

interested individuals will deplete a shared resource. For Bollier, however, the real tragedy is that this parable doesn't describe a commons at all—it describes an “open-access regime, or a free-for-all.” A true commons is, in fact, defined by its “boundaries, rules, social norms and sanctions against free riders.” Most importantly, a commons is created intentionally by “a community willing to act” to protect and share it.

As such, the commons is situational, developing from the character of the resource, the experience of the people, and the unique natural, cultural, and institutional contexts it emerges from. “It embodies certain broad principles—such as democratic participation, transparency, fairness and access for personal use,” writes Bollier, “but it also manifests itself in highly idiosyncratic ways.” This quality of being both general and particular means one can find evidence of the commons in everything from those who share heirloom seeds to those who share software code.

*Think Like a Commoner* comes at an important moment when people across the political spectrum are increasingly disillusioned with both the market and the state. What is most exciting about Bollier's book is how he locates groups of people

embracing the commons on their own. “Not all of them espouse the commons discourse per se,” he writes. But they “embody its core values: participation, cooperation, inclusiveness, fairness, bottom-up innovation, accountability.”

Bollier positions the commons as a third way between the free market and the government, and as a community-driven alternative to the collusion between the two. However, he is clear-eyed about the very real threats of predatory markets that seek to exploit the commons—such as the privatization of water—and aware that government and the legal system have a role to play in enabling and expanding the commons. “The question is not so much whether markets or governments have some role in the commons,” he writes, “but rather to what degree and under what terms.”

*Think Like a Commoner* is rich with ideas and examples, though it lacks stories that make the pragmatic work of building the commons come alive. Interestingly, while the commons is often associated with natural resources, Bollier's most compelling and detailed stories explore digital and cultural commons. Bollier convincingly shows how the internet's capacity to facilitate decentralized collective action and mutual aid online is helping inspire and facilitate commons in the physical world.

If the aim of Bollier's book is, as the title suggests, to help us “think like a commoner,” then it is successful. In the face of a market culture that has “insidiously narrowed our imagination,” Bollier's project is an important corrective. The book is less helpful as an instruction manual to the act of commoning itself—but, Bollier suggests, the best way to learn that is through doing.

—Josh Stearns

## Its Day Being Gone

ROSE MCLARNEY

*Penguin, 2014. \$20, 112 pages.*

**ONCE**, at a panel whose subject was “Poetry and Place,” I listened to a poet claim that her poems were not at all influenced by physical place, that they were purely metaphysical, coming only from the landscape of her mind and imagination. Her statement perplexed me. Then where, I wanted to ask, did that mind of yours come from?

Rose McLarney embodies the opposite idea in her work: instead of the arrogance of disconnection, the longing for and humility of connectedness—to place, to people, to what came before. In *Its Day Being Gone*,



her second collection of poems, life is integrated with place and landscape, woven in and through it. Her home place, the southern Appalachians, is a part of her. In the poem “Watershed,” the speaker builds an argument for the region's richness and biodiversity, the “worked land, intimate,” as she seduces a lover of western landscapes to her side of the map: “Come home with me. Come in and tell me I can have / everything. That all of this I love survives, the farms that strove only for / subsistence, content with the providence of junk piles, pearl and diamond / darters, the rarer fauna, the multiplicity of trees, you.”

Some of “all of this” does survive, at least in pockets, but much has also changed, and this thread is thick and heavy throughout McLarney's book. The book's title, taken from a line from an

*Every single soul  
is a poem.*

—Michael Franti

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Appalachian ballad, seems to refer to the present reality of something that has passed—a way of life, a relationship to the land, a relationship with a person.

Much of the book is about coming to terms with change. In “Past Lives,” “the ghosts that gather at dawn” to talk at the auto-shop counter include the mechanic whose second job is “cutting building sites / into the mountain where he grew up,” the truck driver who is “truly a farrier.” And then there are the ghosts in “Eyes Lifted,” who are “still working / branches” in the old orchard or dancing on the roof of the barn, poking holes in the tin.

The middle section of the book brings us to another lush place of the poet’s childhood, in South or Central America. And though it is filled with exotic particulars—howler monkeys, rambutans, *jaguarundi*, and bunches of bananas—the constant here, too, is memory and change and what to make of both. In “Imminent Domain” McLarney draws a messy line from the Tennessee Valley to Mexico to Costa Rica to Patagonia, outlining the scars of dams that were built to bring power and progress. In their paths they left drowned communities and drastically altered landscapes, waterways, and ways of life. “Who doesn’t live / in the sway of the power of what’s pent up / behind them?” asks the poet.

In the third and final section, it becomes clear that this book is also about looking forward with the past in mind, choosing what to conserve, and resisting lament after all. In “The Treatment Was Frogs, or, The Tradition Was Honey,” McLarney contemplates the traditions one might keep alive: “Then butter will thicken in its mold—whatever you make / your custom—as if it had always been set firm.” In “Glossing the Image,” the speaker rejects the constant that “hardship is what’s historical” and “everlasting”: “But can’t we change the constants, / choose different images?

Aren’t there also beauty bush’s berries vibrant purple / just under the ice? Haven’t there always been?”

McLarney is unafraid to use such words as *love* and *beauty*, conjuring them out of mud and blood and mountains and rivers. She dwells in the tension between the lyrical, romantic, poetical, and the solid

earth, manual labor, and the steaming guts of a field-dressed deer. The poems in *Its Day Being Gone* are devoted to emotional, physical, and historical connection with the land and with others, past and present. In these links, this rootedness, is where we find our hope.

—Hannah Fries



## Yamatane

By Yusuke Asai RICE GALLERY, HOUSTON, TEXAS, 2014

Tokyo-born painter Yusuke Asai’s most recent “mud mural,” *Yamatane* (mountain seed), appeared at the Rice Gallery in Houston last fall. It took two weeks to create, and used twenty-seven shades of Texas soil. Asai is known for his sprawling works made of locally sourced mud and dirt. The colors he uses represent the ecology of a place, and the dirt, he says, is a living medium, containing seeds, insects, and microorganisms. At the end of an exhibit, his murals are washed away. Like the sand mandalas created by Buddhist monks, they are as ephemeral as the cycles of the natural world. Asai’s murals have appeared in galleries and classrooms around the world, including India, Tibet, and Japan.

—Kristen Hewitt