

We were witches once.
Who healed through story,
Relationship with the land,
Performing alchemy,
Vessels for change,
For transformation,
In alignment with
The sacred energies that animate all life.

I'm not trying to romanticize
the past,
Strange and cruel as it was,
Probably incomprehensible to me now.
Just that it's no surprise
That where we are today
Came from the destruction of
The Commons.

The purpose of the commons
Was for all to have equal right
For use and relationship
Of and with the land.
All needed it for survival
So all cared for it
And had access.
This was in Europe.

Why am i telling this story
Starting here? Centuries ago?
Because the story of where we are now,
Of how i tried to make a living as an artist
And ended up becoming a grant writer
Begins here.

One ancestral line of my family
is from what we now call Tyrol, Austria.
Before it was Austria,
It was Suebian Land
The Suebi, the "Celts of Germany",
The Pagans of the Black Forest
Defeated Caesar and in 1525
Had a system of self-government

That stayed in place until
the 19th century
When it was destroyed by the Witch Hunts.

Over just a few hundred years,
Hundreds of thousands of people
Were killed
As witches
across Europe.

First they took the land
To do this they had to divide the people
(who were resisting)
So they demonized women, queerfolk,
Then they demonized
the body.
To rest was sinful
It was Descartes who was made holy,
And his idea of the body as a “work machine”.

I struggle to remind myself now,
As I navigate Google Calendars and Zoom meetings
That my ancestors did not accept
This sacrilege easily.
They murdered hundreds
If not thousands
Of my family and ancestors in Europe
Forcing, through penalty of death,
Exile, humiliation, torture, rape,
To accept a system of wage labor
To accept the body as a machine
To accept that what was once
Held with care, in common,
Was now owned by just a few.

Just a few.

And you had to believe
Or be devoured by the gallows
That Jesus is your savior
That women, once holders of the sacred
Mysteries and connection to land,

Are inferior,
That queers are disgusting,
And that your life is meant for labor
And your struggle to have what you need to survive
Will be rewarded in Heaven.

This project
This violent erasure of local knowledge and lore
This violent erasure of women and queers
Thought to be animalistic, basic, savage
Not human
Was so successful
And made so much wealth
That the belief system
Of private land
Of christian values
Of the body as a machine
Of the white man as superior in all ways
Was forced upon every continent
With the same brutality
The same violence
With which it was felt across Europe
And the Black Forest.

But my people have forgotten
And believe these myths so utterly
That I was never even taught to grieve
For the land that was stolen,
For the grandmothers, crones,
That they hanged
No one in my family says prayers
For my ancestors
Who were faggots, used to light
The stakes where the witches
Were burned.

So successful
Was the capitalist experiment in Europe
Which began with the eradication of the commons
That there is no record of it
In my family lore.

I don't know how to heal this grief.
But it is somehow encouraging to know
That even though they were killed
In horrific ways
My ancestors fought so hard,
For so long
To try to stop the onslaught of the powerful few
Whose only care
Was the accumulation of wealth
(and you cannot have philanthropy
without the accumulation of wealth).
They did not accept
This utilitarian worldview
The attempted destructions of their sacred and their magic
Passively.
THEY. FOUGHT. BACK.
And others, so many others in Africa, Asia, the Americas,
FOUGHT. BACK.
And we are fooling ourselves
If we think this is not the same struggle.
Capitalism was never separate from racism.
From conquest
From misogyny
From a supremacist worldview
Especially one that claims it can save the world
With 5% payout of Net Assets annually.