

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/3

Chris Crittenden
Linguist

words attack us,
but who worries?
something happened to them
in the days of the stones.

they come out our mouths
like chain gangs of moths,
or dragonflies unleashed--

secretly to sting
while lurking in banter.

when we flounder
in whirlpools of thought,
and most need wings,
they tend to faint.

idols come and go,
pentateuchs and krishnas;
but the words won't stop
giving tragic birth.

even as we die,
they labor on and on,
a callous rain.

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Garapito Loop

a bright net hugs the land
as far as you can see.
only imaginable
are the busy creatures
it has swallowed.
in this grip of the electric,
somewhere,
dwells everyone:
a neighbor you
undress daily with thoughts;
a gas clerk whose smile once
mattered; chocolate
on the faces of boys
in a park.

from this perch of stones
like stegosaur humps,
you might as well be a satellite,
or the squint
of an orbital mystic.
much has passed
on this dying sandstone:
natives in labor,
cascades of them,
birthing a commotion of tribes
while condors swing
over antelopes
and pug-faced bears.

...

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it's as if you had snoozed
while chanting, and woke
to find the earth lost--
hidden under burns every night,
a valley of steady fire,
and prisoners in the flames.

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Sheets During Nightmare

gills of swollen plaster
and ridges of snapped wings

snag his hands,
tight as phantom police

who surveil
the grottos of his mind

and judge his gnashing
not the product

of orderly dreams.

flannel forms knots,
assumes warped shapes

he won't remember,
fangs that bite

his trapped thigh,
lurching him up,

his spine irate, arms
sheathed in goosebumps,

and his fingers holdfasts
hooked in eddies

of twisted fiends.