

Friday of the First Week of Advent

The Paris review is an American quarterly focused on contemporary writers and the literature that they create. I am not a literary scholar but I enjoy reading about those who are and sometimes reading what they write.

The Paris Review like most journals these days has a daily, weekly, or monthly online presence and in this early December appearance comes a four part column/essay by Nina Mac Laughlin a young Boston based writer/journalist turned carpenter and you can learn about that should you care to in her book, Nail Head.

She has contributed a series of similar columns to the Paris Review all reflections on the sky and in these Winter Solstice reflections, she writes of our sky now in these days in this year and I share some of her words (please note I have copied sentences and paragraphs and offer them not in the exact context that she wrote them. I think all of her columns in the Paris Review can be read for free, if you have further interest contact me and I will help you find them).

Inhale the Darkness

“...Last day of November and the dark this year is darker. We’re moving into winter. Henri Bosco describes the moment in his fevered novel *Malicroix*:
It was already the end of November ... a time of extreme balance between the seasons, a miraculous moment when the world was poised on pure ridge. From there it seemed to cast a glance back at the aging autumn, still misty with its wild moods, to contemplate deadly winter from afar.

We’ll contemplate this deadly winter from right close up, we’re already almost in it.

...Dark makes its annual inhale of light. It seems night all the time now, and it’ll keep getting nighter as we spin toward the solstice on December twenty-first. If you follow the meteorological calendar, tomorrow, December one, is the first day of winter. If you follow the astrological calendar, calibrated by the position of the sun, winter begins at eight thirty in the morning on December twenty-first, when the earth’s northern hemisphere is tilted farthest away from the sun, when we’re delivered the longest night of the year. These are lampposts to string your lights around, ways of managing your time, systems to agree and believe in. There are other winter signals.

...What's the start of the season for you? Is it: the first time you see your breath; the first potato-chip crisp of ice on a puddle; the first snow; tinsel; Menorah; mistletoe; mug of hot chocolate; when the river freezes; when you hear a Christmas carol in CVS; see a wreath on a neighbor's door; a candy cane; a persimmon; a pomegranate; eggnog in the dairy aisle; scarf around your throat; a certain pair of socks; the changed quality of blaze in sunset sky? Is it a creeping spider of malaise? A vague and frightening fuzz-edged feeling of hopelessness when the sun starts to sink too soon, a bottom giving way beneath you? A shadow at the back of the brain that, if you find yourself in too quiet a moment, gives an electric sizzle of static you can almost hear? A snarled black nest of fear in your chest and the upped urge to have another drink? The first fire? The first frost?"

...The gap this year feels wider, the fear pulsing at a different frequency. Loss has been the dominant condition for months now. "In a world of facts, death is merely one more fact," writes the poet Octavio Paz. And we lump it in with the rest. The full moon in December is the Long Nights Moon; strings of incandescent mini lights strung around a porch rail use 408 watts of energy; the snow-white sap of the milkweed pod is toxic to most creatures, but not to monarch butterflies; you, I, they, brothers, sisters, parents, pals, children, strangers, loves, God bless us every one, one day all of us will not be anymore. One more fact in a world of facts. Turn around while I press it down between the cushions here. What's death in a world of stories? Is it merely one more story? Maybe in a world of stories, there's a door that leads to the possibility of a different ending. Maybe in a world of stories, death is infinite potential, just another means of moving on. And on we go, absorbed into the wet, warm belly of eternity, back here as a robin or a wren, a pelvic bone in someone else's skeleton, riding the underside of a cloud. No matter what, it's scary, yes?"

Advent 2020 begins shadowed by fear, can our celebration of Christmas 2020 be an antidote to the fear of the darkness?

Remember, our ancestors survived worse, so can we!