ForeWord Reviews

NATURE

Wild Delicate Seconds: 29 Wildlife Encounters
Charles Finn
Oregon State University Press
978-0-87071-655-3
(Jul 1, 2012)

For those who have lived in a landscape that is shared with wild animals, *Wild Delicate Seconds* will conjure the transcendent moments that occur between wildlife and humans. In a collection of "micro-essays," Charles Finn describes his encounters with wildlife while living in the Pacific Northwestern United States. Although Finn admits to seeking some of them out, most occurred in a "chance encounter," producing a "special quality … a timelessness, a residue of the sacred."

As editor of the *High Desert Journal* and contributor to nature writing periodicals including *Open Spaces*, *Northern Lights*, *Big Sky Journal*, and *High Country News*, Finn has published widely in the genre. But it is his poetic gift that offers access to a reader who has not had his own wild encounter: "In the growing light pewter water reflects pewter sky and I watch how this flower-bird stalks: horror and beauty are at one in the dawn."

Finn's collection, however, is not one of drama; his quiet essays are deliberate and powerful, each one containing that nugget of surprise, such as the gentle quality of a passage both feminine and haunting: "Above the geese the soft colors of the afternoon deepen into a tremendous wound and a gibbous moon is birthed, shadows crawling over the snow to dissolve into the river." His message, though understated, is clear: nature, if observed carefully, is transformative.

While not overly reflective, Finn does philosophize about the human condition and perhaps his own choice to live close to the wilderness: "We are given these days, don't you know, to do with as we will." Occasionally he lapses into the anthropomorphic, saying, " I know my one wish above all others is to spend time with one of these cats, to hold and to pet one, to hear one of them purr." It is Finn's subtlety—while watching a herd of mountain goats on a rocky 9,000-foot slope—that conveys a hint of nihilism: "They crowd onto their narrow shelves, staring out of black button eyes onto their beautiful and indifferent world."

Finn's book should appeal to fans of nature writing and will be a welcome addition to undergraduate courses in that subject, environmental studies, or surveys of literature that include

the traditions of Emerson, Dillard, Thoreau, and Whitman.

Kai White