

SERENADE IN A KANSAS WIND

Malcolm Childers

Stand
just here,
in such a way
that the sweeping
copper lines converge--
an ever-shrinking
prophetic mirage
in both directions
toward the horizon.

Now
close your eyes
and lean your head back,
so that the sun can wash
your salty brow.

In the amber half light
behind your lids,
your thoughts will focus
on what your mind can see
and
something of the middle ground--
what it means to be in this place
where East becomes West--
will reach out
and touch you.

From the early
supple greens of spring,
this great grass ocean
begins to spill,
flow,
and flower in the wind.
During those living months,
birds and insects
dance and sing--
a primal buzzing,
twittering floor show
of sex,

predation,
and passing.

Like
a grand expeditionary force,
they spread a thousand miles north
from here
into Manitoba.

Then drying,
their life
begins to fall back
like a defeated army
clad in the the hissing
brittle yellow of autumn.
It retreats
a thousand miles
south from here
into Tamaulipas.

Maybe you can sense
there used to be
more.

Perhaps
you can just hear
the American Serengeti
that was.

The endless brown armadas
of large animals
plying the grass ocean,
the indigenous nomads
who moved with them,
who lived from them,
who knew great risk
and even greater freedom,
who danced and sang
their primal invocations
of sex,

predation,
and passing.

Perhaps
you can just hear
what it was like
before these wires
crossed the sky,
before the time
of white men,
before everything changed
to conform
to their European
God-given mandate
to subdue
and possess the earth.

Still
sometimes,
in the thin winter light,
long after the vacationers
have hurried through
without seeing,
without caring,
as if they had never been;
and only an occasional semi
reads the icy concrete pages
as it passes indifferently
from Dodge to Wichita,
the wires themselves
will sing.
And the sound of it.

How to describe
that sound.

It is
as if all
that has passed here in time
where we stand
listening
comes again
as a chorus of the ages.

Within
the penetrating hum
and breathy moan of it,
are the lowing of wild herds,
the intimate passion and birth cries
of native women,
the ceremonial chants
of their men,
the screech of wheeling hawks,
the last prayers of wounded settlers and
dying braves,
the raging curses of betrayal,
the brass of victory bands,
the hammering of builders,
the buzzing of back-room dealers,
the twittering of evening ladies,
the rhythmic songs of workmen,
the whistles and calls of cowboys,
the throaty din of tractors,
the quiet songs of farm wives,
and the lonely rumble
of distant trains passing through at
twilight.

Within the soft
and strident passages
of that longing sound
there are melodies
of a subtle and oceanic nature.
Within those lost chords
are intervals
that might
change the world
if we only could hear them.
If we only knew them.
But then
it's only you and I listening,
and the quite serenade rings
endlessly on
as if no one
will ever
answer the phone.