insurmountable solitude.
All paths lead to the same goal:
to convey to others what we are.
And we must pass through solitude and
difficulty, isolation and silence
to find that enchanted place
where we can dance our clumsy dance
and sing our sorrowful song.
But in that dance, and in
that song, the most ancient rites
of our conscience fulfill themselves
in the awareness of being human.

- Pablo Neruda

~ Third Movement: Pastoral Psychotherapy as Devotional Practice ~

And so we have transitioned to my last movement: *Pastoral Psychotherapy as Devotional Practice*. Devotion, etymologically: profound religious emotion, awe, reverence. And indeed, I understand pastoral psychotherapy, in its fullest expression, to include the disciplined practice of awe or reverence. In a statement that is more easily communicated in writing than speech, I understand spiritually integrated therapy to include not only the encounter of self with other, but further to offer at least the potential for encounter with Other, leading to an experience of Self.

In the first encounter of self with other, the therapeutic frame becomes the ritual within which the client can know her own mind/spirit/body; and the therapeutic encounter can be seen as the making of an offering of this self-knowing (the material that emerges), placed upon the altar of the intersubjective space between client and therapist. This is the arena of our psychodynamic work and the analytic task of working with transference material in unloosening and breaking up psychic blockages, in the repair of developmental deficits or arrests. This work is pursued by seeking atonement, by seeking to be-at-one-with, to whatever extent possible, the psychic reality of the client.

But in the practice of pastoral psychotherapy, I hold the potential for a further encounter, for both client and therapist, that through the other, we might encounter the Other. In the therapeutic frame as ritual, the intersubjective space between is understood (etymologically, stood in the midst of) as containing the Ground of Being/Ultimate Reality/God. And the offering that is made (material, content) is not only *worked through* but also *worked on* by the divine transpersonal, the “Source of the Sounding,” which is recognized as the ultimate mutative agent in therapy.

I was restored to a sense of clarity regarding this awareness as I listened to Bruce Reis at the NWAPS Distinguished Speakers event here in Seattle last October. He began his presentation sharing his credo as a clinician, sparking the idea for my presentation today. Reis spoke of his understanding of analysis as including an encounter with Truth, based in a non-rational *listening with* (as distinct from listening to or listening for) one’s analysand, in a precarious and intangible mutual experiencing. He spoke of this as being a culturally dystonic practice - perhaps (I might add) a practice even with an agenda of deranging, of temporarily dis-locating the client. For me, Reis was describing an experience of, or a moment in, therapy in which Tillich’s Ground of Being is an active presence. This is a crucial moment – both the moment Reis is pointing to in therapy as well as our historical moment - for a practice dedicated to the ineffable and nonrational. At the core of the therapeutic endeavor is not only the fundamental mystery of being human, but the fundamental Mystery itself – literally and of course. A moving

example of this came for me when a client, for whom our work has included much focus on religious history and ideation, as well as spiritual experiencing, started a recent session by sharing an experience that arose in his meditative practice that very morning. He shared that, in the midst of his quietude, a voice came unbidden saying, “I am here.” He responded reflexively, “I am too.” To which the voice responded simply, “Attend.” Consider this exchange in the context of his Judeo-Christian tradition in which “I AM” is among the most profound names of the divine presence. “I AM, here,” he hears. “I AM, also,” he responds. “Attend.”

Here, I’d like to harken back to an idea introduced earlier, that of *omnicentrism*. We live in an omnicentric universe, in which each instance of consciousness, human and otherwise, subjectively experiences itself as the center of the universe, and in that sense, so it is. I, you, my dog, the trees outside – all of these “I’s” – we each of us experience ourselves as the center of the universe. How could it be otherwise? And what is a subject, what is this “I,” but a locus of awareness that perceives and experiences the world. The glue in all of this, the unifying element is awareness. Of awareness, Zhiwa Woodbury has this to say,

Awareness is...a kind of shared commons through which braided streams of consciousness flow like cognitively charged neural pathways...packed with information, all pulsing and vibrating at multitudinous, overlapping frequencies. The full spectrum in which these frequencies are embedded can be considered to comprise a ‘psychosphere’ (M. Skelding) that interacts dynamically with the biosphere, the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, and the lithosphere. (Woodbury 2021)

The idea of a *psychosphere* that Woodbury cites here is parallel to the “noosphere” that Teilhard de Chardin wrote of, some 70 years ago. It is certainly related to Jung’s idea of the collective unconscious. It is of a piece with the Spirit that Prechtel admonishes us to help make fat. Perhaps this is even what the Christian tradition refers to as the Holy Spirit. This may all sound a bit “woo-woo,” perhaps. I think that is so because we have, in our vaunted modernity, so limited our ideas of what is possible with regard to the reality of our vast interconnectedness, to our own great impoverishment and the detriment of the world. I would like to suggest an overlay to the reality of the intersubjectivity about which relational psychoanalysis has become so very articulate, and that is *omnicentric intersubjectivity* as the

unifying thread of all sentient existence. Omnicentric intersubjectivity points toward a view of the universe as comprised of an infinite number of interconnected, interpenetrating subjectivities, all of which know themselves, simultaneously, as the Center. And so it is. At the root of all mystical traditions is this truth: we are One. This leads us to a radically interconnected, interpenetrating concept and, hopefully, experience of the self.

