SOME OF US MAY LIVE

Leigh Kotsilidis

WE WADE AT THE EDGE OF WHAT IS BEYOND US

'*Some of Us May Live* engages with the signs of our richly troubled times with poems that are at once deeply serious and – how does Leigh Kotsilidis manage this? – playful. These poems give voice to the textures of current existence: a collection to treasure for its acuity and lightly worn wisdom.'

– DON MCKAY, AUTHOR OF *LURCH*

'Without a doubt, Kotsilidis has unmasked herself as a[n] [r]evolutionary poet. This collection is as vital a read for science communicators as it is for ecopoets, knowledge workers, and dreamers who seek new epistemic breaks to re-rupture, re-envision, and re-imagine our ecological condition.'

– ORCHID TIERNEY, AUTHOR OF *THIS ABATTOIR IS A COLLEGE*

'In Leigh Kotsilidis's *Some of Us May Live*, the disconsolate song of the proverbial canary in the mineshaft is revitalized by the boisterous voices of Fox, Wolf, and Bear, with grace notes of glaciers and black holes. Even suffused as they are with an awareness of imminent ecological collapse, Kotsilidis's poems are infused with wonder, music, and humour. They map small miracles, full of animal sense and empathy.'

– SYLVIA LEGRIS, AUTHOR OF *THE PRINCIPLE OF RAPID PEERING*

'Speculative, witty, lyrical, and elegiac, these pressurized poems vibrate at the event horizon of life and death, bringing into focus ethical and philosophical tensions between humanity's apocalyptic effects on nature and scientific knowledge that requires us to imagine the unimaginable. Kotsilidis sees what otherwise cannot be seen: an expanding universe accelerating toward environmental, political, and cultural catastrophe on Earth.'

– AMY CATANZANO, AUTHOR OF *THE IMAGINARY PRESENT: ESSAYS IN QUANTUM POETICS*

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poetry by
Leigh Kotsilidis

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MORE PRAISE FOR *SOME OF US MAY LIVE*

'In Leigh Kotsilidis's *Some of Us May Live*, the disconsolate song of the proverbial canary in the mineshaft is revitalized by the boisterous voices of Fox, Wolf, and Bear, with grace notes of glaciers and black holes. Even suffused as they are with an awareness of imminent ecological collapse and of End Times looming (maybe), Kotsilidis's poems are infused with wonder, music, and humour. These poems map small miracles, full of animal sense and empathy. "*Be* the ant / *Become* the spore," they implore.'

– Sylvia Legris, author of *The Principle of Rapid Peering*

'*Some of Us May Live* engages with the signs of our richly troubled times with poems that are at once deeply serious and – how does Leigh Kotsilidis manage this? – playful. With fine-grained irony, insight, and wit, but without ever losing the bite of wonder at ecological interconnections, she documents our passage as "we wade at the edge / of what is beyond us." These poems give voice to the textures of current existence: a collection to treasure for its acuity and lightly worn wisdom.'

– Don McKay, author of *Lurch*

'In this wise, opulent mash-up of vocabularies, Leigh Kotsilidis summons Bear, Wolf – alongside many other kinds of living beings – and neural networks to tell her stories. The result is a beautifully readable set of questions about life suspended on the edge of the abyss. Enter her world of omnivorous curiosity.'

– Eleanor Wachtel, former host of CBC's *Writers & Company*

'*Some of Us May Live* radically expands the call of ecopoetics to include the domain of cosmological wilderness. Reinterpreting scientific understanding, human experience, and animal behaviour through an investigative poetics, Kotsilidis unearths

the indeterminacy of reality from lockdown. Speculative, witty, lyrical, and elegiac, these pressurized poems vibrate at the event horizon of life and death, bringing into focus ethical and philosophical tensions between humanity's apocalyptic effects on nature and scientific knowledge that requires us to imagine the unimaginable. Kotsilidis sees what otherwise cannot be seen: an expanding universe accelerating toward environmental, political, and cultural catastrophe on Earth.'

