

Wilderness House Literary Review 17/2

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Where Do the Bees Go?

1.

It's cold, so cold, a wet cold, and the bees
have disappeared into their thin-walled

huts, built out there in the dark somewhere.
They try to sleep in the cold rain, wake,

try sleep again, huddled together in a
bristled crush, breathe as one. Their wing-

vibrations generate a feeble green light,
a light that guides the memories of

the dead back to their source (the image of
a house on fire, eyes glistening in the dark,

a few words like yellowfoot chanterelles
rising from decayed wood or bone).

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2.

When it's this cold and wet, I stand in
the middle of the room, head-bowed, and

feel the cold as punishment, something
deserved from before birth, and notice

there has always been a slight tremor
beneath my skin, no matter the season.

The bees know why I've always been
cold. Grateful to them, I wonder what I

can leave outside my door tonight that will
let them know I'm thinking of them, that I

believe their dim winter light might help
some part of me find it's way back home.

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Starry Night Over the Rhone

(by Vincent Van Gogh)

Harsh yellow gaslight sent gold ribbons across the Rhone.

I followed those ribbons up into Ursa Major's seven

aquamarine-soft haloes: seeing as spinning out every-
where threads of light. Look: the hands, green stars.

Look: the heart, gold gas. I was eight and I heard him
say: *night is richer in color than the day*. I was eight, and

for one second, maybe two, I knew someone else who
sensed night in the same way. And I reached up, almost

touched the thick paint, and for one second, maybe two,
my muscles were freed from fear, could articulate how

dark and light feed, and are fed. I stood on my toes and
made starlit ripples in the air, mimicked the feedback

loop between my finger bones and distant star-gas threads.
And I saw the couple, almost in shadow, maybe an after-

thought, maybe in love, at the bottom of the painting,
walking back to their hotel, to get out from under that

intense mirror of their hearts, hands, eyes. And I knew,
for one second, maybe two, that there is no escape, no

matter what we do. Is this memory true? *Night is richer
in color than the day*.

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I open the small charred

1.

Rain all night. Mist dissolves the mountains.
I open the small, charred metal box you sent,

burnt 40 years ago in the house fire, and smell
that smell, so familiar, one that's always with me,

the smell of all-things-burning-at-once, mix of
meat executed at the stake and toxic paint-shrieks

in a vat of melted plastic, that still clings to things
inside the box – pieces of a lost life, one I tried to

erase from memory, because I could not contain
the loneliness we all shared inside that house.

2.

The mountains emerge from nothing, as if they
were never gone. We never did recover from that

fire, did we? No one ever said it was something
we needed to recover from. *It happens all the time.*

Move on. Your life is ahead of you. What does
recover even mean? A return to a previous state.

I never wanted to make that return. The smell
clings to an old cartoon a child made to make

someone laugh. Anyone. Smoke-residue was
on that child's fingers long before the fire...

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3.

Outside, the oak is fire; amber, brick and blood
red. The brown along each leaf-edge is a glorious

life-shout inside a masque for death, while the
world all around this town will not recover from

last year's fires, or next year's fires (slowly
closing in). I take in a deep breath of that distant

burning, close the lid, knowing where I can find
it anytime, inside this small charred box, that I've

given the impossible task of holding everything
that cannot be contained.

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Self-Portrait: Rembrandt (National Gallery, London)

1.

Old Man Rembrandt's face looked into mine. In this painting he is perpetually 63, a year from death. I was 51, death close

from a recent funeral. What did he see? The ones who stopped in front of the painting and lingered were all older, their faces

lined, slack, beginning that slow decline, like mine; the skin's longing for earth.

2.

Who am I? It used to be a question of failure. *How can you not know...at your age?* We watched each other for an hour.

His face, his eyes, told the story of falling, how light falls, is revealed by the shadow of deep furrows, thick folds. *Who am*

I? Did he answer that question for himself when he stared back into his own eyes?

3.

Staring into his face, I felt my own, how parts were frozen by fear, fear of everything moving around me, fear of things

that happened long ago, the muscles around my eyes retreating, wincing, waiting for the blow; and felt parts that were more

relaxed, reaching out, listening, curious, wondering *Where is the end of this thing called I?*

4.

On the morning of that death, there was a crow on a bridge rail. A few black feathers lifted and fell in the wind. *Who am*

I? Old Man Rembrandt stared into me, into himself. The crow's call turned the answer into the question's echo: *Who am I?*

Light falls. Darkness reveals light that is always falling. Down the hall, in another gallery, someone laughed.