

The Problem with the word *Environment*

Who environs whom
the word presupposes a center something around which the earth swarms
the word presupposes a human center as if the earth swarms around us
the word presupposes the Jar in Tennessee
are trees part of that slovenly wilderness
or are they their own centers responding to all that environs them

now in the 21st century plant neuroscientists claim
trees have an awareness of their environment
and some kind of intelligence
and some kind of consciousness
and some kind of agency

language is the limit of our world, indeed, all these human-centered words
leaving so little room to touch and even begin to understand the chemical lexicons of plants

elder trees know where their kin are
send them nutrients through an underground
interrelated network
of roots and rhizomes and mycorrhizal fungi

roots can change direction long before reaching a barrier
they sense and seek out water
they strangle the foundations of homes
and rumple concrete sidewalks

hair-thin traces of the outermost tips of roots
are thought to be crucial to the network
that gives the whole root system
its own collective intelligence

Cummings wrote of the *leaping greenly spirits of trees*
Tolkien had his Ents
Muir swore by the idiosyncrasies and personalities of different species of trees
and non-Europeans knew in their blood
in their bones
in their rituals
in the roots of their hair

trees have spirits

a forest is incomprehensibly alive

we should walk with unshod feet
leaving shoes at the trailhead
before entering that which is sacrosanct

when winds take forests in their paws
I am learning to think of the roots of the forest too
alive like the arms of a hundred-thousand octopi
straining and seeking in their own slow time

along a trail, roots surface from the depths like antediluvian sea-snakes
seemingly immobile yet possessing a hundred-times the contractive strength of anaconda
and they sense the vibrations of my enviroing footsteps