

Requiem for the Last Mouse-eared Bat in Britain

"The sole surviving member of Britain's largest bat species is hibernating in a secret underground site somewhere in the south of England. It is not expected to survive 1990."

(From a newspaper report, January 1990)

The tribes of moths and beetles, like dazed amputees,
 Will feel the flutter of these ghost wings
 For perhaps another thousand years.
 The sense of darkness as an endless plain,
 Crisscrossed by deadly orbits of the beast,
 A draught of life-enhancing danger, water to their seed,
 Place perilous of unimagined space; all this will cease.
 Night will become instead unhaunted, tamed,
 A starry pasture safe to graze,
 The death of God in miniature
 As the terror and the mystery fade.

I half hope for punishment for this misdeed,
 The careless breaking of a pattern so complete it reeks of holiness,
 Unnoticed desecration as we stole the land and felled the trees,
 Rupturing an ancient dance of secret partners rapt in intimate embrace,
 Their movements honed into a blade of such perfection
 That it seemed more like caress than execution
 As it cut through age and accident, disease,
 Deftly severed form from formlessness.
 The dance itself defined the dancers,
 Knocked out of step by our rampage they lurch, collide and falter,
 Lose the pattern of themselves.

Imagine this: an age when moths and beetles swell in size
And dance in grim uncultured battalions, unpartnered, through the emptied
night,

The mouse-eared bat's revenge:

A plague of insects grown gross, rotund and unafraid.

But punishment must fit the crime, and so for this:

No crude eye-catching nemesis, but eye for eye and tooth for tooth,

Justice, karma, consequence,

Each small unmourned extinction steals from us piece by piece,

The breathing fabric of life's warp and woof.

We stand half naked now and wonder what the chill about us is.

Our dance unravels into chaos, a grotesque striptease,

Whales, rainforests, elephants, the mouse-eared bat,

Our ark is holed, sinks slowly in the rising flood,

Myotis myotis, last in the land, flies from its roost,

Does not return with sprigs of olive in its grasp,

But falls, and spills its seed upon the earth.

So one by one our story peters out,

As sense is stripped away with every little loss.

The words, like stars, glow for a while beyond extinction,

But talk is fast becoming hollowed out.

The mouse-eared bat weighs just one ounce,

No weight that we can conjure can buy its precious tonnage back.

Chris Arthur