The Expletion of Tan

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The Expletion of Tan


& so Broca planted his name on that region of speech, on that brand of aphasia Broca’s Region Broca’s
Aphasia (The Expletive of Tan-Tan)
Broca died of an aneuhrism in his brain ex
pletive tan tan-tan tan & what
did those fissures of Tan-Tan's
locution hold what triple
rhythms of tan what punct-
tations of pause between
that one shrunken syllable's
expletion of all other words
"The meaningless syllable
Tan" Medieval Latin *tannum*.
Tannin. Tanbark. Shredded
bark. Cortex: Latin for *bark*.
Bark of the brain's half-
stripped tree. In the Macon
Hospital, in the ICU,

I came from the Boy Scout
jamboree to see

my father, stroke-ridden,
for the last time & hear

his last words, not words
but a guttural
lung-deep when he heard
me speak his name, a grunt

that grew louder & more urgent
till I fled that room—

Now he calls me up, in sleep,
sometimes, & the operator-static

whistles *I am required by federal law
to inform you you are receiving*

*a call from someone known
to be deceased, & I hear*

that desperate-to-connect
bark again, that

gnarl of syllable
peeled off

*its meaning & growing shriller*
*(Tan Tan  Tan Tan  Tan)*

to carry off throat & glottis
& tongue what the left brain's

stripped bark knows, & doesn't
know how to tell it knows

—& I crush that phone in my hand.