

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/2

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Among birds in the water

I am very still

Holding only my face above the milky water
I try and become another bobbing head
dipping to fish
and to drink

A white swan submerges his long neck at shoulder length
while several green-headed drakes funnel water
through their beaks;
they present an un-terrestrial green
and I grasp for expressions of
whom I believe they are

Then the brown ducks preen their purple speculum
and my concentration is broken

Will my curiosity carry them off?

My focus fortunately does return,
it coheres around individual acts of drinking and feeding
the undulation of dozens of gullets raised
sometimes synchronously
in groups of arch-backed beaks

I almost do believe that my heart for now has stopped beating
because I feel no inner ear thrum
moving through my nasal chasms

That is until I dip below the water
to listen for the pedaling of wide webbed feet-
my blood is nearly drowned

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I haven't their patient design-

Still, I must marvel at how far I have come,
from that nearing-sleep vision of silent communion
with those very fowl that fly in their light whining whistle
whenever I approach.

There is a cormorant standing on a buoy
out in the harbor;
she dives for fish and is gone
some minutes

I remember myself saying how
I must watch her closely

I pick up my binoculars
and seeing almost into the past
I catch her raise a fish
toward the sky and swallow it
in one sweeping arc.

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Leaves: A Lament

I wait to become my leaves and conceal these long and eager
branches. If only they were visible now, right at that moment

Just after they have flowered, when a full winter's work has
become light and sheer, collecting water in tiny crystalline droplets.

Then I would be spared the humiliation of being watched so
closely as I work at making the display that one day will litter

The yard. Each afternoon I am out on a limb with no visible plan or
tangible tools to reveal my grand design; this work is like fastening

A ladder up to the sky with that last step invisible in a cloud; this
is like the price the novice picker pays for stepping off too quickly to

Grasp the canopied fruit. Yes, it is undignified to dream when the
world at your feet has gone clearly to seed and the grass has fled,

What for the mud. We are in the wrong season for this work; the
inspectors are inspecting our bones for sap; that sweet, moving spectacle

Properly reserved for others who dream, not a display for hard-look
eyes trained to capitalize on what will yield. No, it is not seemly to be

Seen gazing ever higher up and out into space, in front of houses tied
down to stone foundations, their tenants watching anxiously for signs

Of age –this is the face of things now. Sun and roots and water sluicing
through, what could a dream be here but an entr'acte; a few whispered

Measures of music heard between a stilled hammer and dropped saw.
Right then, quickly as a cloudburst, every one of my remaining limbs

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Will make savory the rain, drawing chutes up high towards that place
where my impulse is clicking like the sap sucker. I am dug in, still trying

To tie my long and eager branches to the waving spectacle that should
guide the onlooker off and away into beauty.

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Iris

I have grown tall with the grass but learned
how it goes to seed in the cold, late year rain.

When I am left all alone I stand tall in the
mud and up through snow; my diligence and

Duty, my patience is not for any idea, it is instinct:
I am waiting for iris. She will come again and touch

My roots when the river resumes its rush, a day
after the snow has fully melted through moist air

Bright and green. Again the wind will breath
and the Sun's arch eye will unfurl my new

Flying promises. It is a new season and I have raised
them up under my skin, in a place I always keep green;

Where my knuckles teach those tender cotyledons
how to breathe and when to wake. Iris has shown me

How I might do this right, turning light into nurture,
and availing myself of rain to wash the past away.