
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Daniel McGinn: Three Poems

Daniel McGinn · Wednesday, November 14th, 2018

Phonophobia

Have you seen the way children play? They will talk to a stick as if it were a man. They speak life into the air around them. They drag everything out and leave it on the lawn. They tear things into pieces. They dress dolls for dinner parties. They break what needs to be broken. They cluster in packs like wild dogs. They are not like me, they don't take no for an answer.

Sometimes my house becomes a playground, floors shake with running children; I cannot stop gathering information, even as I sleep. A game show is yelling from the television, there is laughter in the hallway, the toilet flushes and I hear water pushing through the pipes. My ears work like hands, cupping the unseen, again and again. I hear young, busy, full of nonsense voices echo the impossibility of death.

I wish someone would have warned me about old age, how the sound of all those years come seeping through the walls. I've reached the limit of what ears can hold. Everything contains an echo, even my own voice, resting on my tongue like a breath mint, sweet until I swallow and it burns on the way down.

When noise stops my ears begin to ring. The sounds that circled around start to overflow, like a clogged drain, all the things I've heard begin to back up and words spill out into the air around me. I would tell the voices filling my head that they have to leave now but I know the truth. I'm the one who needs to go.

*

Visiting Mother

Her hands close and pull at the air just inches from my neck. She reaches for long strands but I've cut my hair short. She knows me from somewhere but that was a lifetime ago. She takes my hand in both of hers. Her hands are wrinkled, her skin is thin and her veins are blue. She searches my eyes, trying to place me. I ask her if she likes living in this place. She says she is worried about lunch.

We pass a piano on the way to the cafeteria where she stops to gaze at the keys. I know by her face that her hands remember. She tells me about dances that she used to go to with her husband. His name is Ken. Every man she dances with is Ken. Ken is every man she ever married and every man she dreams about. She points to a resident shuffling down the hall. There he goes my mother says, that's my Ken, and she follows him.

*

The Mist

I was a boy watching a cloud come down
to nest in the leaves of a grove of orange trees
where I walked and my sidewalk sneakers
never stepped on a crack in the suburban town
where it never snowed and it seldom rained.

I would spit on the ground to prove I was a boy
and launch great gusts of breath
from the window of my mouth
to watch the whiteness burst from my lungs
like a miniature cloud and if there was a glass—
a backseat window, a storefront reflection—
I would fog it up and write
the letters of my name in a patch of mist
and never look back to watch myself disappear.

The morning my mother chose to leave I watched her
descend in a cloud that covered the snow and trees
on the slope of a mountain. I watched from a window
of a building in a valley as a flock of birds winged by.
I don't know what kind of birds they were
but their timing was terrific.

I saw her again today when I looked out the curtains
from the 36th floor I saw the marine layer that hovered
over Elliot Bay begin to drift towards me. My mother
was there, in that particulate, looking to cling
to anything green. Before she evaporated I saw her bead up
and fall in streaks on the other side of the window glass
in a hotel room where I happened to be passing through.

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