

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

obscurity 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.