

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/4

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october

The barn returns to view in autumn.
There, across the field, nearly unseen in the lame hillside,
It stood in silence, in disregard, in winter, spring and summer;
Empty, hard, jagged-edged and untouchable,
A sheet-metal house of cards,
To be toppled by the summer sun itself.

Now is harvest time, corn maze time, hay-ride time,
Time for photos of the painted faces of toddlers sitting on hay bales.
Now is the time for cider and the cool, firm flesh of the pumpkin.
Now is the time for hand-painted signs directing patrons
And their agape anticipation across gravel and meadow
To community parking, spontaneous and free
Wherever you want to park.
Now is the time for hands exchanging dollar bills, a free gourd for the
kids,
Carving lessons, and the shyness of the donkeys across the fence.

The barn returns to view in autumn.
Sheet metal shanty, grayed and rusted, remote and useless
For a time.
This time, each pumpkin toted home, each marked, cut, carved, gutted,
Candled by the doorway, each fruit of the vine,
A stout orange diplomat, negotiates memory
Of the stoic barn with the cool earthen floor.

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/4

warmth

I was born in a thaw.
Ice melted first on pondtops and shorelines as
Rivulets gathered on streetsides.
The air blew breezy on snow crusts
That melted and puddled in stillness.
Foglets ascended above declining snowbanks,
Dissipating as fast as they formed,
As mists hovered then dispersed.

Crown-first, I emerged;
Head, then shoulders,
Then washed in a rush of amniotics.
Suspended there from my umbilical,
I fluttered pink, body heat emanating
Off my shoulders and heels.
A cloud of vapor gathered over my body
And vanished into daylight
As my eyes opened through a filmy haze
That obscured the gathering pigmentation there.

As the sunlight faded its wintry cameo,
Afternoon approached. My cord was cut.
Dusk promised cold as my mother gathered me in her arms,
Cooing her familiar warm moisture across my cheeks.

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/4

the blue

Those who've been to the Aegean
Have understood blue differently than those who haven't.
Like an Inuit with snow, you try to deal with it,
And it might as well be oxygenating your body,
Or converting light into vision.
Those who've ever read any of those ancient Greek myths
>From 10 million years ago –
The Iliad, the Odyssey, Jason and the Argonauts –
Know why those crazy Greeks were forced
To write that stuff.
They'd sit on a volcanic island like Santorini,
On the smooth black sand of the atoll,
And stare at that blue that surrounded them.
They were people of the sea; there was no exit.
The sun would beat down on them like
Camus' Meursault,
And they'd just fry their brains up there on the hillsides
Drinking retsina and ouzo
And lose their fucking minds
Trying to explain and describe the sea
By conjuring Medusa and Sirens and golden fleece.
There was never any shade on Santorini,
There is no Greek word for shade.
The sun just penetrated their skulls and scorched their occipital lobes
While they babbled blue streaks about impossible fables and myths.

Coleridge gathered the seascapes for the Ancient Mariner,
Having scratched fragments about pleasure domes and a Chinese emperor,
Totally wasted on laudanum,
Soon sick as a dog, addicted, losing his heart and lungs.
Melville, penniless when he perished, recovered from alcoholism,
Wrote of Ahab and obsession,
Of a man who fought the whale on its own turf
And spent eternity under water.
Hemingway conceived of Santiago from the sands of Key West or Cuba,
Autobiographical loneliness,
Busted in spirit and body, abandoned and deserted.
Then the sun and paranoia cooked his brains until he blew them out.

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I first stepped into the Atlantic
With my grandmother, who was Greek,
But never contemplated a color
Or a natural force like her forbears.
But she made baklava, dolmades, and spanakopita
Sing like Nana Mouskouri,
All from recipes of oral history.
I caught a crab there as a boy
And Yaya warned me never to take it home,
For it "would stink to high heaven."
When she died years later, I got a sense of her heaven
For she was funeralled by priests robed in black Cossacks like Santorini's
sands,
Wearing mitres like topless volcanoes,
With beards flowing like golden fleece,
On a hillside Greek Orthodox church
With gold-leafed icons, ancient incense and a perfect blue cupola.

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the ruminant

There, across the median, the other roadway, the shoulder and the wire
fence,

A black angus grazes on brown grasses beneath the bare tree,
Former shade, now barren rest for grackles.

The sky grays, so thin it does not penetrate the empty spaces
Between the dry twigs nor slow the cow's chewing.

The lightless cold cannot deter her rhythm.

Her hide is far too thick.

She will eat and grow through the winter.

My car flashes brown on the roadway.