

## THE KÜBLER-ROSS MODEL APPLIED TO OUR ROLE IN NATURE

- Carolyn Moore

### Stage of DENIAL—Nothing is or Can Go Wrong

#### Explaining Black Holes to a Downy Woodpecker in January

Yes, she's refilled the suet basket with you  
and yours in mind for this record spell of ice.  
When you found it empty yesterday, perhaps . . .  
it only seemed so? And perhaps you thought, *Is this  
what the human caged in glass means by "black holes?"*

Well, she did not mean spots on retinas  
or a rift draining vigor from a marriage.  
Perhaps you sensed she meant a gravity  
so strong it tugs away the wholesome fat  
and seeds that cede survival these cold days?

Or that female-shaped guitar the artist claims  
sucks notes of music into the sound-hole  
instead of *thwanging* them out for all to hear?  
She understands that stars conclude their lives  
as blackened gaps, while you and she will shrink

to feather, bone, or ash. She dimly grasps  
the mathematical model that projects

the star's final throb of light before the black.  
As it blinks out, a star might explain how iron  
forms at its core, a mass to collapse as fuel

burns off—though stars ignore the gravity  
of the situation, overlook the curve  
of space where hungers, questions, intersect.  
She sees more clearly, how much she shares with you:  
that *zero at the bone*, the smallest space

your cells and hers might claim as their black holes.  
While you've fed, she's played John Cage for you,  
four minutes, thirty-odd seconds of heartbeat.  
In what is left of ambient grace and sound,  
join her in shutting out all noise but this:

the comfort in how close your comet trail  
crosses hers in the space where rendered fat  
of slaughtered cows congeals a galaxy  
of seeds—those embryonic worlds—a gift  
from her to you to devour in your good time.

## THE KÜBLER-ROSS MODEL APPLIED TO OUR ROLE IN NATURE Stage of ANGER—This Situation is Unfair, Unjust!

### Of a Maligned Myth and Its Namesake Aquatic Mammal

*for Saw Wai of Burma (currently Myanmar), imprisoned in 2008 for writing a poem of veiled protest  
in which beginnings of lines spelled out "Power Crazy Senior General Than Shwe"*

Perhaps along a Burmese river bank  
One dugong fins his way past mangrove roots  
With languid grace. A world away he's called  
*Endangered*, like his cousin manatee,

Relics, both, of the ancient power of myth.

Called *Sirenia*, their order's named  
Rightly for sirens: poets of the deep  
And feared for what they sing. Lock them all up!  
Zoos—send to them all rebel mammals, birds,  
Youths, and poets with their crazy songs!

Shadows fall when the bright moon is blocked,  
Even as its senior, the sun, can be.  
Nothing but darkness outlines those who stand  
In the way of light. A shadow stretched enough  
Only seems larger than its prideful man  
Reveling in his false rule over light.

Go safe? Go silent, like all who live in fear?  
Everyone, that is, except the local souls:  
*Nats*, spirits of the forest, hills, and trees.  
Each must be appeased if displaced by farm,  
Road, or house. They teach defiance, strength.  
Ally yourself with *nats* against the general  
Lack of hope that this fear will ever end.

The goal, when malice calls itself upright?  
How else, than turning wrongs inside-out  
And righting them? Let *siren* stand for truth—  
Not deceit—and poets turn words to fists:

Siren songs, like fish wending their way  
Higher to light, can save endangered truth  
When zoos or prisons work to shut it up.  
Enough strong words can slip through iron bars.

THE KÜBLER-ROSS MODEL APPLIED TO OUR ROLE IN NATURE  
Stage of BARGAINING—Can We Make a Trade?

## Why the Field Guide, *Squirrels of the West*, Avoids the Word “Rodent”

Simple neglect? Perhaps. Intelligent design? Less likely. Association quiz—what does this word call to mind: *rat*? Filth? Plague? Now try this one: *chipmunk*? Comic? Pert? When we consider things *Rodentia*, we never speak of *lovely* or *revered*. I knew a marmot lovely in her bones?

And speaking of bones,  
the field guide gives only two ways to tell  
the Allen’s chipmunk from the Yellow-Cheeked,  
Townsend’s, or Siskiyou. You must know each call  
(and, I quote, “intimately”) or must scrutinize  
each penis bone, a step requiring death.

And speaking of intimacy,  
how can we feel lonely when rodents chew  
through wiring under houses or hoods of cars?  
One violation’s heard, the other’s not,  
yet both gnaw morsel solitude to crumbs.

And speaking of wiring,  
how can we feel lonely when we are wired  
to each slight *scritch* in the hollow walls at night—  
proof we have company and are not alone?

And speaking of walls,  
how do we get them working again, once  
we know the taste of solitude, its rasp  
and scent of lemon verbena leaves we brush  
and bruise on solitary walks at dusk?

And speaking of solitude,  
natural enemy of loneliness,  
that state, in turn, the natural prey of rats,  
mice, marmots, chipmunks, capybara, squirrels—  
all whose incisors keep growing and must

gnaw nuts or seeds or wood or wires or walls . . .

