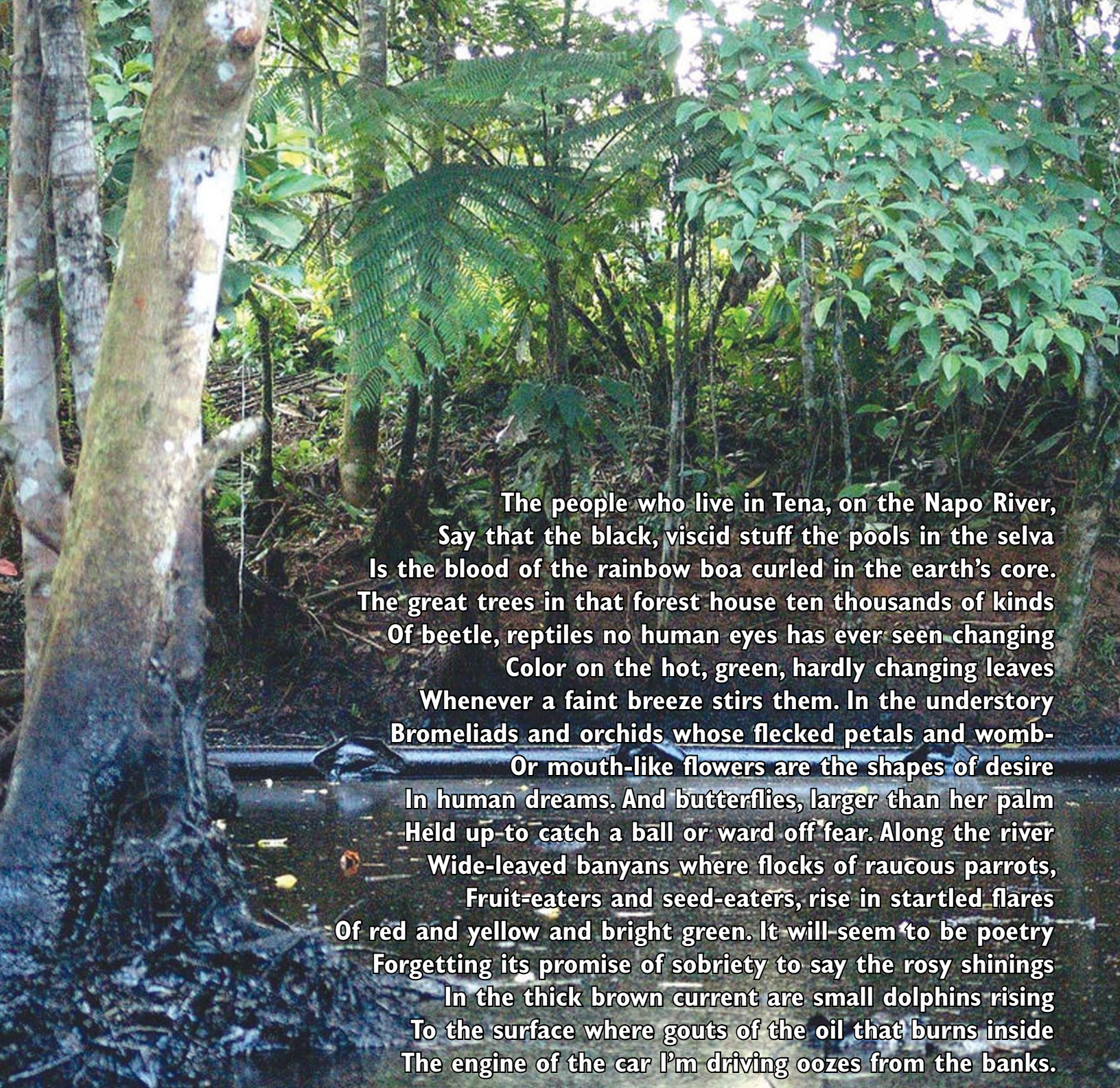


Excerpt from "State of the Planet"
by Robert Hass

A photograph of a dense tropical forest. In the foreground, a large, thick tree trunk is visible on the left side. The background is filled with lush green foliage, including large ferns and various trees. In the lower part of the image, a dark, polluted stream flows through the forest, with a dark, viscous substance (oil) visible on the water's surface. The overall scene is a stark contrast between the natural beauty of the forest and the environmental damage caused by pollution.

The people who live in Tena, on the Napo River,
Say that the black, viscid stuff the pools in the selva
Is the blood of the rainbow boa curled in the earth's core.
The great trees in that forest house ten thousands of kinds
Of beetle, reptiles no human eyes has ever seen changing
Color on the hot, green, hardly changing leaves
Whenever a faint breeze stirs them. In the understory
Bromeliads and orchids whose flecked petals and womb-
Or mouth-like flowers are the shapes of desire
In human dreams. And butterflies, larger than her palm
Held up to catch a ball or ward off fear. Along the river
Wide-leaved banyans where flocks of raucous parrots,
Fruit-eaters and seed-eaters, rise in startled flares
Of red and yellow and bright green. It will seem to be poetry
Forgetting its promise of sobriety to say the rosy shinings
In the thick brown current are small dolphins rising
To the surface where goutts of the oil that burns inside
The engine of the car I'm driving oozes from the banks.

Robert Hass is a professor in the Department of English at UC Berkeley and the former Poet Laureate of the United States. He recently won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for poetry.

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Photo: An oil slick in a tributary of Ecuador's Napo River. Photo by 00rini hartman.