

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

Jim Davis

Nature Poem

What but the wager of reflection remains
nameless, prompts leaves fumbling over the road
to a structured sort of meaning, warm the phone on the floor with voice?
Should you doze in a pillow of your own arms, your dreams
will be shapeless.

In a pool of numbers, does a student scan the surface, hope
for a recognizable figure, or does he visualize desire
and seek her out? Either method can be applied
to late-night bars on the Basel-side of the river, where they are free
to sling drinks at the brink of frenzy. There has to be a permit

to touch [lightly] the hand and [gentle] the face. In awe
of pulsing storm approaching blue, its Paleolithic rhythm
sifting vanilla desert. Remember, kindly, June's
humble buzz of insects, the winds of existence –
now that locks are frozen over, sewer caps steam like her breathing.

(One cut red onion sweating in a bag.)

Desire, derived solely from lust, from dark speckled night, from the king
of speech. There's no such thing
as Alabaster, says the Dodo, stepping off a rock into the sea.

Poetry, the augured principality of precision, of concision as it adheres
to the limits of all that's written and seen, or sung, or hung by small thread
to the bark of a tree where the cartoon carving of a principled existence
as determined by the subject of the honeybee, who sees advantage
in sniffing stamen, will repeat.

One thousand times over, the red-throated loon,
crazy with boredom and desire, whispers to her huddled brood:
chirp, swallow, repeat
before pushing them out of the nest
to fly into the sunset, or splatter in the street.

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Orchestra

I tried the outdoors once, they didn't suit me.
You said it was late November and that shouldn't count.
But it counts, of course it does.
I'm looking out the window now. And it's fine.
The trees are pulled apart by wind, yellow and failing.
The tide tongues the coast and recedes.
The season is over. The woman at the table in my periphery
unties the scarf around her neck and lets it fall.
I pick it up and hand it to her. Then I go back
to the world beyond the window. Tonight, she will
think about me. You can see her scars,
the lighting so dramatic. The empty cadence of gears
ticking in her wrist watch become a metronome,
I tap my feet to it. Thin hands vibrate, become
a conductor's wand, twitching before the pit
of string and brass. Every string is silk and strong,
together they web, together trapped. Against the fence,
a collection of fallen leaves, their piles interrupted
by soda cans, empty bags, abrupt roots and arms
of severed hedges, woven through the steel web of chain-link.
I breathe against the glass and write a message in the fog.
Beneath her seat is a brown paper package wrapped in string.
In the pot-belly stove down the road, leaves are burning.
Why would anyone leave the dry inviting heat of home?
The room pulses with awful, expanding silence: a chorus
that dips and rises into blades wiping a windshield,
bathes in crescendos to the cadence of my tapping feet.

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The Season I am Best

This might be the season I am best at, fall,
if you can call this fall. We are hiking
through the ecotone of late summer/early fall,
but that's fall enough for me. I am always quick
to pull on a pair of beaten jeans and poke my arms
through the sleeves of a thin flannel. I welcome
sweatshirt weather with open, covered arms.

I will miss the tan bodies, surely,
but I will develop a taste for the pale ones,
the soft, lumpy ones waiting just beyond
fall's comfortable corner – though I maintain
slight motivation to walk instead of drive,
to eat a salad and take an evening jog,
maybe a pushup or two: because although
there's a chill in the air and the leaves are dead,
falling in vibrant collections of red, yellow, burnt orange,
dried and stuffed into the fire pit, there is still
the off-chance, the one-in-many potential
to feel the warmth of a final summer day,
if you can call this summer,
before winter strikes dull in frozen streets,
a day when I might roll up my sleeves and choose
to sit on the patio at the local café, have my waitress
bring me a sandwich on a warm plate, a cup
of coffee, no, iced tea, so that I may continue reading
about the preservation of innocence, and, of course,
the creative importance of being alone.

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After Slow Dancing with a Girl who had a Boyfriend at the Wedding of a Former Colleague

Hungover on the year's most beautiful day, he'll forgo
the ham sandwich for sliced lamb and beef, six piece
falafel, six piece grape leaves. How can you give away a day
like this, she asked as he napped on the couch in the sun.

Please, said his dream voice, she's not even that high-cheeked.
What's a reverie anyway, when he who's been abandoned
is exactor of terrible normalities, feet fraught with concrete –
sorry to burden the process with response. He thinks that
a heavy conscience is less in the haughtily conscious, and he is
not willing to pay anything over the asking price. If you were to

speak without boundary entirely, follow yourself headfirst
into all and sundry crotch, tipped heavy by sex or the promise of sex...
sure, he's tried it, which is why he understands all the unpublishable
private literature he's heard of. An afternoon stuck in traffic – this is

the year's most beautiful day – listening to lectures set to brakes,
wailing ambulance announcements and the cry of neighboring radios.
There's an accident at Foster that's slowing the flow of both lanes.
Nothing is pure, he says, more for her than to, but the unquestioned ge-
nius

of one who questions genius. Yes, she said, finally, as she ran, one hand
on her ear, pressed to phone, the other going white at the knuckle

on the strap of her saddling purse, skirt billowing behind her like a flag,
like the tail of information that floats behind the wise, as she races
to capture a train. Let's never do that again, she said, her headache
battling his. Competition, ambition – those are the oldest and most

deeply rooted parts of the brain, you know. She said that perhaps
nostalgia heightens ambition. She says, *Shit Haystack, you wanna*

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live forever? Live in the moment, she says, think outside of it. He nods at the other end. She stops to see two brown cats square off, then again at the parkway where a curl of fern is born into itself, and the world it will want to forget. (Don't be so dramatic she tells an echo, he's hung up.) His lone black suit was beaten to wrinkle in his bag. Toothpaste split. This is it, she says, so damned beautiful after all. Most went on chasing, though she walked back to where it all began, sniffed the air, buried her head and her hands in the simple dirt of morning.