

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

Cracker crumbs in the bed, rhinestones

by Amy Wright

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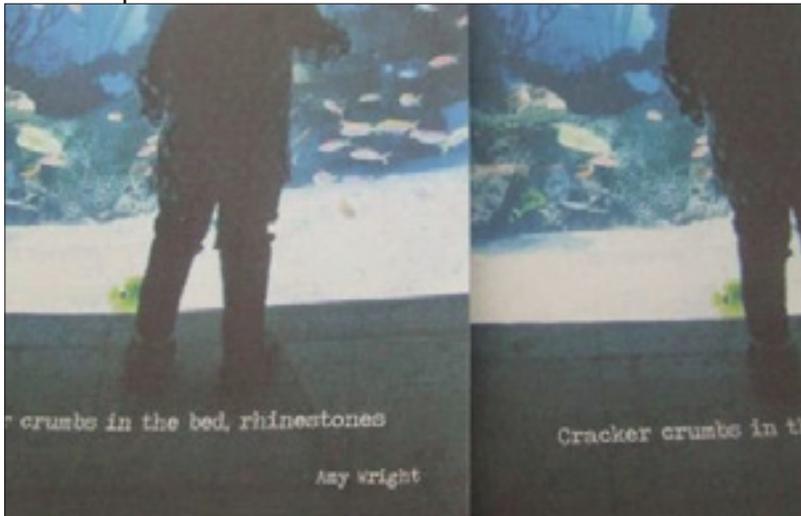
Dancing Girl Press

Chicago, Illinois

Chapbook, softbound, \$7

<http://dulcetshop.ecrater.com/p/19623561/cracker-crumbs-in-the-bed-rhinestones>.

Review by Tom Daley



In Amy Wright's chapbook, *Cracker crumbs in the bed, rhinestones*, the stereotype of the redneck as connoisseur of the tawdry is simultaneously elaborated and exploded. Wright, who seems to be rooting through direct observation as much as legend, manages to mold grand metaphors out of knock-offs, close-outs, seconds, and Dollar Store stock clearances as she relishes this particularly peculiar American phenomenon.

Mocking the feudal-derived hierarchies of our European heritage, the backwoods yeoman and yeowoman are elevated to "Barons of Cascade dish detergent and empires / of shoe shine." With affectionate and winking attention to detail, Wright imagines these nobles as contriving their thrifty etiquette, their hopeful couture, and their shambling fashion statements out of the material possibilities afforded by the minimum wage. They

*hoard their stings & sediment,
wind neon carnival necklaces over gear shifts,
propose by twining Christmas tree tinsel
around a lover's finger.*

Flirting with cultural clichés about a particular class of people makes for a risky project, especially in poetry, but Wright probes the pigeonhole, plucks its feathers, and scoops its guano with a brave and unabashed delight. The chutzpah sometimes takes one's breath away, as in this litany of fun-poking at the beleaguered cracker's predilections:

*Crackers render the fat of the beloved
into Crisco, pour their hearts into
the great collaborative dumbwaiter,*

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*console themselves with peppermint toddies
& Hershey's syrup.*

Yet there is honor in Grand Ole Opryland, as testified to by an elevation of "ordinary" into something almost sacral. These priests and priestesses of Cheez Whiz "dream in third person, / fast after services in backwoods churches / until nothing is ordinary or all things are." "Ordinary" gives many meanings in its ecclesiastical context: An ordinary is a member of the clergy capable of judging matters of spiritual significance; it is the correct form that a religious service takes; and it is, in the Roman Catholic Church, "the parts of the daily Mass that do not change from day to day" (Encarta World English Dictionary). The word "ordinary" derives from "order," and the famous handiness of the average cracker receives its due when you follow the etymological trail. "Order" derives from Latin ordinem, "originally 'a row of threads in a loom,' from Italic root *ord- 'to arrange, arrangement' (source of ordiri 'to begin to weave;' compare primordial), of unknown origin" (Online Etymological Dictionary).

Lampooned as ignorant and buffoonesque in the general culture, the cracker ultimately wins a recognition of his or her intelligence from Wright when we hear that they "plunge giddy into the elemental clamor knowing / the remains will be transparent & the guards ill-timed."