

Wilderness House Literary Review 2/4

Review by Doug Holder

The Turn of the Century

Julia Carlson

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Leave it to Somerville poet and publisher Gloria Mindock to come up with a chapbook press branded "Cloudkeeper," and to recruit a high caliber poet like Julia Carlson. Carlson, who is the fiction editor of the *Wilderness House Literary Review*, obviously has a serious talent for poetry, as evidenced by her collection: "The Turn of the Century." This poetry hits the reader hard and square, with the power of a Punk Rock riff. Carlson, an old Punk Rocker of Boston's notorious "Rathskeller"- club vintage, takes stabs at the tender underbelly of contemporary society and draws blood. In the poem: "Hotel Caribe, San Juan," Carlson paints a scathing portrait of "Ugly Americans."

These beefy men
Sell aluminum siding
In Topeka or Duluth
They wear their blazers to the beach
Their wives are plump and fashionable
The men look at every woman but their wives
The wives watch the black boys
Sweeping up the sand
What any one of them
Wouldn't give
For some wild
Rum-drenched episode
To not write home about."

And here is a right-on-the-money description of a café society party full of the requisite number of poseurs and ciphers. ("Dinner with the Ruling Class.")

" As the evening progresses through descriptions of bad haircuts...

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Cleaning ladies who never clean the house the way they would
Shopping sprees, bankruptcies (not theirs, someone else's)
Unhappy relationships, therapy, yoga, personal trainers
And unambitious/drunk/cheating husbands or wives
(not theirs, someone else's)
I get plastered and caught in this sticky bullshit.
I feel like I'm sealed in plastic wrap bound with duct tape
Gasping and suffocating in drivel so pure it hurts.
I hate these people who are so tolerant of me and my boozy state
These people who think I am "cool"
I deeply despise them
And, despite the fact they're footing the bill
Or perhaps because of it, I will never show them mercy."

Carlson is a member in good standing of the "Bagel Bards," a writers' group that meets in Somerville/Cambridge, Mass. throughout the year. She doesn't often talk about her poetry – this is a gal who likes to keep it close to her vest. Don't mess with her, and for Christ sakes, keep it down and let her write!