

Translated by my husband Per Brand:

“All people have a story to tell. The protagonist in Maj-Britt Wiggh’s new novel calls her story Worry 1 and Worry 2 (the first and last section of the book). She worries about the state of the world, the climate, the extinction of species, a yellow-haired president and dangers that people don’t seem to take seriously. And yet her story conveys so much more, cheerful resignation, anger, self-irony, amazement. The novel is a joy to read.

They have moved to the countryside, her and her husband. He engrosses himself in the small world, digging, sowing, taking care of sheep and chickens, baking, pickling; he creates a small paradise just north of Stockholm.

But she cannot hold the wider world away, it presses in on her when she least expects it. Deer droppings remind her of the yellow-haired president’s speech about shithole countries, a blue truck reminds her of terror attacks in the city. Phrases and stories from her reading get mixed in with harvesting. Using a bow saw on recycled wooden planks she reflects that Thoreau only had hand tools when he built his cabin at Walden Pond. She, on the other hand, plans to build a platform high in a massive oak to look at the world from above like Italo Calvin’s tree baron.

It is a multifaceted and entrancing stream of consciousness. The narrative sprawls out over the pages, full of unexpected associations, sharp observations, and sheer poetry. She observes her husband’s calm ambling between shed and barn, but inside her there is funnel leading into the abyss. She hears the voice of Dante describing hell and does not know how to get from there to paradise. Everywhere she sees how the earth is being destroyed, people and animals exploited and suffering.

But there are always those who have it even worse; Julia Pastrana, for example. Even she has a story to tell, a story no one want to hear. But now between the sections Worry 1 and Worry 2 Julia’s gets to tell her story.

They called her the ‘ape woman’. She suffered from a disease that gave her a swollen palate, swollen lips, and hair all over a face. She was born 1834 and at an early age performed before paying audiences that were more interested in her beard than her dance and song. After her death in childbirth 1860 she was cut open, stuffed with straw, and exhibited. Her body toured the world for more than a hundred years before it was stolen. Later it was found but then forgotten, ending up in an institute for forensic medicine in Oslo. First in 2013 was she buried in her home country, Mexico. From her grave she now tells her story.

The novel’s protagonist has carried Julia Pastrana within her for a long time. Everything has its place in the funnel to the abyss, and everything is connected. She climbs the oak and thinks about how Julia was exhibited as an ape even though she was human. From the grave in Mexico it is not far to a wall

and a border where people are called animals by a yellow-haired man and where children are interned. Children of today may live a hundred years, but what will the world be like then.

It is a profoundly original novel, linguistically driven, with social and political criticism interwoven with the reflections of a middle-aged woman on everything that comes her way; TV images, Internet links sent to her from faraway places, newspaper articles, her husband's warm hand, visiting sibling grandchildren, small fingers reaching deep into the wool of their sheep. Here there isn't a single trite formulation; every sentence and every word open the reader's eyes to reality, describing it anew.

After all, paradise does exist; the purring cat, the checkered tablecloth, the rag carpet smelling of soap, all kinds of grass – blue grass, red fescue, timothy – and the native breed cow that grazes on it. It is no bleating idyll, for 15 km away is a small town that she goes to support refugees in their struggle to learn Swedish. Paradise is, after all, only borrowed; she cultivates her garden, but lives in intrusive wider world. She takes the threats of doom seriously but despite everything still believes in eternity, because as long as there are children in the world there must be hope. “

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