

“The Rapture of Bees”© by Annie Boutelle

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Suddenly absent, vamoosed, as if
they'd never been, never spiraled
in air, nor clung to each other
through frozen dark, nor filled
the hive with their million lithe
bodies, packed shelves of wax
and gold, and all that honeyed buzz.
like a child in a bed in Portugal, just
not there—only space in her stead.
Or hair in coils on the barber's floor,
the neck abandoned and chill. Or
the breast with the other discarded
body parts, somewhere in a hospital
basement and only the stitches to show
where it was. How not envy
the bees? So fierce and uprush, it
can't be resisted, that soaring in air
to meet whoever is coming, the cell-
phone tower bristling with urgent
messages about the time, the place.
and the fake plastic branches are
arms that sweep them in, not one left,
and death is simple—just being where
the others are, a trembling vibration.

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Annotation by Mikayla Peters

Beginning with the title of this piece, “The Rapture of Bees,” one can begin to see some ambiguity. Sects of Christianity claim the rapture comes before or during the second coming of Christ, when those who are deemed worthy are brought up into heaven by God. Then, Christ returns to Earth to fight a battle with the demons and Satan in order to determine once and for all who wins. In this poem, those deemed worthy are the bees. In Christianity, the believers are taken away, and Christ is left to fight the demons who remain on Earth. In the poem, the bees are gone, which leaves humans, suggesting that humans are demons, and the bees were in search of a savior. Demons are known to bother people, to tempt them to sin, to harm them and their lives, etc. In this poem, the humans are demons because they are the ones who condemned the bees to die.

The first line of the poem begins with “Suddenly absent, vamoosed.” The first word is “suddenly,” which suggests no one saw this event coming, even though there has been research on it for years. People refuse to accept that the bees are slowly dying because the chemicals that are killing them are considered “helpful” to humans as a species. This relates to Rob Nixon’s discussion of slow violence in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism and the Poor*, when he says that slow violence is “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight” (Nixon, 2). Because people are used to violence that is “an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and...erupting into instant sensation visibility,” they tend to ignore things that happen slowly, such as “climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of war, acidifying oceans,” and other things. Therefore, the bees suddenly dying or vanishing comes as a shock, because people don’t believe it is happening.

“Nor clung to each other/ through frozen dark.” With this, the author shows the hibernation patterns of the bees, who must live as a hive and work together not only to store food, create honey, and build hives, but also to keep each other warm through winter while being packed in together. Many bees live less than a year, but each is important to the hive. They have specific jobs from first being hatched to their last day. Every role in the hive is critical to the hive’s success and survival. With one line, Boutelle shows how much the hive depends on one another and personifies the bees with the verb “clung,” which encourages people to think of bees as a similar species. While during the summer they have their own specific jobs, during the winter, the bees pack themselves together for warmth. She continues this idea in the next few lines, “nor filled/ the hive with their million lithe/ bodies, packed shelves of wax and gold, and all that honeyed buzz.”

“Packed shelves of wax and gold” is important, because the gold refers to the honey that bees produce. This honey is, of course, useful to other animals for consumption, and for humans, it is a commodity that costs money. Honey can be used to treat and disinfect wounds, suppress coughs, regulate blood sugar, enhance flavors, add sweetness to dishes, fight cancer, and has antioxidants. It is precious to human animals not only as food, but also as medicine. Honey is made by honey bees, and it cannot be artificially produced with the same benefits. Raw honey is extremely nutritious, much more so than pasteurized honey, and is truly a liquid gold when it comes to flavor, health benefits, and costs. This is why many people raise their own bees in order to make extra money or supplement their own diets and save money.