

Roadkill

by Moya Costello

There was never a season for roadkill. Roadkill was roadkill for all seasons.

Warning road signs pictured drawings of koalas and kangaroos or wallabies, outlined in black.

Real, broken, desiccated bodies of snakes and possums were common on road surfaces.

People took spiders out of their houses, but not ants. Inside, eradication was the fate of ants. Outside, ants used to forecast rain in their utterly berserk business, sensing some change that only instruments could for humans. Now, in long-term heat, in the Anthropocene, they were permanently berserk, similar to the cry of the black cockatoo, which used to call in the rain but now out of sync as intense rain lessened.

Commute time in the bush. And huge trucks appeared like monsters, intergalactic, in the evening's queer light, formed by that time of day, and in the growing blackness, featuring the brief sight of every cars' lights. On the narrow roads, cars streamed like mad demons in the opposite direction, so close there was only breath between you and them. You could have overheard conversation, joined the conversation, dreamt their dream, communicated via telepathy.

It was dangerous to swerve not to kill. You'd end up on the other side of the road. Swerving was only possible if you had enough warning, either yourself from way up ahead, or from someone else on the other side of the road flashing lights. You'd stop, inciting impatience in someone behind you. You've run over a snake before seeing it in time to slow down/pull up.

The evening you kill the echidna, you don't even recognise it as another sentient being. You remember thinking that up ahead is some dead vegetation blowing across the road, a tumbleweed. A stream of cars comes towards you, another following behind. It is a 100km zone. Then the road bends, and you can't see the oncoming traffic. But all of these circumstances were irrelevant. You are going at 100, in a stream



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of traffic, and, by the time you recognise what it was, it is too difficult to swerve in either direction. There is a thwump, and the thing rolls across the road into the bush.

From whom or what will you seek forgiveness? You sense there will be penance, self-imposed – if not retribution, other-imposed.



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