

Shanna Compton
Reading from *Creature Sounds Fade*
New Orleans Poetry Festival 4/21/19

Introduction

Creature sounds is a term used by SFX designers: it can refer to any animal or monster sound. Growls, snarls, hisses, howls, and roars, but also smaller sounds like lip smacks, breathing, and wounded crying. Sound designers often take snippets of real-world sound from one context, rework them, and recontextualize them for wholly different effects somewhere else, a recombinatory poetics.

Nonverbal yet essential sounds in this book are styled as closed captions, such as (CREATURE SOUNDS FADE). This soundtrack of captions asks the reader to sharpen their listening—to notice how much meaning is conveyed by sounds usually thought of as background noise, to imagine how it impacts one's experience not to be able to hear them.

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The Eyes Have Woods

You woke with a line in your head

You tripped on a root realization

You lost the path deranging itself from fact to conjecture & back again

You grew hairy with conflict through evergreen thickets

You wore a cape inexplicably in the warm evening

The woods resinous with amber terpenes & something starchy-sweet like gourd

You didn't know where the trail led

You didn't exactly want to follow it

You forgot everything else thorny, dark as pitch, pulsing

with the (MEWLING) of the mammal snared in the loops of your chest

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Example Sentences

(RUSTLING, LOW CHITTERING)

The cedar apple rust is a weirdly symbiotic fungus, affecting on the cedar if it grows on the apple, and only the apple if it forms on the cedar. Symbiotic's not the word I mean. The gall of the thing. It has of all things tentacles, appendages known as spore horns. After a rain the horns extend, hot orange and gelatinous—alien even for deep forest.

It's gotten to the point I'm looking up things I'm already sure of just to experience the subtle shocks in their example sentences.

In the woods today I stopped to read the plaques put up by the Conservancy. I love the word *deciduous*, I confessed to the trees. The littered spot where the stand of red cedars once bristled depressed me, crowded out until choked for light. I rubbed my aching

horns. You're probably expecting it—just then five white-tail deer (CRASHED) through,

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flinging themselves headlong, bounding
in arcs. My slender tentacles instinctively
retracted, my spores packed up and put themselves
budlike away. (ONLY-BIRDS SILENCE.) Only trees.
The autumn olive bushes around me
in the breakthrough sun exhaled, sweet and high,
like no creature on earth is able.

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Dark Acres

Who dresses up as an image
That's no way to slip into a mouth

Not ache-tired but diffuse fading
in the tissues of every muscle

Well—the world becomes is reduced
to left and right a progression problematically

spatial The lids of our eyes shuttering
like insects kept overlong in a malcontent jar

We attempt predictably to predict every day's worth
to capture it and keep it fed

Blanking in the sun we cannot alter
falter in a summer ripple so intense

it obliterates math down to your favorite number
Perhaps a face will rise for us here

a deeper deafness a loosening of the inner organs
wearing upon an expression some culminating word
(UNINTELLIGIBLE)

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Disenchanted Woods

(PINES CREAKING)

I sought and found
my father's grave she said.

Alas it is still empty.

Ghosts, bed, the last tangle
of the perpetual dream
she writes most nights

each tremble as she rises

like the leaves of the quaking aspen
flashing silver. I found in it
a spiral of rope she said
a jar of chalk.

Around her in the trees
she heard no doves.

Alas she said
there is never a body.

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Shorn Fur

My love I am a tangled I am choked and salted

My love I am feeling the itch of the buds soon to burst from my skin

My love I have emerged as a principal voice & I know you are listening / I'm making
big plans to fix the end, to complicate as I clarify / Your face is the forest

Your face is the font from which Thursdays spring amid freshets of sentiment /
your mouth like a deer hoof someone left dangling from a tree

I trickle a creek when I want to boom

Geolocation's bounce my signal glances off the nearest star

The wisteria down dangles its bosomy fangs over the white lattice of the bridge
while the river rolls unperturbed, standalone

My love might I breathe like a stand of oaks?

Pace like the beasts of the Middle Ages?

Bolt like the underinsured just after a crash?

