AUGUST 25, 2019

Graceful & gripping: "Fieldnotes on Ordinary Love"

Fieldnotes on Ordinary Love (Copper Canyon Press, 2019) is, in my opinion, *very* underappreciated. It's two months old and I've not seen a single gushing post, share, or write-up on it, which is a damn shame, as it's easily in my poetry top five for 2019. Keith S. Wilson's debut is graceful and gripping, descending into territory of Greek myths, racial tumult, and birds. The highest praise I can offer for *Fieldnotes* is that I want to write like Keith after reading it.

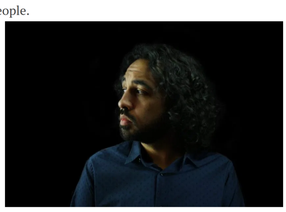
I finished this collection at the beginning of last week and have been revisiting a few specific images from these pages, including this powerful observation in "Augury": "I remember being told I should never touch / a baby bird in its nest. That afterward, // the mother would rather let her children starve. / It isn't true. But how many eggs // has the fantasy kept safe, / how many feathers made elegant, my hands clean and far away / to fold snowflakes or cranes?" Keith's poems unearth small, succulent truths and set them rolling inside my heart.

This collection hovers over big questions like "what is the rest of me but a daydream / of angles?" and "how can black be // the absence / of all color?" In "God Particle," Keith examines the molecular importance of everything, how we're all "built [on] a hearth", whether we're rabbits or galaxies. In the spiritually-moving "Undine by the Drowned Cross," he writes of the want that an outside observer might feel when thinking of the Bible or Christianity: "I try / to catch meaning in my mouth…" Yet the piece doesn't travel the familar path of 'finding Jesus':

> *Rise. Please.*
> *I cannot read your Word, I've only in passing*
> *heard of*
> *salvation…*
> *Don't give me that. Instead, I beg:*
> *please. Please.*
> *Let my soul be.*

Goddamn. What a poem.

In "I Find Myself Defending Pigeons," Keith pens a love letter to these oft-dismissed friends: "How all the / world is here with them in hate, since they are rats / adorned with angel wings, and the children down / the street are free to chase their drag… / I love the pigeons' / shoulders, tongues, and wedding nights… / I love the pigeons, the revolution of wheel to sky." It takes a special person to write *actually* poetic nature poems, and Keith does it with joy and excellence; pigeons return in other poems to add emotion, advice, and warning. A pigeon-lover myself, I thrill to see Keith handling the overlooked birds with a tenderness and reverence often withheld from animals, plants, and even other people.



I often can't choose a single favorite poem in five-star collections, but "Mob" stands out for its absolute mastery of content and lyric and "Heliocentric" made me cry. "Mob" is a praise song for folks of color, weaving the longing for a different reality where fear of violence is nonexistent into a retelling of the Icarus legend, replacing the hero with a flock, a congregation, of people of color, of crows, of canaries. "I want to widen the eyes of God… // Icarus leapt. We will fly, be black together in the sun."

"Heliocentric" is a glowing love and love-lost poem, the final piece in the book. Without ruining the magic of the piece because really, everyone should read this fucking book, I'd like to highlight Keith's linguistic prowess: "Who could love you / like this? Who else will sew you in the stars? // Who better knows your gravity and goes / otherwise, to catastrophe? // I've schemed and promised / to bring you back a ring // from Saturn."

I wholeheartedly recommend picking up this collection. You'll smile and ache and admire Keith's creative use of language. You'll want to write, and you'll want to reread it. *Fieldnotes on Ordinary Love* is available from Copper Canyon Press or your local (indie first!) bookseller for $16 or from your local library for free.

A special thank you to Laura at Copper Canyon Press for the review copy. My apologies to Keith for the formatting not carrying over for the excerpt from "Undine by the Drowned Cross."

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