

For Ken Brown on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday and All Soul's Day

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For Ken Brown on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday

Nancy Mackenzie

The theme tonight is "Regeneration."
Not – "Who invented love?" but
"Why do the effects of invisible tethers,
felt as light spilling and piling up east to west
every morning of your life, offer a new day
to learn to love
everything?" To be
the miracle of illumination
looking blindly with eyes of colour to feel
the heart's way to the soul? Regenerating
as if fueled up by love and miracle
you could possibly last another day like this.
Until the one eye of God blinks
in a snowstorm, among birch, or willingly,
again and again on a transatlantic flight
that has you coursing through meridians of time.

Let us be
careful, lest the soul's tethers catch
on the delicate wrist pulsing with love
and hold us down when we would rather soar.

I thought I'd tell you
about editing the *Reforestation Standard of Alberta*
as a metaphor for how each of us
complicit in the logging of the province's forests
can be replanted as a new forest
and the process amended annually
so as to get the mixed species numbers right,
but stars got in through the back door
where "my" Lombardi Poplar clung
snug to that wren's nest
and it was early morning, again,
in Edmonton, where our parents met their spouses
—mine skating at Garneau—
music allemanding across avenues.

And now this: felting, the soft darkness winging
into this century as their ghosts
dance among the dreams we dream.

All Soul's Day

Nancy Mackenzie

All of life is foreplay
focused on transcendent spiritual climax
exactly at the beginning of a winding country road
that takes us past hawthorn, fairy mounds, elm.

The Old Country never looked better
its ruins and tapestries
memento mori (remember death)
counting backwards to the start.

I saw indigo willow groves stark
against prairie wool, early stars
and your eyes, the mountains glooming
in the gloaming, a sorry thing
to turn your back on me. But how else
do you expect to start over? I count
as one of the reminders of blood
flowing in your veins. O brother. Thou art
cast into these circumstances with me.

And whether or not you believe
in heaven or hell, the day returns
with many returns. The day of the dead.
All Souls. Surely this day will dawn

and the blue gaslight in the room will wither
so that dark acts may be whisked away on a west wind
or blown out like a candle.

Yes, the hours grow older, the light finds its way in
from across the hills through filmy curtains.
And it is not a west wind, but an *Aos Si* (Gaelic Spirit)
radiant before the firelight
offering to incinerate every deceit in exchange for allegiance.
O brother, I offer to propitiate this spirit
as I gather my inheritance. Will you dream the dream
with me?