in the subtropical warmth, the warm temperate forests in the tall open forests, in a range of vegetation types the dense understories and the dense coastal heaths beneath the thick ground cover, the light soils easy for digging, here you stand beneath the heaths, beneath the low gremlin of a jagged shrub in the dry sclerophyll forests, the wet sclerophyll forests their dense understories of slicked up ferns and grasses, occasional open areas where grass-trees surround ferns, heaths and sedges low shrubs of tea trees clumped in beside the melaleucas a sandy loam soil, where dense cover is a distinctive feature a patchwork of habitats and ground cover densities the long, undulant carpets of a quiet country here you are, shrouded in the density of midday hidden from the revelation of light's harsh blanket until it begins to fray until a bright blanket begins to fray into darkness until bush recedes into darkness, foraging in the open at night the bush hollowing into a tunnel through a belly of fern the that-that of the open-hearted sand, now here you stand, now with the rain approaching the patient, fluffy sand, pitted with ants' nests the patient ground will sing like a web of notes

and o those brilliant bones of paperbark

where loneliness becomes your home, in the dim light of solitude, where loneliness overlain the forest stillness they are held like newborns at the edge of night, the soil parts for your little forepaws a body gathers around the ebony of two smooth eyes a body freezes in a rush of sandy loam looking back from where the ferns begin at the edge of night, where the day begins her brown fur and tail long as a body under the moon through the heathland, a little bandicoot-like creature the twinkling eye of a mind, of a wet blade of grass in the sandy sclerophyll, a furry banksia shudders with smells in the sandy sclerophyll heathland, her ancient blood, her long nose smelling the morning air, her ancestors warm in her blood the animal smells the morning air, her cherry heart pumping from the depths of time the animal grows, smelling the air from the depths of time she hops and flies a nugget of night darker than night darts across the track over the vast, shuddering universe an animal appears an animal appears, numerous and singular

in the winter chill: fruiting bodies of seeds and fungi, for underground fruit, flowers, roots, seeds omnivores loosely gathered, digging for buried desire curved claws longer than your vision's lid long, slightly curved foreclaws good for excavations males and females feeding in loose aggregations I can't see, several men and women eating underground roots and fungi tickling your nose the soft-bodied animals sheltering underground roots, tubers, insects and their larvae the fruiting bodies of hypogeous fungi excavating with long, strong claws, the map is formed shallow excavations in the litter, in the soil digging for a range of fungi in the early early morning an excavator with the skill of a truffle specialist the soil around the roots of banksias and eucalypts the soil that guards the roots, opening fingers part at once, for you the ground opens never seen, a colony slips and sliced with shadow I can't see, roots and fungi map your body where presence inscribes itself with absence, with maps of roots and fungi where runways and diggings illustrate your presence ps with loneliness

or when it warms: plant tissue, arthropods, flowers and fruits your dynamic patterns of foraging, your critical colonies you distribute critical colonies of beneficial fungi spreading fungal spores with your droppings fungal spores across stressed, moaning country they muster into mycorrhizae on trees and shrubs all while eating, while flicking your tail the animal eats at night while flicking his tail trembling a little, the animal's tail flickers through tufts of moonlight, trembling in a breeze that hugs the ground, the bush holds him in a pool of grass enfolded in the forest pack, there's a pillow of fur brooding in the force dusk, pushing at beyond brooding, nibbling along a trembling wave when his chest expands he pushes at the frame slowly, the packet unravels, slowly leaf and clod and claws become unravelled here we see a view sliding into milk, here a view is submerged in oil

the old ones are disappearing, their great leafy temples we are felling the last of their leafy temples what do we say, of the spotted quail thrush or the tiny pardalote of the powerful owl, pygmy possum or bandicoot of the tree frog, bettong or this long-nosed potoroo all these dimming memories in the heads of our elders all of our heads slipping from the oldest memories of all the marsupials, one of the first described by settlers your early encounters with the spread of settlement before the acres of devastated habitat, I can't watch the destruction of country, community after community marsupials of the potoroidae slaughtered by invasion broken by highways, by urban subdivisions and all the associated impacts stemming from that: flying metal, its mad clamour, cunning dogs and cats on top of red foxes, livestock, vegetation loss they're nearly gone, the cool flames for fungal flourishing savage fires have come to wipe out the undergrowth while the Pacific Highway comes snaking down the coast down through Bundjalung country, a tarmac snake like a horrid bruise heavy tarmac slapped over your home in early afternoon while a hungry tiger quoll rips off your arm finding you there, a leg ripped off by a fox your skull crushed beneath a Prius your shelters eaten out by giant stock only then, the raptors gorge on what they can stripped of a body, your soul wanders aimlessly, resting where it can homeless but restless, you scatter across the day, only then slowly, slowly you are strangled by invasion after hundreds of years, the country can barely breathe in spasms, the air clatters and whirrs the angry spirits welcome you into the earth

triangulate the facts of it / potorus tridactylus tridactylus / potoroidae (bettongs and potoroos) at first glance, a pointed nose and grey-brown fur at a glance, fur of a dark, chocolatey brown until little pricked ears like two soft horns the claws longer than your vision's lid, and a long furry funnel resolves into a wet button of a nose hold her now, her fear will beat in your hands her glinty looking, how much time for sight? she's peering across, the moment has split torn across, a retreat or an obscure plot before we see, she's a bandicoot until she hops hopping away, front paws tucked into chest racing from the end, life tucked into her chest as the poem ends, the revelation of a relation as the line ends, revelation of a relation with the kangaroo like an oversized rat, hence rat-kangaroo, the frame won't bend there you are, in full-moon's gauze two polished eyes orbiting your body's fluffy gourd two polished eyes, a pulsing, fluffy gourd a phrase from the earth stuck on your nose there you are, slowly dying into photo having revealed yourself completely within the fissures before time resumes and you disappear as if you were never there, or as if I never saw you

NB. Northern Long-nosed Potoroo contains echoes of phrases from Venie Holmgren's 'What Shall We Say?'