

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

Ron Yazinski

PORTRAIT OF DAPHNE DU MAURIER

At least one of us knows she is lying
When she says the inspiration for her most famous story "The Birds,"
Was a newborn lamb whose eyes had been pecked out by crows,
How she ran home for a gun to put it out of its misery.
As far as I know, she may have plagiarized that story too.
But I play along because I'm her friend,
And she is my patron.

But that's not the kind of tale which helps me do my job.
After hundreds of sittings,
I've learned that I can only paint a woman's face
In a way she'll approve,
If first, she reveals herself to me, as if I were her confessor:

For the delicate creases around the mouth,
I want to hear the rough sketches of the men she slept with, but didn't love;
But for that strength in the eyes which comes from forgiveness,
I need the details of the men she slept with, and did.

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OBSERVING THE DREAM

On the Fiftieth Anniversary of Martin Luther King's
"I Have a Dream" speech,
My wife and I coast our bikes into downtown Apopka,
Taking a break before returning home.

There, behind the McDonald's and under the overpass
That allows more dedicated bikers to cross Main Street,
A homeless black woman sprawls on the sidewalk
Surrounded by bags of tattered clothes and a tarp,
Her back braced against the water fountain.

Perhaps because of the day,
We initially think she is chanting "Freedom,"
Each time she puts food in her mouth,
Like an old Catholic granny says "Amen"
Before receiving the host;

Only to realize as we again pedal past her,
That what she is actually drawling
Each time she inspects a chip
From the little red and gold package on her lap,
Is, "Fritos,"
As she brings it to her lips.

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DUSK

(For Stevie Smith)

Darkness marks the return
Of consciousness to my backyard on Victoria Way.

The oaks awake to their griefs--
The younger ones, that they can't reach the sky;
The older ones, that it's not worth the effort.

Paving stones sulk on the lost glory of mountains,
When they were part of something
Larger than themselves.

And, from the abandoned groves beyond,
The wind is woven with the whispers of the dead
Crying for the things
That mattered in their penny lives:

The farmer's wife, about the horse and buggy
that would have reached the doctor in time
To save her child, if not her;
The suicide who shot, but did not kill his treacherous lover;
The parish priest, who passed without the presence of a priest,
Eternally confessing and condemning God for making him the way he was.

Which explains the hesitancy to walk in the humid twilight,
Into my own backyard;
There's a chill in the bones
That locks the door and leaves on the lights.