And this brings us to what I would offer as the culmination of pastoral psychotherapy, as I currently understand it, in the encounter with the Other as leading to the possibility of an experience of Self. We could pursue this idea of Self in many directions, but for the sake of the current conversation, let me offer but one that is particularly relevant and timely. We can understand the Self in terms of James Hillman's *ecological* self – the ecological psyche or soul, which is and always has been embedded in the anima mundi, the soul of the world. Risa Mandell has some very evocative musings on this turn. She reflects,

Just as the clinician and patient create a third intersubjective reality, let us now admit the biosphere into the clinician/patient relationship. Let's call it the Ecological Third.

So far her framing of the Other, but then she turns toward a new idea of Self,

Like rhizomes or Merlin Sheldrake's mycelial webs...our minds are distributed throughout our body and beyond...Such intuition implores us...to assume consciousness and sentience in all who are – fish & wood, water & soil...Let's consider the psyche as distributed not only throughout our body but throughout the planet... (Mandell 2022)

Mandell moves us from an ego- to eco-centric experience of self, from self to Self - responsible for midwifing an ecocentric civilization. Mandell's reflections deliver us into the emerging perspective of ecopsychology, which in the words of Margaret Babbott,

...challenges anthropocentric Western psychology to expand from a human focus to an ecocentric-relational paradigm...(that) views humans as part of the interdependent web of life rather than a separate, superior life form. Within an ecocentric-relational paradigm, both humans and the natural world benefit from mutual right relationship, a secure attachment that has been damaged by centuries of industrialization and colonization... (W)ithin this frame, integration with the natural world grounds the psychotherapy and inspires the two-bodied human exchange." (Babbott 2023)

I want to amplify and expand that last sentence. Within the frame of ecopsychology, (a recognition of the) integration (of the Self) with the natural world grounds (literally) the psychotherapy (not to mention the client and the therapist) and inspires (“breathes into”) the two-bodied human exchange (which is embedded in and an expression of the Earth body). Increasingly, I find that my understanding of pastoral psychotherapy is being drawn, with a sense of gravitational inevitability, into the urgently emergent frame of ecopsychology.

In conclusion... What of this title, anyway: *Of Failure and Faith: Credo of a Psychoanalytic Agnostic?* I trust I have spoken sufficiently of failure and of faith. No doubt, there will be more to say of these. Far more than I anticipated, I have shared my credo with you today, if credo is understood as dynamic process, not product. I have shared not so much my personhood, as much as my person-ing, the dynamic emergence of my sense of s/Self that has transpired between Bruce Reis’ event last October and today, as I have encountered what is “in the field,” the field of psychology and the field of Awareness. Further, I am, progressively and proudly, an agnostic in the proper sense of the word of *not knowing*. Not knowing, un-knowing has been the continuous work of preparing this presentation, leaning into the invitation to decolonize my mind by resisting the ever-present, internal demand to be an “expert” - letting go of what I think I know, or what I want you to think I know - to make room for a different kind of knowing.

Here is what I do know; here is the implicit mission that I carry into each session and whose constituent pieces are rarely spoken aloud. I am concerned with and committed to:

- ∞ cultivating warriors for the human spirit, in order to nurture local communities of courage and compassion (Margaret Wheatley)...
- ∞ engaged in non-hierarchical, radically interdisciplinary conversations (Climate Psychology Alliance-North America)...
- ∞ toward the discovery of a new story (Thomas Berry) for my clients, for myself as clinician (and human), for our field, for the human collective, and for the earth.

I trust orthopathy (right suffering) to liberate us into orthopraxy (right practice) toward the discovery of a new orthodoxy (a new story), whose ending we cannot know.

Benediction

[The Lost Words Blessing](#) (click to listen)

Enter the wild with care, my love
And speak the things you see
Let new names take and root and thrive and grow
And even as you travel far from heather, crag and river
May you like the little fisher, set the stream alight with glitter
May you enter now as otter without falter into water

Look to the sky with care, my love
And speak the things you see
Let new names take and root and thrive and grow
And even as you journey on past dying stars exploding
Like the gilded one in flight, leave your little gifts of light
And in the dead of night my darling, find the gleaming eye of starling
Like the little aviator, sing your heart to all dark matter

Walk through the world with care, my love
And sing the things you see
Let new names take and root and thrive and grow
And even as you stumble through machair sands eroding
Let the fern unfurl your grieving, let the heron still your breathing
Let the selkie swim you deeper, oh my little silver-seeker
Even as the hour grows bleaker, be the singer and the speaker
And in city and in forest, let the larks become your chorus
And when every hope is gone, let the raven call you home

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