

Out of the Woods: Seeing Nature in the Everyday

Julia Corbett

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In *Out of the Woods*, Julia Corbett writes about nature and the environment around her with a sense of wonder but also a kind of self-reflective melancholy. She recognizes, for example, that despite seeing and hearing the birds in her own backyard in Salt Lake City, she chooses to enjoy nature by escaping to the nearby Wasatch Mountains. In the mountains, she writes, “the ‘wild’ nature ... seems free of contamination by human desires and actions.”

This dilemma sets the tone for many of her insightful, often poignant essays. About recycling: Corbett sees the preferability of aluminum, better because of its close connection with the earth through bauxite, and the dangers of plastic, which recycles poorly, as evidenced by the fact that five of the seven recycling numbers stamped on plastics “are rarely or never able to be recycled.” She agonizes over a local retailer who keeps the doors to his establishment open to welcome customers; his lack of energy consciousness “models this wasteful behavior for others.” Even when it comes to maintaining the grass in her yard, she is conflicted; instead of following the lead of her neighbors with their neatly manicured lawns, Corbett cultivates a “Freedom Lawn” which “encourages a hardy polyculture where all kinds of plants grow.”

Throughout this well-crafted, contemplative collection, Corbett writes eloquently about the environmental conundrums she faces in the hope that they will impact the sensibilities of others. With some amount of angst, she observes, “It is hard for an individual living within our dominant energy system to question and disrupt the system itself; it is far larger than the energy; it is the entire system and the consumer culture that energy produces.”

Corbett’s complex relationship with the environment comes across as genuine and authentic. Her provocative, timely message suggests we are not “out of the woods” quite yet.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (September/October 2018)

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