And speaking of squirrels,  
could I spend the next life as a flying squirrel,  
a Northern? Dark eyes deep and huge as marbles  
and primed for dusk? If you take this as a prayer,  
I'll cease to fight the flaps of flesh that swag  
beneath my forelimbs formerly known as arms.  
I'll embrace the glide membranes now budding there,  
by grace of overlapping DNA,  
and keep on nibbling anything you say.

And speaking of limbs,  
each evening on my exercise machine,  
before my stroll along the fragrant hedge,  
I'll chant the outlawed mantra, *rodent, rodent*,  
and assume the launch position: head down, tail up,  
ready to glide on to new trees, new limbs.

## THE KÜBLER-ROSS MODEL APPLIED TO OUR ROLE IN NATURE Stage of DEPRESSION—What's the Point?

### Searching Tucson for Words To Say Goodbye

Today we'll see a few things out of place.  
Those oranges, big as heads, are just for show  
and taste like lint. In one day, their tree sucks  
dry a saguaro's year. (We'll take the safe  
route and handle this through travelogue.)

We'll drive south, out to the *Dove of the Desert*—out  
to that wincing white mission of San Xavier.  
For miles it falters over the hot road's

false water like a crippled dove. Its second  
tower is domeless, clipped like a wing. At first

you dream it whole, then you take comfort knowing  
even Jesuits can fail. The one  
who raised this mission sowed pale wheat that leached  
color from maize. He brought in sheep and cattle  
thirsty as those oranges. Call that missing

dome his penance for hauling here too much  
of what he should have left behind. Be warned—  
the chapel shocks tourists with effigies  
the colors of wild corn. Those wooden saints  
flaunt satin robes Papago women stitch

to hold small charms petitioners pin to cloth.  
Silver pleas of hearts, arms, lungs and legs:  
each a prayer for parts that fail, for wounded  
wings or domes. Outside, barbed ocotillo  
climbs the Hill of the Holy Cross. On top,

a pair of bronze and shrapnel-maned lions squat  
where pumas used to sun. From there we'll watch  
the skies remember maize with colors so dead  
and holy, any painter who steals their relics  
draws the curse of sentimental to his brush.

Sunset will banner the clouds with rose and gold  
and balm scarred hills with purple spreading down  
to the mission-dove at roost. Before the sun  
goes limp as a yolk, we'll find the place to stand  
to watch it flame when it crowns the empty tower,

embers the stucco twin, until the two  
match—dome of sun mirrored by the moon-dome  
it soon must leave behind. For one long breath,  
the dove's healed wing will soar in borrowed grace  
before the sun loses its hold, and falls.

THE KÜBLER-ROSS MODEL APPLIED TO OUR ROLE IN NATURE  
Stage of ACCEPTANCE—Peace through Preparation

Botany, Domestic Architecture, and the End of Days

It comes to this: a camellia leaf lies  
long on the ground in a fellowship of duff.  
Larvae strip the leaf to an elegant theory  
of itself. The bared veins, finer than wasp  
antennae, cast their desiccated net  
to the edge of their known world. Angels cease  
dancing on heads of pins and forsake their census  
to marvel at this tracery decay.  
Likewise, the family house must cast off wallboard,  
until exposed studs holler “function, function!”  
and scorn wallpaper curling at their sole-plates.  
Drawers will pull out, flip over, and shed their hoards:  
the tarnished baby spoon and sugar tongs,  
half-used candles, lids to long-gone jars,  
and schemes for leaf-miners to carry off  
what never should be saved. The goal is rapture.  
The means are ravish, devour. All that remains  
lets through light at last.

*See bio below:*

Title of Work Submitted for *Earth Vision's* Contest:  
“The Kübler-Ross Model Applied to Our Role in Nature”

BIO FODDER

FORMAL BIO: Carolyn Moore's poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction have garnered over seventy awards and honors, including a nature writing award from the National League of American Pen Women. Her first poetry collection, *Against a Second Fall*, won the 2005 New Eden Chapbook Competition, and three more collections are pending in 2008: *The Last Night of Maskmaking* (winner of Southern Hum Press's "Women of Words" Chapbook Contest), *The Great Uncluttering* (co-winner of Bread & Lightning's chapbook competition), and *The Flavors of Quarks and Blame* (winner of The Refined Savage Press's chapbook competition). After a long stint at Humboldt State University in Arcata, California, where she taught Nature Writing, Moore now works as a freelance writer and researcher on the last remnant of the family farm in Tigard, Oregon.

#2 ODDBALL BIO, or the HOW-MY-CAT-SPENT-HER-SUMMER-VACATION BIO: In a previous life Carolyn Moore performed her poetry with mimes, dancers, and actors wearing masks she designed and crafted. In other lives further back, Moore worked her way through college and graduate school as a waiter, a sportswear model, a wrangler at a dude ranch, and a dormitory housemother. She now works as (etc., as above).

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These sections of this piece or their earlier incarnations have been previously published:

“Of a Maligned Myth and Its Namesake Aquatic Mammal” first appeared in the e-chapbook, *Power Crazy Senior General Than Shwe*, from *Anti-* ([www.anti-poetry.com](http://www.anti-poetry.com))

“Searching Tucson for Words to Say Goodbye” first appeared in *Louisiana Literature*

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