
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Thomas Ahneesan: Two Poems

Thommy Ahneesan · Wednesday, April 21st, 2021

“How Can I Say Who I Am if the River is Gone?”

-after Natalie Diaz, the Scorpion Queen

never has a river
belonged to me
nor I to any
body of water.
who am I,
if I cannot even
remember a house?
a special place I used to hide in,
or even a rock
to slip into my pocket
and name?

I don't remember a bedroom,
but a carpeted floor with a TV
instead of a mother, the TV
loving and braiding my hair
-gloved in static.

so who am I
if I couldn't hear
a single word
from the muddy, broken mouth
of the Missouri?

even if it were to speak
to me, I wouldn't know
its sludge-talk, or its memory.

when history is a tossed archive
on paper, and the paper is white
and the paper is wet
and the paper has flown

in a whirr of fastfood bags,
lotto tickets, lost bets
dead leaves and dollar store
receipts prancing
in their own ratchet-ass
tornado down any given street,

when a childhood
is a tossed and finished bone—
when leaving Iowa
nobody cried or even
waved goodbye
to the slaughterhouse.

even though I cried for the pigs
when their screams echoed through
the downtown stockyards
many days when my dad
held a tiny office full of
mysterious tools, nail guns.

maybe if I had met one of those pigs
I could have loved him and set him free,
sounding drums of victory.

maybe then I'd know what I was made of,
or who I was going to be.
Driving over the bridge between
Sioux City and Omaha,
the Missouri
gurgled and folded into
its own swirling mud
I waved,
I swear—
I tried.

*

BANGARANG

Cleaned my hair
to chase the smoke out.

ladled burnt eyes
in two frozen spoons

on the table, bedside
the next day, too soon

morning screams in glass language,

the dialect of double pane

bobbing like a kite through my city
tail-ribbon tied to hulking frame

to order booze in the broad
daylight, I say I'm planning a party.

Lose the gravel, turn my face
upside down or whatever they say

-a regular Mrs. Dalloway.

All that's needed are the flowers.
I'm still pretty so it's well believed

that smell is not my smell.
a sweet & sour garden.

unwashed-and-still-metabolizing
the pleasure undone

it was me last night, you idiots
who was the funny one.

later, I will throw a hammer
thirty yards with great skill.

Just look at that hammer flying—
eventually it will puncture the night.

Not a death but an undoing,
a wound to walk out of.

Black felt fabric gaping now,
wind whistling against

a branch that won't bend,
but I will be long gone by then.

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