

BRUCE BEASLEY

The Expletion of Tan

Tan. Tan. Paul Broca hunted our speech
down, in 1861, through its lack & toward

its fissure in a man who, since age twenty,
could say only *tan, tan, tan-tan, tan* & an

obscenity Broca never reported. *Tan.*
Expletive. *Tan-tan. A man Leborgne*

called Tan aphasic in a French clinic
& when he died Broca saved his brain

in alcohol, & found *tan tan* expletive *tan*
it shrunken in the left lobes, & lesioned

from the Fissure of Sylvius to the Sulcus
of Roland. In its third convolution, a serum-

filled egg-sized depression, neurosyphilitic
locule. & around that fissure he found the brain's

clusters of language & speech.
Tan. Tan. Tan-Tan-Tan. 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 aneurysm 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 punc-

tations of pause between
that one shrunk 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
jambouree 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.