

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Jennifer O'Grady: Three Poems

Jennifer O'Grady · Wednesday, July 24th, 2019

THE ANNUNCIATION ACCORDING TO JOHN COLLIER

For once, the angel
is film-star handsome,
more a gift than bearing a gift,
but alas, he is unattainable,
as angels are. The girl looks up

from her spark-red prayer book,
school dress billowing, shins
darkly naked, saddle shoes
firmly on her welcome mat.
The angel looks down

in modesty or submission, as if to say
I am less than you, which is true:
He cannot feel. And she is doomed
to be always looking at him,
the lily of purity

sprawling from its earthenware pot
between them. Or can he feel?
Is that why his face is shadowed,
tinged with a hint of mortal grief
for all the things he can never have—

this house on this street, a door
waiting to be opened—he leans toward it
as if staged by the weight
of his wings. And she watches,
the prayer book lowered,

while she awaits illumination,
the child who will become
another man to leave her,
as the angel cannot do, and might wish

with all his heart he could.

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ALPHABET FOR THE STAY-AT-HOME PARENT

An abacus arrived at abeyance.
 Bobble-headed. Bitter but bright.
 Claustrophobic cacophony. Causing crushing.
 Death-defying. Dyspepsia. Dustpan.
 Easy exercise. Enormous errors.
 Fossilization. Feeling fortunate. Fantasy.
 Goddammit/gosh goodness. Gaffes galore.
 Hate hamburgers, hate hot dogs. Hysterectomy.
 Igloos. Idolatry. Identity crisis.
 Juice. Jousting. Joy.
 Karate kicks. Knackered.
 Lapsing laughter. Lacking like.
 Me. Mine. Mentholated.
No!
 Opining. Obviously ordinary.
 Polemical Pop Tarts.
Quiet!
 Ridiculous rooster-rising. Rage.
Sorry, so sorry. Sitting. Sobbing. Silence.
 Tremendous theater-of-the-trite.
 Underneath umbrellas. Uneasy urges.
 Virulent vigilance. Victorious vetoing.
Why?
 Xylophone-pounding X-chromosome. X-rated (e)xpletives.
 Yoked. Yielding. Yachtsman. Yearning.
 Zoo. Zoloft. Zanzibar. Zen. Zenith.

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THE ANNUNCIATION ACCORDING TO TISSOT

Here Mary sits, figured
 in malleable water

and fugitive pigments,
 head drooping, possibly

asleep, practically straitjacketed,
 the white robes so dense

no part of her is visible
 except for one palm upturned, empty,

the face we can barely see.

Surprisingly the angel appears

to be female, swathed in long feathers,
tapered hands raised in greeting or prevention,

for who but a woman could understand
the bleeding, the separation, the lingering

after one's child is gone, nothing but spirit
left to leave you and a straitjacket

might be better than this: seeing
the life you created beat out of him, shattered

until there is nothing to hold, nothing
to keep you from being alone.

The angel with her far-reaching vision knows all
and has come this time perhaps in warning:

wake up, wake up, it's not too late.
But Mary sleeps on, seemingly

drugged, forever fading, heedless
of the urgent message she bears,

the one that will spoil her life.

These poems are from her second book of poetry, *Exclusions & Limitations* (Plume Editions/MadHat Press, 2018).

(Author photo by Chloe Catana)

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