

Wilderness House Literary Review 21/1

Summer Barnett
Creation Story

before language
i was raw and red, a scrubbed yam
i had no word
for the word that means open wide your mouth
i was of hunger
before hunger
there was no border
between my feet and my belly
i caught thorn
in me
in the deep of me
and upon the face of the deep of me
moved form
and i bucked tonguelessly
in the formlessness
and my breasts
were not yet breasts
i was living and fucking in the womb
time was very still then
i was as round as a sea urchin in the darkness
i did not know i was naked
the woman i laid with
was not my lover
a white flower bloomed
in my thigh
but i did not know the name for it

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Babel

when we pass through the fields
I know we are natural.

as the gulls who flee
from our hurtling racket,

we are becoming totally secret.
and I understand that we are not like them or even similar,

but breeding a new language
of quick toothy consonants

and little keening vowels,
a singular unified tongue, so that nothing

that runs from us
is from us

but towards us and again and
as it is.

yet, I'm so bewildered--
when I think of your tongue

alone in the unlit cave of your mouth,
I'm so astounded, I can hardly bear it,

and I cannot name the call.
but as the birds light the trees,

(their hollow-boned
their stone-throated

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their alien terror)
desire is the air

I vibrate with my mouth
towards them,

whistling, pushing tiny
greedy sounds,

I'm wanting them to look up--it's
so desperate,
this wanting--then

I look at you and I covet
your eyes. I want you

to possess my pupil
I want to lift the veil

and let you look at your face.

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Real Meat

Today, I tell an acquaintance that I have a psychosexual obsession with my middle-aged female professor of translation. I don't know why I say it;

it's barely true. I drive a federal road to the empty reservoir and write it down. I write: Today, I drove down to the empty reservoir.

Some things are just exactly things you'd imagine would happen to a real person. And it's so shocking--it's exactly as you thought,

and all those things you wondered are really true. Like the clarity before defibrillation, finally touched

by the Renaissance depiction of Christ. Then waking up hungry--yes, hungry! Rotating in the smelly kitchen

like an empty forklift and hoping for drugs. That's when I realize it, that's when I know for sure: When you're really

starving, you're really hungry. You want something with real meat.