

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Nicelle Davis: The Walled Wife

Nicelle Davis · Wednesday, May 25th, 2016

Nicelle Davis is a California poet, collaborator, and performance artist who walks the desert with her son J.J. in search of owl pellets and rattlesnake skins. Her two most recent collections are *The Walled Wife* (Red Hen Press) and *In the Circus of You* (Rose Metal Press). The author of two other books of poetry, *Becoming Judas* (Red Hen Press) and *Circe* (Lowbrow Press). Her poetry film collaborations with Cheryl Gross have been shown across the world. She is currently working on the manuscript / play, *On the Island of Caliban*, which was recently workshopped by The Industrial Players. She has taught poetry at Youth for Positive Change, an organization that promotes success for youth in secondary schools, MHA, Volunteers of America in their Homeless Youth Center, and with Red Hen's WITS program.

The First Hour Of Being Buried Alive In the Walls Of A Half-Built Cathedral

Since death and events surrounding it are considered dangerous, it follows that those who directly deal with death both court danger and are dangerous. And, accompanying this dangerous status of women is power.

—Ruth Mandel, “Sacrifice at the Bridge of Arta,” *The Walled-Up Wife: A Casebook*

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A sky
    is eaten by clouds.
A ceiling
    drops as shattered glass.
A tree
    shakes from standing for flocks of feet.
A wall
    is screaming as birds will yell-
A unified
    cry before migration.
    What was said-black bird to brown bird? What was it I saw?
A dirt path-
    curious objects? Finches copulating while
a cat
    swallows them. Fists for bodies,
they never
  
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stop beating upon each
 other—rhythms
 implying melody—pounding to open
 themselves
 like doors. Finality.
 I feel
 my voice,
 a stone,
 I threw long ago, but windows
 continue crashing
 as an indefinable7
 light, exits from me.

Footnote #7 (indefinable):

I.

I compare variations of a song sung across the globe. Lyrics go: a wife is buried so a structure can rise—it implies a room is worth more than a woman and as a place she approximates value. I look at my small home and think how few enter. I sing the *Ballad of the Walled-up Wife* for days without sleeping; the rhythm bruises my lamps. In a shade, I watch an egg burst into a million fanged stars; spiderlings secrete sliver and fall. Their footed arms fingering me, I rethink home as a world of infinite entrances.

II.

Studying the architecture of Kinbaku knots, I attempt to bind flesh into the shape of a bird—alternatives for flight—bound suspension. Singing allows my voice to walk through walls, so again I sing. Again wonder, how much of my life will be lived as an albatross? It's impossible to move with these dark wings gyrating; I come undone to look at stars who will never touch me with the weight of house spiders. The sky lowers itself in unbounded layers; I am no place—nothing.

III.

Lets give the wife a name, lets say it's Cassandra. Sound of loose change: shake it. *Ca-ca-ca* it goes; *ca-ca-ca* I go. Like crows. On days I feel wings in my purse—a sexual im-im-pulsiveness—I keep to books: read prophecies no one will believe. Close covers and flip for faces—foresight coming down in staccatos. Dropping change I count yes, count denial. Admit: untouchable—I live solely for the chance to be held by what hates me. Hysteric. The little girl inside me is crying. She holds a knife. I could cut her neck by thinking it, but it's hard to think with her howling. She holds the knife against me. *Ca-ca-ca* she crows. *Ca-ca-ca* the knife goes. Red pennies fall from heaven. Look, to the ground—there is the story of how we fail each other.

My Little Box Head Responds / Objects to Found Poetry and the Rewriting of *The Ballad of Walled-up Wife*

I. Stop being so fucking clever poet: *here, the blueprint*:
 What I found in *the wife* is this: I thought I would dig her up, but

I only uncovered my desire to be brought down, to be bound.

II. A Friend Criticizes: *I've listened to you go on about this for hours.*

Enough. Don't you think this is out of time—we are past this?

You only love patriarchy because it's familiar; why retell this

 fucked-

up story? Why rebuild a corrupt structure? *Your point is?*

III. What I Can't Explicitly Say in *Italics*: *I seldom feel human.*

I can't distinguish love from a desire to be named. Confession:

I feel less like a grave when a he says my name. As death approaches, I fuck

like a shovel, as though this were my way out of the grave. I watch his eyes

to see if anyone's capable of loving not just any grave, but this name.

I don't want to be saved. I want to feel like my little life is worthy of

this question—I watch his eyes to see if he will, ask for my name.

IV. The point

The wife became my architecture for search. This is not the same as being saved. This is not the same as being renamed or claimed. What I need to find is beyond walls, past definition. Call it something—something indefinable as...

V. ...Love

anymore

only trans-

lates to shame.

I have a name; I am / am not ashamed of it.

(Author photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

This entry was posted on Wednesday, May 25th, 2016 at 5:35 pm and is filed under [Poetry](#)

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