

The word *extinguish* first appears around 1540, a derivative of the Latin to stifle, obliterate. Like seeds, language propagates in particular conditions; maybe during this time the world was becoming a little darker. In a starvation of light, one yearns for that which illuminates, the two as inseparable but impossible bedfellows. I think of things like a match or a firefly when I think of *extinguishing*. In 1540, the fading decades of the Renaissance are giving way to the serpentine; the era had reached its setting phase, and it is in this last gasp that both dark and its counterpart vie for attention and survival.

The hairline crack of time before light is choked - when the tension between the two is most heightened - is visceral and urgent in N. Shanley's work. As though working a path through the index of the home, the outcomes of material explorations in ceramics, painting and textiles are candle snuffs and candelabra, plates, hooks for coats or keys or other paraphernalia, small bowls, silk scarves, lamps with gnarled bases and allegorical shades. Having trained in printmaking, the relationship to surface is important in Shanley's practice. In both the painting and ceramic work, there is an attention to how an imprint, line or contour might be informed by an external impression.

At the change of the clocks, I live with a pair of lamps from Shanley. Twisted caper green tresses climb ceramic bases; friezes of animals cavort and hunt and snarl and caress in gold leaf on others. Fired at extremely high and volatile heats, the glazes are unpredictable, throwing out burnished or jewel-like tones. There is a distinct palette to Shanley's work, keeping close to colours that feel slightly medieval or symbolically rich: papal yellow, rust, aubergine, dark hues close to black, cornflower, earthen greens, an exalted pink if the occasion calls. In these pigments, figurative scenes depict a personal mythology that is at once alien and archaic. It is important that the lampshades (and in fact, most of Shanley's environment is covered with these stories) are teeming with creatures, as though they could be brought into being by perfect light; as though this bestial hum might be a way to affirm how precious and terrible being in the world is.

A dim and warm lamp is the closest we can get to perpetual candlelight so it is a sacred kind of incandescence. When the wick of a candle reaches its terminal point, we know of how time has elapsed. It allows its passage to be measured in a mode other than hours or minutes. The magic of electricity, though somehow crueller than flame, is that it can stay alight until the bulb blows or the grid is exhausted. There's no longer a marker for our imagined increments. We've outrun time itself, or at least turned it into an illegible thing.

The days keep shifting in length.

These monuments that hold time and break time recur in Shanley's work. By *hold*, I mean that its mechanism is absorbed by the clay or expelled through silk. This sensibility is akin to an archaeological dig. Shanley understands clay as a kind of force that past stories can be excavated from. There is a respect for the material knowledge of a substance: what it might have borne witness to or hold secrets of. I sense that this is true too for the silk paintings and stretched shades. Even though their fibre is not so tightly bound to the earth, the sacrificial organisms are kept dormant through warp and weave, until ready to show their face.

I can only speak of them as if they were kin.

Seventeen years from now, a stick of frankincense resin will finally smoulder out. Its smoke has sent all the cicadas underground, like a wildfire running across the bracken and ridgeline would; like you would too if the wet sun of a new day turned fast to tar and sweet concrete. Ten thousand of them, teeming with the song tied to their legs, shape-shift into bullets headed for the mantle. How does it feel to proclaim your own name as a mantra, again and again and again? If only life was that easy, that I could say my name aloud in order to exist. Is that all it takes? Have you said my name out loud before? Would the cicada say it for me, turn me into an onomatopoeia like him? If it catches on the sonar waves is that enough to mean *I'm here*? Each time you make me raise my voice it's enough to make me shrink back to the soil until they pave another road and we can't make it above the surface.

I scare them away into amber oblivion.  
No more the caterwaul of the wide-eyed stoat.  
What sound, on the dawn of a new epoch?

They say I can't know without a rod for dowsing and prodding, that you have to destroy something in order to learn anything. But I'm sure that we have lived together before and dissolved one another into hard carapace, married by an old flood.

That gum stick, its fine and funereal powder is doing a slow dance on everything. I spoke earlier of the Renaissance, a time when homes and sites of religion and worship were decorated with stories and luminous with them. As held true back then, Shanley honours the ornamental as having the capacity to complete and proclaim humanity; it's a quality that can resuscitate the spirit. May the clamour of stuff that we live with and use, hide amongst, allow to share our most private experiences, hold remnants and residue of our bodies and ours of theirs. To keep things too safe is to kill them off. The advent of modernity brought a severance of this relationship between people and objects, a lie that somehow also ushered in a tidal rush of possession. Why did we ever abandon the sanctity of the home? This is the only place where the cat can slumber in the cage with the long-toothed dog. As oft-cited, anthropologists have recognised that before the tool that forces energy outward, we made the tool that brings it home. That is to say: nest precedes spear, basket precedes quiver. Perhaps beyond that, before that too, we made the shelter that would allow what we gathered to stay a while. Here, share the last feast and the last song. As Shanley describes it, this is a beautiful prison that she is building, of both solace and suffering.

The hive has slowly dried out,  
now maudlin carpet on the windowsill.

It's a good light that spills across the threshold.

Jane Wallace  
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