– Amy Catanzano, author of *The Imaginary Present*

'*Some of Us May Live* seduces with its stunning epistemic raptures. Leigh Kotsilidis delivers an astonishing détournement of our scientific desires to know ourselves and the gorgeous universe in which we live. Here, animals – Wolf, Bear, and Fox – collude with the everyday to reveal and revel in new patterns and formations of thought in the Anthropocene's many catastrophes. With bold minimalism, Kotsilidis asks us whether it is the "knowable loss" of death, zombifying parasites, or the neuro- and genetic networks that make each of us porous with meaning. *Some of Us May Live* bursts with scientific lyricism, insightful schisms, and sensuous data. Without a doubt, Kotsilidis has unmasked herself as a[n] [r]evolutionary poet. This collection is as vital a read for science communicators as it is for ecopoets, knowledge workers, and dreamers who seek new epistemic breaks to re-rupture, re-envision, and re-imagine our ecological condition.'

– Orchid Tierney, author of *This Abattoir Is a College*

'*Some of Us May Live* is a conference of fauna, a cacophony composed with a consonant swiftness and rhythmic ferocity, in search of camaraderie. Situated at "the edge / of what is beyond us," Kotsilidis is a poet who foretells of the collectivities – between species, between ecologies – that must be our horizon.'

– Michael Nardone, author of *Convivialities*

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poetry

Leigh Kotsilidis

Coach House Books, Toronto

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For Martha, the last known passenger pigeon.
(c. 1885 – September 1, 1914)

When we try to pick out anything by itself,
we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.

– John Muir

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FIRST PRINCIPLES

A theory exists
for each of us.

To stop motion,
something heavier must intervene.

There is nothing
that won't crush you.

The more you suffer,
the more you remember.

A crisis churns
out opportunity.

Fame promises fun
until someone ODs.

We pay heed
only to what is useful.

Purple is proof
of deep pockets.

Nothing will change
until wolves spare rabbits.

This hunger
holds us together.

A silent room,
a cipher of stifled airways.

Sound proselytizes
profoundly through water.

Thresholds of low
and high tide.

Current turns back,
sea bottoms out.

Lightning strikes
more men.

The less coordinated
are easy targets.

Dead birds scatter
like candy wrappers.

We are all unintentional
witnesses.

Insubstantial
to the long view.

What does the heart have to do
with it anyway?

Before relenting, a lone note
will travel sixty kilometres.

The universe
is expanding.

Light is presently
300,000 kilometres ahead of us.

The question is,
Do I believe you?

The question is,
Do you believe you?

COGNITIVE SHIFTS

Wolf believes in the beginning
we were all soil, carbon
copies, no two specks
unalike. Among the bivouacked
riff-raff there is no reason
why one fence post would be sturdier.
Dorsal, cervical, pelvic, lumbar:
all bones
are scaffolding. Fruit
never falls far.

Wolf perceives unique peaks
he is unable to climb, multi-storeyed
oaks, aspens, pines, smothering leaves,
tines, hastening hurricanes,
Time. And wasted terrain,
which is different from glade,
as nothing will grow
again. Wolf worries
about this
over that, what makes him

him.

WE ARE DRIVEN BY STARS

A distant growl
yanks Wolf's ambition

upward. The way branches
reach from beneath swamp

for a white collar
of canopy, Wolf self-helps himself

through stiff cedar, clingy
forest floors, mouthfuls

of moss and other tossed greens,
clambers face to face

with scree. Finally, he arrives
at the peak,

a jackpot of troposphere
sprawling.

Growl grows quiet –
a beat –

before it turns
shriek.

DOMINANT GENE HYPOTHESIS

Bear, bow-legged, is on top
of balance. Milking it. He is more
than chop, flank, rack, leg,
and loin. He is streamlined
and calcified, he need not
compromise. Bear is stud.
He does not run, he struts
into the blazing barn.

For all creatures that follow,
the high jinx of bloodline
is insurmountable.
There is no slaking
Bear's predator heart.
He is forever: *Mine,*
mine, mine,
mine, mine, mine.

SELFIE THEORY

An infinite number of Bear
is surely better than one.
Bear at the gym.
Bear at the shisha lounge,
at the all-you-can-eat sushi.
Bear with his umbrella,
with his shih tzu, under his silky sheets.
Bear below the rotunda
of the National Scottish Museum,
where sheep DNA is pulled
from sheep DNA to shazam
Dolly the sheep. And now another
Bear. Bear, where ongoing matter
comes to replicate. Eve Bear
endlessly in the embrace of atoms.
Bear, naked, fish gape, kissy face.
Bear, found-my-light. Bear.
Bear. Bear. Bear where death
has no domain.

WOOING ECONOMY

More than wealth or power
Wolf wants to win
Fox's affection. He gifts her
a top-of-the-line LG TV.

