

The Trespasser

Edra Ziesk

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When Sebastian Bryant arrives at the end of a winding road in the mountains of Kentucky looking for the ideal photograph, Hesketh Day asks him if he has come to “show everybody how sorry it is.” The encounter highlights the tension between rural and urban, local and tourist, which so often characterizes representations of insular Appalachian communities. But Bryant, who wants to photograph the Pomfrets in front of their mountain cabin, really wants to capture the beauty, stillness, and humanity of the remote locale.

Although Bryant is deterred from taking his photograph, his project is taken up by the novelist, whose beautifully rendered images of the region merge with the human portrayals of a tiny community of people who are all in different ways in love with and stuck on the iso-lated mountain. Stripped of its coal and lumber, the mountain is both beautiful and sinister: “hollowed out, its solidity gone, held up by nothing by ribby stalactites, its meat picked out so it looked, now, like a carcass with its rib cage bones sucked clean.” Upon the backdrop of this skeletal mountain, Edra Ziesk casts the lives of Hesketh Day, who suffers from dementia and moves psycho-logically between childhood and the present, Mattie Wheeler, who patiently waits for her life to really begin, and Cass and Sylvie Pom-fret, who have a resilient capacity for survival, despite the fact that steady work is simply nonexistent.

Ziesk is also the author of *Acceptable Losses*, *A Cold Spring*, and many short stories. She has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Foundation for the Arts. *The Trespasser*, her third novel, explores what that word means in a place where nobody locks their front doors and where property ownership has already been rendered mean-ingless by the coal and lumber companies that have picked the mountain clean. Hesketh and Mattie are continually on guard, fervently defending their property against photographers, neighbors, and even raccoons. But they trespass in the moral sense evoked in the Lord’s Prayer, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” committing countless sins in their desperation to preserve what they believe is theirs.

Ziesk’s novel moves seamlessly between the different lives brought together by their shared space, making the reader the ul-timate intruder. In doing so, she evokes great sympathy for her characters—trespassed and trespassing alike.

KEYA KRAFT (October 13, 2008)

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