



Feasting Wild: In Search of the Last Untamed Food

Gina Rae La Cerva

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Feasting Wild is a fascinating record of ecological travesties committed in the name of pleasing humans' insatiable appetites.

There's an otherworldly sensibility to Gina Rae La Cerva's accounts of the lands, airs, and seas as they used to be: of oceans so teeming with green turtles that they seemed to move; of skies darkened by, and cacophonous with, the beatings of a million pairs of pigeon wings; of forests and fields biodiverse beyond our imagination.

To gather a sense of what's been lost, La Cerva travels the world, feasting upon, and learning about, foods that are now considered rare and desirable. She begins at Noma, where, after a decadent feast, she horrifies the chef by gagging over the smell of wildstuffs fermenting in a jar, and troubles human fetishization of the wild:

[T]he abundance that once existed ... seems so unfathomable it might as well be fiction. We do not understand our own poverty.

The text is both erudite and poetic as it chronicles animals and resources that no longer exist, including herbal knowledge that was subverted by the church. Cellular memory is a factor: in the primeval Biaᳵwieᳵa Forest, home to La Cerva's ancestors, the book celebrates the wood's floor, which "glow[s] with phosphorescence through the darkest nights" because of its many varieties of mushrooms. Even there, though, human impact is apparent: the wildflowers bloom too early, and viruses carried by foxes infect the berries. Elsewhere, a romance in the Congo unfolds against the realities of bushmeat exports and colonization, while domestication is shown to quell appetites only in the short term and not to improve imperiled environments. Even in places that nature has reclaimed, nothing is as it was before.

Feasting Wild is an intelligent, compelling requiem for species and spaces that have been lost; it laments the rapaciousness of human appetites.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (May / June 2020)

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