

BENJAMIN BALTHASER

For Jim Foley, October 18, 1973–August 19, 2014

When I think of Jim I think of the low, humid desert where the last veteran from Spain talks to his hands about what he reads in the paper: the monarch butterflies are dying.

And it's true, the sky is empty as it is on most days. I remember watching them as they pulsed like an erotic, alien skin, unfleshed, one atop another, dying

and breathing forth, like a single body, a giant diaphanous wing made of dust and sky in the shade of the eucalyptus, the gaunt white trees under which the earth is dying.

The metaphor might appeal to you: planted for paper by the Spanish, eucalyptus grow by killing everything beneath them. Some days, I can almost hear the Chumash dying,

taken without a trace, paintings of spirals and suns linger on the red walls of ocean caves like the shells of insects: may we all be so beautiful when we are dying.

Jim, you forced of me one thing: that we aren't invincible. That we are growing old. That one can kneel before an alien sky, and grow younger while you are dying.

There are no apologies in nature; only coincidences and springs and long streets in the shade of trees that do not know of what they symbolize: we are all dying

of something, yet when I think of the old man who fought in Spain, I know that we are a country sleeping on and on, and — for the lack of all you lived for — dying.