

## The Wilderness Party

### Selectors' Comment

At A B Jackson's *Wilderness Party* you never know quite what will happen at the next inventive and fantastical turn of thought - always elegantly dressed and poised, working with beautiful musical control, Jackson's poems in this collection are wired for unpredictable play and fancy. Wryly volatile and resistant, his language is open at every step to the high-energy transformations that spark from the metrical and harmonic patternings of his phrasing. In the glitteringly erotic 'Easter Monday', for instance, creatures flash and rise in a kind of alternative resurrection of wild spirit invoked by lovers making "wrestlemania love" as they sail their Easter bed: "I offer my sea-chains, / a billy-goat also, to minister these rocks, // and fifty-seven varieties of shame. / You stroke my fur, give me your best licks, / a miracle fish made of cellophane."

The final 'Apocrypha' sequence is a new iteration of his 2011 Donut Press pamphlet of the same name (a PBS Pamphlet Choice). The twin epigraphs to this long section constitute a compositional move typical of Jackson's love of switchback and conversion, as the reader is invited to the conjunction on the same page of two playfully different haunting presences, Wallace Stevens ("*Ursula, in a garden, found / A bed of radishes*") and George W Bush ("*The German asparagus are fabulous*"). At this visionary party in the sign-less regions of uncertainty, the soul as well as the body can grow towards wildness, away from liturgy. There are many moments

reminiscent of Hopkins' compressed sensuousness, provoking and fighting free, not least in the wonderful 'Foxes': "A fox's nose is cleaner than a sword; / our kiss, like burning bibles on a wheel. // Hail, as foxes gnaw their daily bread, / the winter pavement serving as a dish. / We snuffle out our boundary marks in bed. / Speed me, Christ, another night like this."

Turn to page 27 to read a poem from *The Wilderness Party*



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