FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Literary Collections

Sex and the River Styx
Edward Hoagland
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Literature is one of the few places left for savoring the gifts of maturity; in this vein, the musings and conclusions of Edward Hoagland, long-time essayist, must not be missed. Hoagland has traveled widely—the essays in this book take the reader to Africa, Asia, and the American West—but he is also the kind of observer who dives deep into a moment, observing in minute and ecstatic detail the life around him.

For Hoagland, now nearly eighty, aging "is not a serene occupation." In this collection he reflects on his life and loves, principal among them his great love for nature, and his perspective on the technological, environmental, and human problems the world faces. His vision is not optimistic: he anticipates "the widespread death of nature, the approaching holocaust of famines, while Westerners retreat in veiled panic into what they prefer to regard as the realer world of cyberspace." He's frank about his own mortality: he'd rather not be around for the world's demise, but he's not without humor either. When death comes, "The politics will be less rancid, my dentistry at an end, and the TV off."

The ecstasy that Hoagland observes in nature is here in large measure, in both the delightful content of his observations, and the rich, multi-layered, half-wild quality of his prose. While he claims to be tired of elegy, these essays are nothing if not finely wrought examples that linger on the beauty of the beloved. Hoagland himself, happy, modest, and affectionate, is a companionable guide, and his worries are humanely articulated. Nature is a source of such joy and empathy, he notes, that surely humans are meant to be part of a larger community. When birds "arrow overhead…part of us exults, much as marbling of a moonlit sky or the scent of cedar trees uplifts our mood. This wider span of responsiveness indicates affinities we haven't catalogued." His honest and sympathetic voice rambles over politics, too, in a remarkable essay on "The American Dissident," and, as the collection's title indicates, sex and death.

Accomplished and prolific—with over twenty books to his name—Hoagland provides a

view both historical and wise. This book will be a fitting addition to any public or private collection of his work, or a good place to start reading him. His considered and considerable gifts are an important facet of American thought, poised as we are on the verge of further loss.

Teresa Scollon