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HAUNTED OBJECTS; THE BOOK IN THE MOUNTAIN; METHOD; THE STORY OF ICE AND US

Jane Monson

Haunted Objects

Whenever he placed a hand on a wall, bench or building, he heard things; imprints of the last bit of their story. Inside the sounds—palm pressed flat into the stone, metal or wood—he also saw things; witnessed unseen the last drawn scrap of their view. Tracks, alleys, roads, rooms, screams, glass, falls, arms drowning in black, poker-red and ashen air. With each life, he felt too much and was blown backwards across space, hurt and bewildered. Recovery wasn't possible without touch and he was offered gloves every other time he was found with his hands open, crying someone else's tears.

The Book in the Mountain

Upon hearing that in geological terms, the scientists were trying to read the sedimentary layers in the rocks of Italy to determine whether or not an asteroid had hit the earth and changed the course of the dinosaurs, she turned to me and said: *they're trying to find the words in the mountain*. Layers like pages of a book, the land all pressed into itself like a sleeping accordion. And the words they were trying to find were fossils; insect and leaf tightly bound inside the traumatised soil.

Method

The air does not separate us; we do not separate in the air. It takes from our skin, hair, blood, waste, words, sweat, tears and laughter, cooks us in the wind and bakes the whole

damn earth together. At least that's what the recipe says. The one we never follow.

The Story of Ice and Us

From Glacier to dead ice, her remains after the summer-melt slump and rise with the sea-line. In her place, a plaque, a memorial for Okjökull: Ode to a Glacier. Janus-faced it stands in stone and shadow as Elegy and Omen: 'we know what is happening and what needs to be done'. She dies a living mantle of dogged ice, moving under the weight of herself defined by name and skin; a frozen garment of stories, 'histories of the atmosphere,' laid waste at our all-knowing hands. We provide a threadbare coat over the puddle—into which tread bears, under which flee fish. Against the wind they cross borders; through the lines where we wait and harvest fear from our towns and houses. Land and sea are each other's worries now and living things can't settle between them. Wildfires of earth and ocean; field and Arctic's topsoil alike, rewritten as a charcoal sea. Inside these worlds of ink and paper, type and screen, we absorb, reflect, and try and bounce the light back into space. Glacier, dead ice, bloating waters, we read on: listen to some characters, skip others, laugh in disbelief, cry at bears haunting bin-lined streets and toppled gates. Mostly, we sit comfortably, stay awake at the good bits, read by the blindness of fires, until shut-eyed we let the whole thing melt away in and from our hands.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Jane Monson lives in Cambridge as an independent scholar and Specialist Mentor for disabled students at the University of Cambridge. Her PhD was on the prose poetry of Francis Ponge and she has an MA in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia. Jane is the editor of *This Line is Not for Turning* (2011), an anthology of contemporary British prose poetry; and, more recently, *British Prose Poetry: The Poems Without Lines* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). Her poetry collections with Cinnamon Press include *Speaking Without Tongues* (2010) and *The Shared Surface* (2013). *The Chalk Butterfly* is forthcoming from Cinnamon Press in 2022.

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