

Wilderness House Literary Review 14/1

Peaches Goes It Alone by Frederick Seidel.
\$24.00.

Review By Ed Meek

Frederick Seidel is now in his eighties so he can't be an infant terrible anymore but he still has the ability of shock, delight and offend. He is a wit and a skillful one. He is urbane and well-read. He is sometimes a little silly and his use of easy rhymes can be annoying but he isn't afraid to tackle big issues. He is in the group of those poets who, as Frost said, want to be understood. That is, he is accessible. From "November 9, 2016" (you remember what happened that November):



*I'll use a cleaver to cut my hair.
I'll wear asparagus for underwear.
I took the elevator to the thirteenth floor
To find the fiends.
They opened the door.*

A couple of stanzas later:

*My country, 'twas of thee.
Sweet land of one, two, three
JUMP
Into the swamp...*

Trump ran on cleaning up the swamp. That's kind of like a pathological liar promising to tell it like it is. Oh, wait... So, Seidel is not afraid to take on Trump and those enigmatic followers of his. He really is not afraid to write about anything. He seems to enjoy the role of provocateur. Here is the beginning of "Abusers":

*Every woman who wants to be spanked should be
Spanked for wanting to be.
It's for excitement and as punishment for her ascent.
She should be put on a pedestal so you can look up to her*

*From below and get outstanding news and views
From beneath and see what you want to see.
Look at her clean machine, her beautiful guillotine!*

A few lines down:

*I'm interested only in the power of their flesh.
I turn the fire hose on them when they protest.*

Seidel is happy to dive into the #metoo movement in a way that is at once supportive and offensive. He appears to be alluding to the civil rights movement and making fun of the #metoo movement in comparison, but doesn't that make light of the civil rights protests? He's also not afraid to

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confess his own transgressions. This might be the time to note that one of the roles of art and comedy is to go after taboos. Our current era provides plenty of material to work with including the oppressive aspects of political correctness, trigger words and personal pronouns of choice. Is there anything more ridiculous than someone choosing z's own pronoun? Well, maybe professors who kowtow to students who choose their own pronouns. Seidel's poem ends surprisingly with:

*The world is nearing war.
The homeless clog the streets.*

It certainly does feel that way, doesn't it? With our trade wars and our corruption and conspiracies and the rise of the strong men! Or is he just talking about the war between men and women?

Most often though, Seidel is self-deprecating and funny: "I had a girlfriend who dumped me for a better job—which, frankly, made me laugh so hard I started to sob." He writes poems to Athena and to Aphrodite. He quotes Sappho in Greek. He knows French. Here is another poem about "Trump":

*I look past the big face of my computer
At what was once New York
Outside my window
And now is a plateau
Of smiling bra-less
Breasts of the contestants.
It's time to wake
From this cryrogenic sleep
In which I've been preserved, and vote.*

*The endlessness of America ends.
And what an ending.*

A few lines later:

*I turn the TV off
Which comes back on
All on its own.
It's all about climate change
And fracking girls.
And every bidet is transgender
Or ought to be.
Trans is the time of day.
Many people these days are Trump or trans or gay.*

*On Emotion Avenue in Queens—
Near Trouble Street—
Cops on horseback clatter
In their yellow slickers
through the springtime drizzle
Toward Black Lives Matter.
White Working class
Clouds of tear gas
Cloud emotion.*

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You can see how Seidel got into trouble offending various groups. He has had prizes taken away. He's been accused of being anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic. Jesse Smollet will accuse him of being anti-gay. Andrea Dworkin would call him anti-women. Or you could just call him funny. His lines are often surprising, his word choice imaginative. In any case, he provides an artist's perspective. He combines wit and non-sequiturs a la John Ashbury with a taste of the erudition of A.E. Stallings and his poems are about something. They have content. In the age of truthiness, Seidel is a welcome voice.