

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/1

Barbara Bowen

We Are Singing

With the storm coming in we are
holding hands and singing we are
walking barefoot in the desert
feeling for underground water with our feet
and we are walking
among stones in ancient sites singing
with our pockets full of pollen

we are standing in the snow singing
to mothers in Ethiopia and Azerbaijan
we are waiting by the tripwire singing
near the bandstand in the park and offering
food to strangers and to the men who are

back from the war back from
an explosion, after the deaths of our friends
we are singing

over cell phones we are singing
on piers and in the back of pick up trucks and
in ferris wheels remembering children
huddled in makeshift tents and tent
worms coagulated in trees we are singing we
are singing looking straight

into the eyes of investment bankers and
peering into the hollow words of politicians
we keep singing and singing

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as ice caps disappear as floating islands
melt beneath the bellies of polar bears and
harp seals as the desert grows around us
we are singing
while the ocean dies faster than our breathing
we are singing with improvised explosive devices
scattered all over like pollen in spring
with plastic growing from our feet
we are singing louder and louder
even when no body listens we are singing
we are singing and holding hands
feeling for doors in the darkness
as the storm roars around us.

after W.S. Merwin

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The Day's Whir

It doesn't make a lick of sense
to count your chickens
before breakfast. Eat first.
Chase the omellete

with a bit of blackberry wine,
let a mouthful of summer
explode—sweet and hot, slide
down your throat--needle

your kid brother about his stutter,
then amble toward the henhouse, headfirst
into the day's whir--its sharp blades,
its warm eggs, its hidden cliffs.

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At E'Anna Temple

The Courtyard Sweeper Speaks

Dawn's still tucked into night's pocket but the stone carver is already at work in his chamber. At dusk, beggars will find their bowls full of pomegranates.

The golden lyre's plucked notes are like the taste of spring snow on the tongue. I go now to gather reeds and bundle them for the children.

While the carver's hammer and chisel awaken life in the stone, priests prepare sheep for ritual slaughter: lambs and ewes, ewes and rams. Euphrates means

good to crossover. This evening it falls to me to make offerings to the gods: burning sweet reed, cedar and myrtle. Moving over the alabaster, the carver's hands are blind

eyes seeking light. By dusk, he will carve the river and crops and by midnight, a queen bee will cross over and gather a new swarm in the date palms.

The Snake Charmer

My reed flute shattered under the hooves of a wayward sheep, so now I myself must sing to the snakes and remain still as a stone.

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The High Priestess Speaks

When the black storks return to the palm groves,
old men will roar like bulls,
and anoint their wives with scented oil.

Startled quail dart about in the courtyard,
but when I pour oil into the sacred vase
all is silence, even the song of the reed cutter's
sickle as it strikes the reeds.

There is a new vessel on the altar, all night long
it sings like the wind.

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Swan Song

In memory of Merce Cunningham, April, 16 1919 – July 26, 2009

Tight curve on the narrow two lane road,
I bank my old Subaru and as the fog
breaks just after the bridge, I glance left
to the salt marsh and the deep water beyond -
pattern of green hillocks and mud,
smell of brine – looking for egrets
that frequent this inlet, but it's not an egret
that catches my eye, but a tall thin long-necked
man balancing on one leg,
the other folded up like a heron, his head tucked,
neck arched toward the earth, his shoulders
rounded in a gesture that echoes the hillocks,
arms outspread, undulating with the rhythm
of the lapping tide, then his head uncurls slowly
his folded leg provides ballast as he leaps to another hillock,
folds himself up again, curves his head
toward the earth as if searching the marshland
for a partner for a pas de deux. The score today
is not John Cage, but the atonal notes
of the laughing gull, a seal's bark, the motor of a fishing
boat headed for the Straits, the swish of tires as
Merce Cunningham dances on the salt marsh at Lilliwaup,
before he flies away for ever.