

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Stephanie Barbé Hammer: Three Poems

Stephanie Barbé Hammer · Wednesday, September 11th, 2019

War (Larchmont Village, Los Angeles)

There's a war here on the two
 Fences— my neighbor's and mine — between the squirrels and
 The birds.
 It's been going on for days.
 The two squirrels — one big one little
 Mount an attack on a tree — why?
 No idea. There's some weird fruit maybe
 Or maybe it's existential — *the tree is THERE*
And therefore we must attack it and the bird —
 What kind? No idea, I am a city person and this
 Is a city poem so get off my back about sub-species
 And breeds — so anyhow the bird flies after them
 Attacking and flapping and pecking til they both
 Run back across the fences and hide under the part
 Of the roof that is higher, and so makes a little
 Bomb shelter for them. I feel sorry for the squirrels at
 First but they recover from the pecking and they crawl
 Back along the fence to attack the tree again. They
 Look like soldiers. They *are* soldiers on a mission
 And I wonder if there's any way out of this — attacks and counter
 Attacks and the wounded licking their tails under buildings.
 I wonder if my neighbor notices. Probably not.
 Since his wife left him, he isn't home much. I see him
 At the coffee shop with other neighbors whom I
 Recognize but don't know personally. I never
 Saw the neighbor and his wife fighting, but one time I heard her
 Orgasming alone with the windows open. He
 Had gone to work. Just her car in the garage.
 It sounded happy. She was glad I think to finally
 Have a moment's
 Peace.

*

Neighbors, unseen and seen (Atwater Village, Los Angeles)

At our Airbnb I listen to our newly arrived next door neighbors
They got in late last night slamming the door and talking.

He sounds foreign, his voice lilts masculine
She sounds softer, laughing — appreciative?

Or perhaps just resigned. And then the hard steps
The pounding feet of the child or children; they/s/he leap/s

5 times on the wood floor. The chairs scrape. Then the house goes silent.
It's quiet now. This makes me think they can't be American. They are too aware

Of others, too mindful of space and sound. But then I could
Be wrong. I wonder how we sound to them. Do our voices ring old?

Or suburban? Funny how when I lived in a city, neighbors drove
Me crazy. Now, I long for others — the noisier the better. Yesterday I walked

On a street and looked up at the sky crisscrossed by telephone poles and wires
I stared at all those crackling connections while a dour girl in pj's came out and emptied the trash.

*

A Los Angeles argument about Washington State

we are fighting about the benefits of
country living
outside on the patio of this cafe
on a big street in Hollywood.
you are trying to speak softly because we
are surrounded by hipsters with dogs
and cellphones. you talk about the values of rural quiet, while
a garbage truck groans, screeches, slams down cans
and two French guys behind me talk in their language
in loud voices that I understand exactly
from the time I lived in Montpellier and eavesdropped
all the time from loneliness because you were in
New York practicing
law.
they say: "this bullshit of asking how are
you? and the answer always 'fine don't worry'
but you should worry I am so worried."
and you say, "I am so worried people can hear us" and I say
"no one is f-ing listening. no one cares
because we are old and we aren't actors and that's
the beauty of it. we can say anything."
one hipster pats another hipster's dog
and the French guys are still talking about

being worried. and you say “you’re
right!”
and you laugh
because
we can shout under this complete
cone of silence while the garbage truck
roars.

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