

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/1

Lynn Hoffman

the first day of trout season

Was that an angry scaly flash
that popped through the sky just before
the swollen pregnant viburnum bud
scratched my face on the path to the creek?

Or was it you and me?

Was that storm the sign of the end
of days-the arrogant heat and the wild moisture
coming to baptize the cold dry people?

Or was it just another ploy of the cells of stems
in the brown of March, on their road to green
and April?

If we stopped reading signs,
would there still be roads,
or fish and hooks
without the bait?

Or would opening day just come
and go
unlicensed?

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expanding universe

the universe expands, it dilates at the speed of sight.
a bell rushes away from its baffled clapper,
a cat springs from a roof in the ninth ward
to catch a starry bird
and a balloon stretches its skin
pounded by mad molecules.
a town dries up like a drop on paper,
pale in the center, dark at the edge.
a man sits by a giant window in a house
where all the light leaked out
and the only sound that waves through the vacuum
is his darkling call to the last elm
that sits rooted, astonished and alone
in the stickly, widening woods.

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Goldenrod

"I hate that goldenrod!" my neighbor says,
pointing to a frowsy ochreyellow bush
as big as a clowns' car
dressed with clouds of ambitious bees and green glass flies.
I was watching a mantis clipped to a stalk,
watching that peculiar humanish turn of the head
Watched it appreciate the abundance
in its own precise, insectivorous way
"Why's that?" I said to my neighbor.
"Does it remind you of a bad hairdo at the prom?
Call your attention to fleeting summer,
Or brand new backpacks crowding their way into school?
Does it make you wonder how goldenrod's honey turns white?
Does it remind you of a little blond boy who never was,
Or the canary that used to sing in your Aunt Anna's front room?
Does the sound of its daily buzz chase you into the night?
Do you hate the afterimage that slides around your closed eyes when
you've stared at the blooms too long"?
"Nah", she says "The damn things make me sneeze. "
I brush some of the heavy pollen on my finger
Tiny stones too dense to fly, too thick to prick
The tenderest of noses.
"Why don't you cut it down?" I ask, more neighborly than botanical.
"Aw shit" she says "I just drink a lot of mint tea,
splash of gin sometimes. Works fine.
easier than cutting it down-more fun than digging it out ."
She laughed and then I think the mantis moved
and the goldenrod was one bug down,
and the mantis and the neighbor and me,
we all flew home, each of us up a bug or two.

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niagara falls

-for jfa

every day it spills more water than its continent uses.
stand here, listen. the river's wide and it drops
great drains one great lake into another
you can stand on its shoulder and see to another country
a mile away and listen to the rumble of a billion litres of water
every six minutes.
fifty thousand years from now, the river will have eaten
the rock that makes it roll.
majesty, geology, temporality.
its pulse is the grinding of the land by its holy water
and here on the american side
a blondish ten-year old boy is poking an ice-cream novelty into
his little brother's blonder hair
their mother wants them to see the things that the rich kids see
and be the way that the rich kids be.
she pinches her face and hisses against the roar
and they all three turn away from the river falling,
to dry disappointment with the mist.

60 tons of silt and salt pass by us
in green display every minute as 60 tons of damp impatient souls
wash around us (chatter, splatter, candy-wrapper) and back on the bus
an elite hundred wrap themselves in plastic
and ride into the falls of water-some are in love
an insane dozen throw themselves over the edge-some live.
we buy a shot glass and a tee-shirt and then for a moment
tremble as the vibration of the water works its way up through
the concession concrete to our feet and tells us
which is big and who is little.
later in the motel room in the pink light of hydroelectric night
i look at your naked back asleep in the downstream chatter
of angry tourist trade and problems held in solution

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and i wonder at the deep green river of you that crashes below
and wets us deeply down below the neon fog.

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september-carpenter's woods

you have to be in winter, you.
you have to have added layers
and subtracted daylight
and seen the sun as the stranger
and the windburn as the price
of looking at grey-brown trees.

you have to walk across the frozen pond
you have to have forgotten
the layers of snow below the layers of snow
and drunk the last of the old man's cider
and eaten the last of the old woman's peaches.

you have to be in springtime, you.
you have to be asparagus green
and raspberry red
with touches of jonquil and tulip
in your warm, damp hair.
you have to wake up when it's already light
to look at fall and not feel for the end
of the leafy, buzzing air.

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Climate Change #2-buying a senator

where will the senators buy bread and meat
with the money that comes from ignoring the heat?
and what do senators buy d'you suppose
with the cash that they get for denying the snows?
and what will they tell the kids of their kids
about all their didn'ts when the world knew the dids?

when the survivors who want to spit on their graves
can't find them beneath the oil-slicked waves
and the ice that stored the earth's liquid blood
surrenders itself and revels in flood
when the glaciers are gone
and the atolls submerged
and the reefs and the beaches
are finally merged. . .

(and i cry for the loss of the raw and the wild
and the state of the world that we'll leave for my child)

what will oilmen and senators do at the end
with all of the wealth they want to defend?
and who will rejoice in the sale of his soul
for a gallon of gas or a bucket of coal?

(these are questions i asked as the grizzly bears died
as the trout gasped for breath and yellowstone fried)