My love I'm renewing to lock in my hot luck now / Ineluctable always, each
morning cinched like a belt, a perfect accent

Whatever you say, you cut a figure, my love

I will continue to snap your portrait, opportune

Tilt your chin this way toward forever my love my domain

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Ongoing Experiment

I wondered if wonder would reach a terminal stop

The tint in the air of the kitchen in the first house

I remembered & tried not to the odor
of the carpet in the apartment I never had any trouble

recalling the green paint soothed onto
the classroom chalkboards I changed my name

at seven I had some big reason, I guess
akin to the trees in the back pasture hours spent

watching rabbits & knowing too much
I pricked my fingers with every thorn I ran across

assimilated rocks from every dry streambed
My name became a glyph I carved into things

but never said aloud All these years later

I am the same woman Taller & older

hungrier sure

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Substantial Atmosphere

Going sweet at the sound
of a certain voice is a wrong turn sometimes

Let's wander into the desert & do our best
not to wander out again until we've truly starved

It won't take long fellow animals

Do you remember the pale
then bright yellows of spring when those still came?

Droplets of water collected in patterns on glass
when we still had glass to keep them out?

I remember yet the clear bald light
of the apocalypse separates into rings

on the ice, too

(BREATH TREMBLING)

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Seven Steps to Better Listening

We perceive difference

where none exists.

In the exercise the green & blue overlap simply

without true interaction.

On the following page the yellow block

does not obscure the newsprint

because there is no newsprint—

the layers are lies.

Likewise, in the pine barrens

when the red blur shocks bright

against the depths between the trees

the patterns we think we discern

in the sugar sand are naught

but desire. The inner violets

though apparently of two shades

are actually alike.

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When is pleasure a pressure

I've got a new gap in my line
the way I feel things sometimes instead
of hearing them It's not easy
to explain Speech is not remote
but a solid thing that slips
& you & I are both receding into it
into backlit space frosted
& agleam like galactic junk

(SOFTLY TRILLING)

The pond once teemed with us
Alienation never knows whose pronouns to use
We live under shame's grammar accent grave
Yet dissenting like the new shoots
that form in summer from the barest
green of spring so many buds
no catastrophe's maxed out enough
to crush

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Belief or No

You could put pressure on it
enough to press a diamond buy a house or job
or you can let it breathe & filter you
as an alternate organ

It cannot unkill or unbomb
or right any of the earth's various
wrongs, though it can sound right
pretty trying It can't hurt to pray

belief or no (no) I explain
to the neighbor it'd take me a year
to fill in all these blanks to amass enough
waste to top off such an ambitious can

& who has that kind of time?
In the early evenings I emerge to investigate
what unknown things grow
in our rented corners as the river

presses diamonds from the wasted sun

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The Vulture

You catch yourself

first thing in the morning

saying *this is not a good day*

Prescience is a virtue A vulture circles

over the river knowing already

you're late to your appointment

have canceled preemptively in your heart

the possibilities that could have wavered

in the pink glass along the far bank

the bridge in its green dress dipping

A world in which

children choke on gas & men posture

over them The vulture settles

on a bare tree above the wing dam

surviving her kingdom

the only way she knows how

preening her hideous head

You catch yourself

first thing in the morning

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I wore my dress

to the anthracite museum
where in delicate bushbean pink
all the chitchat was front-loaded

I wore my dress
I was somebody out larking
where in tufted crest titmouse gray
the minutes rolled by in wavelets

I wore my dress again
and again through the long garnet
fall where the beetles shone to each other
like glossed alphabets what grubbed under our speech

My dress wore me out
It made such demands of my saunter
through the strewn galactic mirrors where
I multiplied relentlessly against my best interest

My dress my dress
o mess of shabbiness o thread
bare habit amorously wrecking
its own shadow

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Desert Valley in Bloom

Are we at last awash friends & unknowns
adrift in the glare inwardly inhospitable
each lone star an isolate smudge of light
or as the prophet said we're soaking in it

In the recent past firemen combed the nearby ponds
as every commercial flickeringly promised everyone the body
part & parcel of the Black Sea Everyone who left him
in the street for hours no vapor stranger all red tape a stranglehold

In the desert cluster birds & the carton of Earth
yet (THRUMS & BRIMS) with green & eerie rainfall
Our poor cluster of void custom We were no good as flocks
in among the milky debt debris We overwatered & overpruned

& yet ominously we put our petals out

For when the last flamingo over the misplaced ice floes flies
& at last expires she will note it in a (RAUCOUS SONG) & all faint stars
their blue retire in a streak rose gold a gathering of tenuous strands
so heavily pendant petal-scented, once civilized once ours

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(CREATURE SOUNDS FADE)

Threads in your teeth
a sheet in a rumpled crèche
partially wounded loosed & pitted
one against the other again
Breath left out to darken overnight
Shake out the pillowcase
Make a case against against
I hook my curved bill synchronizing us
back into fitting colony
I crook my feathered neck to muster
the vibrant color the fleshy temperature
my dear-to-you my hoarse-strung snarl