

REVIEW: WILD PLACE Mindy Kronenberg

Wild Place: Poems

Erica Goss

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THE "WILD PLACE" of Erica Goss's poems EVOKES the wonder and fragility of both the wilderness and the untamed reaches of human experience. Each poem is celebratory and cautionary, a lyrical parable of personal and universal revelation.

Goss's imagery and use of personification is often exhilarating. In "The Redwoods," the majestic trees undergo extraordinary transformation: "They suck fog/like whales sift krill;../... On windy nights they sing/of darkness... /The forest exhales/through trunks in/rows like baleen..." In "The Wind," the natural force is a reminder of what can come unexpectedly, what shifts and shuffles the familiar: "doors tilt on their hinges/and crumpled lists/scuttle sideways/across the floor."

There are poems about people that explore the tactile, corporeal world with startling effect. A child's fingers affectionately wave in a greeting, "opening/and closing like pink fronds/of a sea anemone" in "New Colors." "The Messenger," chronicles sightings over time of a deformed girl who, as a baby, had "arms ending/in stumps like scoops/of

vanilla ice cream" that became, in childhood, "like blunt couplets/like two short puzzles..."

In a transformative moment for both poet and reader, the girl, grown up, is seen walking in the street:

*A tall boy's arm wrapped
around her shoulders
his palm cupping the stump
that swung by her side like a fin
the sleeves of her dress
two wings of gauze.*

Sensuality and mortality are treated with equal eloquence and a synesthetic quality. In "Seduction of the Queen Bee," the speaker describes her lover's stealth-like foreplay: "The smoke of /his breath stuns me:/pores open// all over my body. He hides his hands/ but he is gentle .../ I can't say what happens next./Sweetness rises from me." In the aforementioned "New Colors," love is roused from a sleepy gesture, and she is transformed: "blankets fell/ from my hips/as I rose/in startling new// colors like desert after/rain ..."

The temporal quality of the natural world intertwines with the limbo of sickness and longing for the departed. In "Hours," a period of illness brings one out of life's context but into another portal with "others, people/ you no/ longer recognize// whose mouths/form mysterious syllables." The isolation creates a connection to the lives of insects, the senses magnified as the details of domestic life diminish:

No one
but you hears
Logs rotting in the

forest or the whisper
of earth
passing through the

body of a worm.

“Answer the Phone,” keeps a dream-like life-
line open to the deceased, whose methods of
contact have changed over time:

Before telephones the dead sent letters
sheets of tissues so thin

a hand passed through them like
smoke.

They dried the tongue like warm red
wine,

glittered our dreams into fragments.

How do the messages between us start and
stop, and what news goes unshared? “We
forgot what we needed to tell the dead/as we
rush too quickly from sleep.”

In Goss’s world, “Snow” “is a way/to
atonement,” a consistent force whose “pure
tunnels/concede their light/accepting the
press of foot, paw,/hoof and claw,” and the
act of feeding humming birds rouses an ado-
lescent wish to see boys tumble and vie for
her affection. In “This is a Wild Place,” she
states “the world is stitched together/from the

loosest of tissues—even/concrete, webbed//
with faint cracks/leaves nooks/for the small-
est seeds.” Goss reminds us, in details great
and small, that however delicate the balance
of nature and nurture, life—like love—finds
a way.