In the eighty-inch glow
Fox makes a show
of shedding her dress

slowly.
Overcome,
Wolf unloads.

In moments like these,
Fox believes Wolf
is whippoorwill,

his sedulous song
flailing
only a little way into her.

A STRETCH

Not to be confused
with road, or automobiles –

A blur,
best understood

as a reach, a hand,
not intending to touch

another hand,
but to peel

the atlas from the dash –
The pass

arches over
the passenger. Soundless

inroads
drop away mid-

map. Signs
slip

from the rear-view.
The radio sips

static. Up ahead, what
was

is
now –

Blackness
bending

into
itself.

PHYSICAL ATTRACTION

Bear's bone of want
domesticates.

Incontestable
is the sound

of his spine
curving.

The same way gravity
wastes a body,

he slackens
hearts

so thin
walls cave in.

Limbs
fall

from
orbit.

For Bear,
breakdown

is the same
as buildup.

A BLACKER HOLE

Fox, inside Bear,
senses the inaudible black
hole collapsing.

Outside Bear's body
this frequency
would devastate entire galaxies.

Fox zeroes in – like she would
on a cello, a piano, a violin –
pins that precise moment

when shrewd sailors
stuff their ears
to steer clear of sirens.

Invariably, her own pulse
slips
into the singular pitch.

It's unclear now
who
is who –

in the mine shaft
they are one
canary

but how indifferent
Bear's song shatters
and consumes

every thing
every body.

END TIMES, MAYBE

Even when
crop circles surface
and bats brazenly gnash
and ants burst forth
and trains hack and hack

Bleating everywhere
June bugs smash-splashing
grackles bitch-slapping
moths mother-smothering
worms tossing-turning

At the brink
of prefab homes
with Rottweilers snarling
empty windows glowering
and trucks disappearing

In the night, radio din
and philodendrons crashing
past clapboards flapping
and weather-stripping
slipping

Even then,
when Fox has watched *The Omen*
and Shyamalan's *Signs*,
somehow, these times
are neither

SOCIAL SURVIVAL TACTICS

A turntable next to the dumpster:
for those dope enough
they will make the most of it.

This is the authentic life. This is cheap rent.
The counterstream to mainstream.
Whatever they meme.

Where Fox indulges in Patrón cocktails
ironically. Repeatedly. Because she can.
Because she craves more progressive means.

At last call, a mulleted stranger cops a feel
of her upper seam.
One thin tattoo away from the crotch.

She bears him the same way
she's worn faux fur for years.
She's thrifty. She knows

how to stretch out
polyamory. In theory.
She's hip.

But how will she dodge these
skinny jeans and shelves of taxidermy?
Can she keep breadcrumbing, ghosting,

tossing them to the dumpster?
When will they catch on
that too much is cringe,

yet another reason to throw shade?
Outside her refurbished loft window
a sickly deciduous clings on.

In the big city, unhip things die this way.
She's far too gone to wonder
what it's called, or from what it's suffering.

HOW TO KNOW WHEN A SOUND HAS REACHED AN EAR?

Wolf asks,
How does it feel
to sleep with an eel?
She mocks,
Just like a lupus,
only longer –

Some mouths
hook like moths,
infinitesimally devour
outer layers. Wolf
will soon walk
the plank
of his longing –

From 500 miles
away, the distress
of a humpback
whale –

It is still
a matter
of who
if any-
one is
listen-
ing.

ANIMAL BODIES

Every ten minutes a blue whale rises,
lung capacity ten human orchestras deep

At thirty-second intervals its heart sweeps
so loud it can be heard two miles away

And 500 miles further on, its song –
blowhole as oboe, as tremolo

Nearby frigates vibrate,
buoyant speakers broadcasting

Tracks of acoustic data
sprawl across the Atlantic

The tempo and scale so human,
the crisis of loneliness confirmed

By way of waves we conclude
we all sing our death:

Giant ammonites deflate
on land, salmon slosh

Home to spawn, seagulls cloak over
in caps, conclaves of cod cripple

Under ships, stampedes of dolphins
flip, jellyfish shift

To sea foam, sea lions gobble
last ballasts, squadrons of swifts

Swan
song

We concede, wind
lies down

Without warning
swallows everything –

Inside each of us,
more of us

Un-
sure

Whether we fed
the right wolf

Whether we understand
our dark wolf

Whether we were ever
wolf at all