

Wilderness House Literary Review 19/3

Ben Berners-Lee

Eternity After Ritual

She reaches up
and pulls closed
a curtain of smoke
conjured and guided
by her open palm.

The central kiosk
platform-gurney-bed
and the frontal console,
which glints like a metallic pyre,
have their places marked out
with tape on the floor,
for matching a blueprint
or for being seen from heaven.

She prods the divining
rod into me and I
watch her eyes watch
the pulses it secretes
knowing I've no hope
of reading the screen.

I imagine that she dreads
having to answer to some quip
about *the ritual of it all*,
which would only distract her
from assembling the dimensions
of the image that hereafter, she knows,
will be all of it,
will be the ultrasound itself,
will be securely saved,
portable and online forever—

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afterward the machines
will be reinitialized,
without any need to violate
rite or superstition
by callously sweeping
away an accumulation
of fallen ash in which
we might've been able
to make out a face.

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What Flower?

In a dream, one that still
troubles me, I was so sure
when I said "follow me,
I know the way."

I had such certainty of myself
that I thought, this girl whom I'll lead,
who shares her name with a flower,
will feel her doubts dissolve in it.

Recalling now, I couldn't
have known the way,
had no map or bearing.
The threat of a misstep
into a crevasse
that could've appeared
from nowhere
was there in the dream,
but then it stayed
in its place: mind's shadow.

But it's here before me now,
as I'm awake and wondering.

Who was the girl,
Iris? Magnolia?

And the unthinking trekker
—that in the dream I was—
where was he heading?

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And if he'd been
able to make it there
might he also have been able
to stay on past waking?

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Just So

I attribute my appetite
and its perfect alignment
with my nutritional needs
to the apes that evolved
these tastes for fruit and meat,
to fuel their advance
up the trees and over vast
plains so that they
could spread themselves
across time and space,
fighting, running, fueling
with whole branches of berries,
speed increasing endlessly,
blades of wild grass
a yellow blur
beneath the scramble,
logs turned planks for crossing
gushing, ceaseless torrents
of rivers in spring,
through that forest
and then rocketing up
the south ravine,
a trail now, to the mount,
where there's a boulder,
which is also somehow a part
of this great movement,
lifted above the head, and then
accelerated downward
toward a skull,
human and bloodied.