



9-2010

The Wonder of Geese

Bryan M. Furuness

Butler University, bfurunes@butler.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Nonfiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bryan M. Furuness. "The Wonder of Geese" *Brevity*. 34 (2010). http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers/283

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact omacisaa@butler.edu.

The Wonder of Geese **by Bryan Furuness**

Through my office window this morning, I hear sirens. I can never remember which kind of siren makes what sound, so I can't tell if there's been a car accident or a fire or a hold-up at the Speedway. Then again, whenever anything happens in this town, all the emergency personnel come running. Once, the smoke alarm in my house went off and wouldn't stop, so I called the fire department to ask for advice. "We'll come out and take a look," a cheerful guy said. After I hung up, I thought, *We?* Minutes later, my street was swarmed by a ladder truck, two police cruisers, and an ambulance. Neighbors came out to their yards. It was embarrassing for me, but the highlight of my children's lives.

I think these first responders get excited. I also think they love any excuse to barge through traffic with their lights going slick and whirly, honking and whooping their sirens. Their excitement reminds me of elementary school, when the first flakes of snow fell and someone yelled "Snow!" and the rest of us kids rushed over to press our noses against the windows. "Geez-o-Pete," the abandoned teacher would say. "You'd think you guys had never seen snow before."

Maybe she wanted to rush over to the windows, too, but it didn't seem like the adult thing to do.

One of the worst teachers I ever had was a man named Sam, who led my first writing workshop in graduate school. He used to stop class whenever geese flew past the window. "Geese!" he'd say, interrupting whomever was speaking, even if it was himself.

The class would look dutifully at the geese, and some ass-kisser would say, "Wow," or, "That's really something, how they V up." By the time we'd get back to the discussion, Sam would have forgotten what we'd been talking about, and everyone else would pretend to have forgotten, too, like the geese had been *that* transporting, like they had been totally swept up in the moment. But not me. I remembered what we'd been talking about. Maybe because I'd looked at the table instead of the geese, fuming and thinking of all the debt I was taking on to go to this school. "Narrative distance," I'd say flatly. "Oh, yeah," Sam would say, and we'd stumble back to the discussion.

I dropped out of grad school at the end of that semester.

This morning, as the sirens blend in the distance, I'm thinking about Sam. I'm thinking about myself, too, the kind of student I was back then, nearly a decade ago. Overly serious. A little misguided and more than a little miserable. I thought Sam was supposed

to teach me about craft and the mechanics of writing, like point of view, narrative distance, and structure, and the geese felt like a dumb interruption of that important stuff. Now I think I was missing the point. When Sam said, "Geese!" he was saying, *Be open to wonder*. All this craft stuff should be in service of wonder, anyway. When your attention wants to follow something amazing, you should probably follow it.

The sirens have stopped, but now I hear a helicopter. I'm supposed to be grading papers, but instead I find myself wondering if someone is getting medevacked. Or maybe it's a police chopper, trailing a man in handcuffs running through a meadow, the wet grass and Queen Anne's Lace flattening under the heavy whirl of blades. I follow the man into the gully behind the Steak & Shake, where tree roots stick out of the soil like claws. I don't call myself back to grading, not yet. And I'm not alone, I know. Right now, all over town, people are tilting an ear toward a window, exclaiming, wondering. It's only natural. In our minds, we're all first responders.

[Bryan Furuness](#) has published stories in literary magazines including *Ninth Letter*, *Southeast Review*, *Sycamore Review* and *Hobart*, and in the forthcoming *Best American Nonrequired Reading*. He teaches at Butler University, where he also serves as the associate editor for the journal *Booth*.