

IN PRAISE OF BATS

“What’s the best way to show affection to a bat?” I asked Tuttle, who carefully considered the question, then said, “I’m not even sure I know the best way to show affection to a person.” Laughs went around the room. Margaret Perry suggested petting him in the direction the fur grew right behind the neck. Lifting Zuri onto one finger, I petted his soft neck, and then we put him back in the cage. At once he scuttled over to Rafiki, snuggled rump to rump, and when settled, he began a long, thorough cleaning of his wings, chest, and body, licking methodically like a cat, to get rid of the minute oils, salt, perfume, and human essence he found on me. It was obvious that he felt dirtied. He washed up slowly, good-naturedly eyeing us, then closed his eyes and began to doze. After all, it was sleep time for bats. Nonetheless, when anyone drew near, he opened one eye and peeked out over his arm to see who was there.

At dinnertime, Tuttle and I tried the patio of the Four Seasons Hotel downtown, on the Colorado River, a few blocks from the pink-granite capitol building and right across from the Congress Avenue Bridge. We had not come for the margaritas or the lobster enchiladas but to watch the emergence as dazzling as the one we had seen at Bracken Cave. Tucked inside the crevices under the bridge were three quarters of a million bachelor free-tailed bats. They made Austin the summer home of the largest urban bat population in the world. As the sun ladled thick pastels into the river, two crew boats pulled gently, side by side. Could they see the bats when they passed under the bridge, I wondered? Sweethearts had begun to stroll across

Notes

Identify the author’s use of figurative language. Then, use these phrases to help you write about the main ideas for each paragraph.

the bridge hand in hand, waiting for the emergence. Sodium lights from the Hyatt Hotel cast a trail of copper coins across the water. Suddenly, smoke billowed from underneath the bridge. No, not smoke but a column of bats. Then two columns soared high and flew in parallel, like the long black reins of an invisible sleigh. Bats kept surging out, and soon four columns stretched miles across the sky. A few strays looped and fed near us, passing like shuttles through the weave of the trees. The night was noticeably free from insects, but that was no surprise. These bats would eat five thousand pounds of insects that one night alone.

In a medieval simile of the Venerable Bede's, life is depicted as a beautiful and strange winged creature that appears at a window, flies swiftly through the half-lit banquet hall, and is gone. That seems about right for a vision of creation as beautiful as this one was, which soon included the city lights, the sunset doing a shadow dance over the water, and four columns of bats undulating across the sky.

Notes Continued

Source:

Ackerman, D. (1992). "In Praise of Bats." *The Moon by Whale Light*. NY: Vintage Books.