

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Robert Aquinas McNally: Four Poems

Robert Aquinas McNally · Wednesday, January 13th, 2016

Robert Aquinas McNally is the author or coauthor of nine books of nonfiction, with a tenth in the works, and the author of four poetry chapbooks and the full-length collection *Simply to Know Its Name*, which won the Grayson Books Poetry Prize in 2014 and was published by [Grayson Books](#). this past April. His poems have appeared in a long list of anthologies and journals, including *Ecotone*, *Spillway*, *Snowy Egret*, *Quiddity*, *RiverSedge*, *Blueline*, *Minnetonka Review*, *Sanskrit Literary Arts Magazine*, *Soundings East*, and *Runes*. Five times his poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. A member of the National Association of Science Writers and the Western Writers of America, McNally has also written news, features, and essays about the wild, particularly in the American West. He wanders, wonders, and writes in Northern California.

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### Opening

All night the wind pounded tribal drums,  
beat against windows and roofs, roused  
Lake Erie into dancing ranks of water.  
When morning arrived — bright, domesticated —  
I walked the pier, found it cobbled  
with clams tossed up by the thousands.  
Blue-black, glistening, they opened  
a blade's width as they died, offering  
slim insight into the soft wet  
within. Over them hung  
this smell, unseasoned and raw,  
the scent of secrets that live  
under our eyes and noses  
until a wild music draws them out.

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### Gray Fox

(*Urocyon cinereoargenteus* » dog with the ash-silver tail)

west of Oregon Mountain, northern California

She came like a lover, body stretched straight

from shining onyx nose to black tail-tip,  
 a silver arrow in flight, and as silent,  
 until she sang out that cry with something  
 of the panther in it, of the woman  
 whose throat opens when she peaks and thrashes.  
 Vixens use these notes, they say, to broadcast  
 their desire for mate, coupling, fertile den,  
 yet this song, and the fox's slow circle  
 of the campfire, turned on roast meat dripping  
 into gray coals, raising sweet smoke. Listen  
 to what she was singing: love and hunger  
 rise from one root, this yearning to savor  
 the scent, tongue the juice, and fill the empty.  
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## Snow Goose

(*Chen caerulescens* » white goose shading into sky-blue)

Mackenzie Delta, arctic Canada

Every day becomes passage, arrival  
 just an invitation to departure.  
 Come dark, come cold, the last mosquitoes gone,  
 she leaves tundra behind, heads south toward  
 the shaved ricelands of the Sacramento.  
 She obeys this rhythm scribed in brain, bones,  
 and blue breast despite dangers gathering  
 along the long in-between: flesh-hungry  
 foxes and wolves, tule-hidden gunners  
 with eager dogs, stone mountains honed by ice.  
 It is impossible, so she does it  
 again, rising off the pond and climbing  
 the wind with the flock, honking her secret  
 name to wingmates she has loved since the egg.  
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## Seizing Rainbows

The osprey flew into first light over  
 the high lake to land on a whitebark snag,  
 to watch, to wear patience like its shingled  
 cloak of black plumes until, seeing secrets,  
 it spiraled up, folded long wings, pointed  
 talons, stooped into small wind-waves so clear,  
 so cold. For a moment the bird teetered  
 on the joint of water and air, then rose  
 with the labor of the newly laden:  
 trout fast, dying, silver yet, dark-speckled  
 on pink. Perched, predator pinned kill against

bare wood, hooked beak into flesh, stripped off long, gauzy sheets. Soon only the spine remained, deep dish of skull, the opened, emptied sack of skin, shining, spectral

until the time  
when the hawk struck, speared flesh, flapped hard, and hard  
again, yet could not lift the fish fighting  
beneath, diving against that urgent rise.  
The two tugged and pulled, back and forth, a sway  
of hunter and hunted, until osprey  
unhooked, raised but its own weight, circled back  
to snag, while the trout dove, trailing cool blood,  
bearing deep down the fierce marks of heaven.

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