

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/4

David Tagnani
A Drought Abates

When the first wind blew near the end of September
I realized then it had not blown all summer
Hot and still, the dust lay serenely on the road
stirred only by some sporadic living thing
in transient triumph over its fat lethargy
feeble insolence under the oppressive sun
Skin cracked as earth cracked
Nothing left to give
Nothing but an abiding impotence
and the withering waiting

The ash aphids glistened in the low sun like snow
Still and sleepy in their buoyancy
but when the respiration resumed upon a solstice evening
the breeze shouldering its way amongst them
spinning them in eddies and shoving them awake
the weakest leaves falling
ponderosa needles raining
the first hair-raising
it was a breath choked with the musky smoke of distant wildfire
turning sunsets into blood baths
and dusking the noon
But the flaring fires and their smoldering protests
could do nothing to hide the chill news
carried on the wind

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/4

The Nature of Craft

If I am to float something
on the endless pool
neither contrived skiff nor gilded yacht will I
but a twig frail and thin
as a pen
or this line
and float it will
a small thing perhaps
but for that an unabridged integrity
will keep it afloat
no seams to leak nor joints to split
until it sinks below the surface
from the weight of its own decay
rather than the failure of human craft.

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/4

Bitterroot Divide

The longshadow lightdance on the last heather meadow
The bee-glade buzzing with unmindful delight
A mother-mammal nuzzling her young in safeness
Our bootfalls beating a stomping syncopation
The moonglow snowfields scenting the dusk
The meltwater pulsing in gravitational lust
The lichen-rock trinity bleeding together

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/4

Predator and Prey

Out walking in the dripping woods one day
I walk a distance further than I meant
to watch a smoky little dipper dare
the milky torrent pouring seaward, sent
upstream before my progress on the trail.
He sinks below the tumult to fill a void
and flies to ensure the void in another.
I must have watched the bird too close, for now
two skittish eyes, then four then ten and twenty
pierce through the gloaming green understory
at me, suddenly an elk herd's banshee
come to haunt the soggy cedar by the sea.
All is still but nerves that twitch and tense,
eyes unblinking, muscles taut and ready
as distant cadenced waves concuss the earth.
I stand in wonder: Why the stillness? Why
do they remain? Then I see – a shade
of brown between us, calves, three or four,
quiescent on the shrinking lawn of our world.
Then, when a decision has been reached,
they do arrange in military formation,
all abreast and marching for the battle.
The distance kept between us heaves like the sea.
They push me back until they reach their young,
rousing them with nudges of their muzzles.
Returned again to the safety of the whole,
they look back as they retreat, devoured
by the mossy depths of dusky jade amidst
the ancient columns of the land.

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/4

The Water Cycle

When the buds crack open in spring
it is as much a breaking
as a new beginning
The snow is melting
The water is going
Soon the parched earth
will crack for its dearth