

The Charlatans of Paradise

Sean Arthur Joyce

The charlatans of paradise
come in all shapes, sizes
and skin colours,
but like the infamous snake
of Eden, can only move
in one direction—backs
flat against the wall,
thin as shadows
in the sun's puppet play
of pawns
stretching toward dusk.

Look around you! No Devil
raging in his chains of fire
could have dreamt up such a Hell—
Worn-out souls starving on the sidewalks
of the wealthiest cities on Earth;
Protesters held at bayonet-point
by mirrored helmets guarding the rich
in their feudal glass towers;
The planet gasping
through a hole in its lungs,
seeping cancer into the summer sky.

Aztec demigods bristling
in peacock feathers and gold,
we sacrifice our grandchildren
to a future already spent.

Yet we wouldn't have it
any other way. A blue box a day
keeps the gas tank blues away.

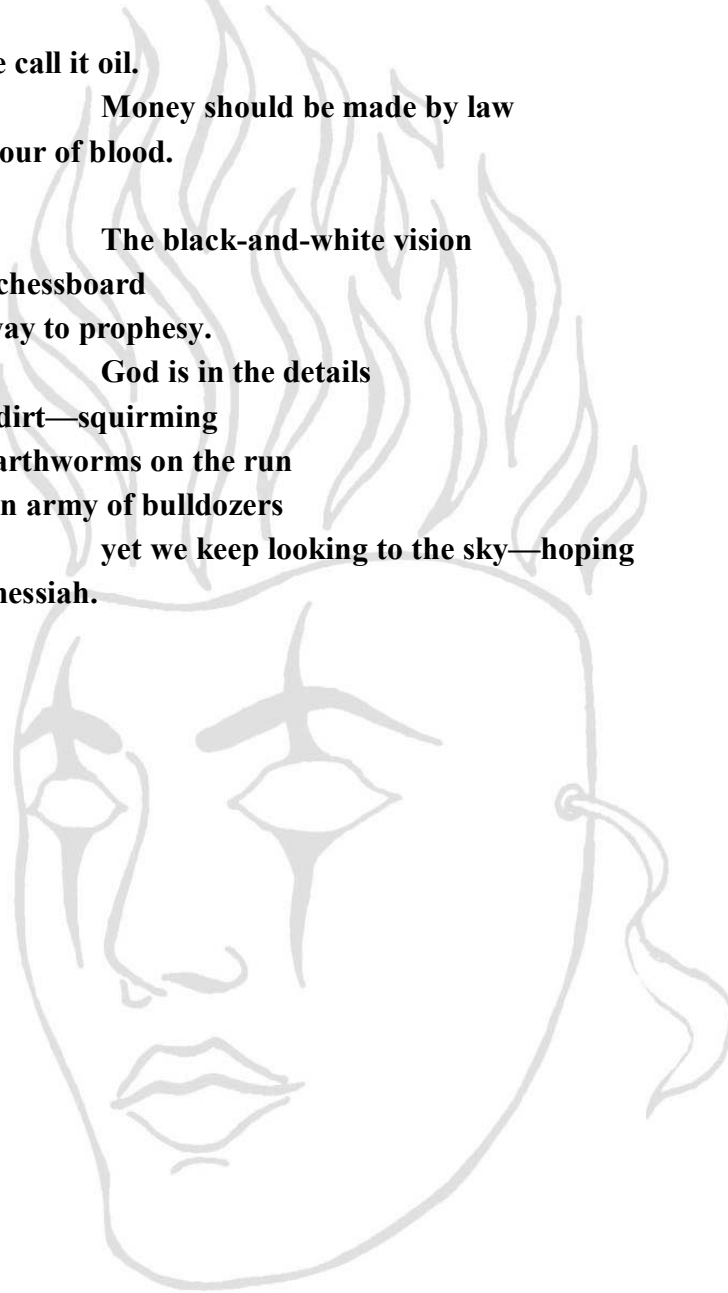
**Ghosts of healing
haunt the vanished rainforests
and we call it economy.**

**The Earth is bleeding
and we call it oil.**

**Money should be made by law
the colour of blood.**

**The black-and-white vision
of the chessboard
is no way to prophesy.**

**God is in the details
of the dirt—squirming
with earthworms on the run
from an army of bulldozers
yet we keep looking to the sky—hoping
for a messiah.**



Conversations with Crow

Sean Arthur Joyce

i. birth of crow

**Creation's womb swells
with stars
colliding—
black blood drop
falling through space
is blessed by light
and becomes thought
without form.**

**And falling
into Earth's atmosphere,
thought is blessed by air
and becomes feather,
to skiff the ponds of heaven
and eventually
become wings.**

**And falling through cloud
wing is blessed by rain
to become body,
the strength to rise up
out of Hell
and ashes.**

**And falling
through snowtipped wind,
body and wing
are blessed with breath
that they might speak
and continue living.**

**And landing
on the topmost branches
of Ararat's ancient cedar,
Crow is born.**

ii. afterbirth

**Crow plucks the afterbirth
of light
from his wings
and starts cawing for answers.
*Why? Why here? On this planet?***

**His voice—a bag of charcoal
dragged over dry stone—
irritates the other animals,
who refuse to talk to him.**

**When the gods make Man,
Crow begins to realize the enormity
of the task before him—
hunching his shoulders**

**for the long haul, the sticks
he knows will be thrown at him
every time he opens his beak
to warn of another Rome
or Babylon.**

Slocan Nocturne

Sean Arthur Joyce

—*October 2003, Hills, B.C.*

**Car headlights pinhole
through the base of the dark.**

**Black steam where the lake
pours cakes of cloud into the sky.**

**Dainty toe of mountain
shadows herself onto the scene,**

**the tearsheet lightning
backdrop ghosts.**

**This is Valhalla,
and if I am dead,**

**so be it, let me lie forever
along the snowy spines**

**of petrified gods.
And if I am alive,**

**I have seen you face to face,
O Lady Earth,**

**and I am not afraid.
This is Valhalla,**

**and if I am alive,
we will enjoy one another.**