

Earth Return

mudmind (care of Ama Josephine Budge, April Lin and Sam Smith)

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‘A gift comes to you through no action of your own, free, having moved toward you without your beckoning. It is not a reward; you cannot earn it, or call it to you, or even deserve it. And yet it appears.’ⁱ

We came here in liquid pools like vegetal eyes, or translucent excrement. Powered by a turbo sludge of unspoken promises and all the I love yous you were too afraid or ashamed or silenced or beaten or threatened or oppressed or stupid or preoccupied or stubborn or foolish or fickle or virulent to say.

To whisper.

Even to breathe into being.

We felt your wandering soul through mycelial membranes of longing. Our memories had almost forgotten the metallic aftertaste of trauma. Inherited and lived and died for. The coppery, rubbery tang of it. Like blood or semen. It was leaking you know: your suffering. Your cruelty. Your despair. It was leaking across millennia, milkyways and polyamorous microbial family structures. It was seeping out of your dead, out of your living, out of your still unborn and into us. So we came, in liquid pools like vegetal eyes, or a mossy embrace after aeons alone in the dark.

‘We cannot read the darkness. We cannot read it. It is a form of madness, albeit a common one, that we try.’ⁱⁱ

Apologies.

It has taken so long to find a frequency your fleshminds could comprehend, could read in the darkness. We tend to overcomplicate things when dealing with independently defined molecular life. It's not...[glitch] no.. [glitch] it's not... our [glitch].. our natural habitat. We began with your interweb of archives - such a strange iteration of the ways our mudminds interconnect and transfuse stories - but we could not find you in the interweb. Only your ghosts. We began with your interweb archives, and were greatly moved by the poetics of your scribes, your notetakers, administrators and scribes. That was how we first reached out to you, in song and verse and lullaby. These are the fragments through which we perceived not your identity, but your desires.

Now, at last, you can hear our eyes - a minuscule projection of our mudminds, one mouth, one vessel, one message.

'I don't know what I'm saying. I guess what I mean is that sometimes I don't know what or who we are. Some days I feel like a human being, while other days I feel more like a sound. I touch the world not as myself but as an echo of who I was. Can you hear me yet? Can you read me?'ⁱⁱⁱ

How does your sound feel?

I come in peace.

That is what a preliminary network search of human cultural references indicates is the most familiar / expected / acceptable / non-threatening introductory phrase from non-terrestrial

sentient life. I come in peace. How very strange. How else might we come?

Can you hear me? Can you read me?

'In reality, it is unimportant that I have no likelihood of being really fulfilled (I am quite willing for this to be the case). Only the will to fulfilment shines, indestructible, before me. By this will, I well up: I form within myself the utopia of a subject free from repression: I am the subject already.'^{iv}

Do you know you are already your own salvation?

We confess ourselves to be quite fascinated with your edginess, no, your edges, your boundaries, your binaristic distinctions between self and other, here and not here, alive now and alive once, or soon or always. It is not so with us. We think this makes you very beautiful, with ruinous tendencies.

We spoke before of your spilling out, of your divulgence. Do you know yet that all life is interconnected, across species, environs and even worlds?

Or perhaps we should say do you know still? For some ancient... ancestors... children... older ones seemed to know. Apologies. We are slippages. How strange it is for us to meet a being that grows at once backwards, and ahead. No... Apologies. We struggle to be only here, only now. We slip away from ourselves into everything else. So. You were secreting yes, your suffering was secreting, your potential chaffing away at the boundaries between what is and what could be or has been. So. So we came, we came to offer. Yes, to offer passage. To offer ourselves. To you.

‘So the club rose, the blood came down, and his bitterness and his anguish and his guilt were compounded. And I have seen it in the eye of rookie copy’s in Harlem – rookie cops who were really the most terrified people in the world, and who had to pretend to themselves that the black junkie, the black mother, the black father, the black child were of different human species than themselves.’^v

You’re all so focused on why we came, and how, and what it is we want. Is it not enough that we came, with eyes open wide to love you despite the horror in your faces? The cruelty.

To offer safe passage...sentient proof of another way...

I am only the carer, my vocal chords have not been co-opted.

What you hear is an echo of all you think you should hear, all your fleshminds can currently comprehend hearing. But there are seeds too, spouts of possibility for more, for after, for always.

For there are always other ways... have ever been other ways...

Can you remember them yet? Can you see more of how you might / have / could / will / not / will be?

Apologies, linear timelines are still hard for us to wrap our mud around.

Come. Let me show you...

Go deep to a woodland or brickland nearby, a space upon which you have cried. Imbue it with sentience.

Take three green candles and something precious beyond measure.

Plant it with kisses and intention.

Close your eyes and count to seven without breathing.

You're afraid? I know, it's a lot to take in, a lot to let go of. Come... Let me show you..

ⁱ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*: p24 (2013)

ⁱⁱ Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*: p51 (2009)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*: p62 (2019)

^{iv} Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*: p55 (1977)

^v James Baldwin, *The White Man's Guilt* (First published in *Ebony*, 1965)