

Down by the Eno, Down by the Haw: A Wonder Almanac

Thorpe Moeckel

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Thorpe Moeckel's essay collection *Down by the Eno, Down by the Haw* captures the beauty of the land near two rivers.

The naturalist's month-by-month account of the year he lived on the watershed of two North Carolina rivers, the Eno and Haw, is a needed invitation to regard nature with new eyes and be transformed by it. Its personal, in-the-moment viewpoints make it feel possible to walk into the woods and leave the fray behind.

With their specific sense of place, the essays embrace the unique landscape and geography of the Inner Banks, but they also have the more universal appeal of temperate forests. The book is rich with sensory details: the smell of the forest, the sound of the birds, the feel of the leaves. These are rendered with inventive candor, and the reverence conveyed for the setting is stunning and extends to all things. Honest and poetically blunt, the essays also include "Coon crap, deer crap, fox scat, owl scat."

Insights about nature lead to insights about humanity, as the text shows what nature does to people when they open themselves up to it and slow to its pace. It showcases all that lies hidden within view, elusive understandings, and the surprising graces that nature brings when least expected.

The text brims with similes, precise word choices, and imaginative juxtapositions, and its chapter titles encapsulate the eloquent and varied matter-of-factness of its descriptions, including "February: Wet (Mud Month)," "April: Salamander Dancing," and "November: Roots" and echoing the pithiness and beautiful brevity of their content.

Down by the Eno, Down by the Haw is a poetic collection and a testament to the multifaceted wonders of nature.

MELISSA WUSKE (September / October 2019)

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