Chaos and Order

Nobody asked but …

One of the most misunderstood words in our language is “chaos.”

If you stand for a bit of contemplation, on the edge of my driveway, looking into the first part of the forest, a forest that stretches for 80 acres, and at the outer edge of which my woods conjoin with the woods of neighbors, you will see what most would call “chaos.” You will see fallen, wind-blown or lightning-struck, trees. You may or may not see the wildlife, squirrels, foxes, raccoons, woodpeckers, herons, turkeys, deer, rabbits, borers, moles, snakes, and turtles that live and forage in the *niches* there. You will see the underlayer, covered in compost, strewn with decaying deadfall, tangled with vines, spotted with seedlings. And then you will look upward, at the tall, shady trees, with millions of leaves dancing in the sun. What a chaos?

That’s not chaos. Chaos is the mishmash of flat earth fictions promulgated by humans. We always attempt to squeeze the unknown into undersized boxes that we claim as “known.” We draw lines on maps and call this, “order.” We build edifices of stone and call these, “institutions.” We fashion fictions and call these, “norms.” We behave as members of a marching band, wherein we check our footwork against that of our nearest other marcher. We like to have things straight, in rows and columns, written down in rows and columns. We like to memorialize events, pinning them to corkboards.

No such thing goes on in the forest. Change goes on in the forest. Predictable or not, the forest is in it for the long haul. The ancestors of these trees and vines were here a thousand years ago, if not a million. The predecessors of these *fauna* were passing through according to the seasons and the epochs. It all changes over the eons, over the years, by the seasons. This is not chaos, this is dynamic, this is orderly. What is new is in order. What is old is in order. The transitions and truncations are in order.

It is when we humans begin to whittle away at the real world, to eliminate its unknown processes, that we get tumult. Nature knows how to govern her processes, even when they lead to something new. Humans tend to grow disorder by short circuiting natural change. A rigid box around the truth will stunt its evolution, making of the truth an aberration.

Things are not chaotic because we cannot see the start or the end or the middle, but we humans often make pandemonium by trying to pretend that we can force changes despite time.

— Kilgore Forelle