

in the winter chill: fruiting bodies of seeds and fungi,
for underground fruit, flowers, roots, seeds
omnivores loosely gathered, digging for buried desire
curved claws longer than your vision's lid
long, slightly curved foreclaws good for excavations
males and females feeding in loose aggregations
I can't see, several men and women eating
underground roots and fungi tickling your nose
the soft-bodied animals sheltering underground
roots, tubers, insects and their larvae
the fruiting bodies of hypogeous fungi
excavating with long, strong claws, the map is formed
shallow excavations in the litter, in the soil
digging for a range of fungi in the early early morning
an excavator with the skill of a truffle specialist
the soil around the roots of banksias and eucalypts
the soil that guards the roots, opening
fingers part at once, for you the ground opens
never seen, a colony slips and sliced with shadow
I can't see, roots and fungi map your body
where presence inscribes itself with absence, with maps of roots and fungi
where runways and diggings illustrate your presence
ps with loneliness

or when it warms: plant tissue, arthropods, flowers and fruits
your dynamic patterns of foraging, your critical colonies
you distribute critical colonies of beneficial fungi
spreading fungal spores with your droppings
fungal spores across stressed, moaning country
they muster into mycorrhizae on trees and shrubs
all while eating, while flicking your tail
the animal eats at night while flicking his tail
trembling a little, the animal's tail flickers through tufts of moonlight,

trembling in a breeze that hugs the ground, the bush holds him in a pool of grass
enfolded in the forest pack, there's a pillow of fur
brooding in the force dusk, pushing at beyond
brooding, nibbling along a trembling wave
when his chest expands he pushes at the frame
slowly, the packet unravels, slowly leaf and clod and claws become unravelled
here we see a view sliding into milk,

here a view is submerged in oil

the old ones are disappearing, their great leafy temples
we are felling the last of their leafy temples
what do we say, of the spotted quail thrush or the tiny pardalote
of the powerful owl, pygmy possum or bandicoot
of the tree frog, bettong or this long-nosed potoroo
all these dimming memories in the heads of our elders
all of our heads slipping from the oldest memories
of all the marsupials, one of the first described by settlers
your early encounters with the spread of settlement
before the acres of devastated habitat, I can't watch
the destruction of country, community after community
marsupials of the potoroidae slaughtered by invasion
broken by highways, by urban subdivisions
and all the associated impacts stemming from that:
flying metal, its mad clamour, cunning dogs and cats
on top of red foxes, livestock, vegetation loss
they're nearly gone, the cool flames for fungal flourishing
savage fires have come to wipe out the undergrowth
while the Pacific Highway comes snaking down the coast
down through Bundjalung country, a tarmac snake like a horrid bruise
heavy tarmac slapped over your home in early afternoon
while a hungry tiger quoll rips off your arm
finding you there, a leg ripped off by a fox
your skull crushed beneath a Prius
your shelters eaten out by giant stock
only then, the raptors gorge on what they can
stripped of a body, your soul wanders aimlessly, resting where it can
homeless but restless, you scatter across the day, only then
slowly, slowly you are strangled by invasion
after hundreds of years, the country can barely breathe
in spasms, the air clatters and whirrs
the angry spirits welcome you into the earth

triangulate the facts of it / potorus tridactylus tridactylus / potoroidae (bettongs and potoroos)
at first glance, a pointed nose and grey-brown fur
at a glance, fur of a dark, chocolatey brown
until little pricked ears like two soft horns
the claws longer than your vision's lid, and a long
furry funnel resolves into a wet button of a nose
hold her now, her fear will beat in your hands
her glinty looking, how much time for sight?
she's peering across, the moment has split
torn across, a retreat or an obscure plot
before we see, she's a bandicoot until she hops
hopping away, front paws tucked into chest
racing from the end, life tucked into her chest
as the poem ends, the revelation of a relation
as the line ends, revelation of a relation with the kangaroo
like an oversized rat, hence rat-kangaroo, the frame won't bend
there you are, in full-moon's gauze
two polished eyes orbiting your body's fluffy gourd
two polished eyes, a pulsing, fluffy gourd
a phrase from the earth stuck on your nose
there you are, slowly dying into photo
having revealed yourself completely within the fissures
before time resumes and you disappear
as if you were never there, or as if I never saw you

NB. *Northern Long-nosed Potoroo* contains echoes of phrases from Venie Holmgren's 'What Shall We Say?'