



Can't Forget The Motor City...

Joseph Nicks

Blue Jay Ink

(72pp)

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Melancholy, discontent, and focused on aging, the poems of Nicks's collection move from a Detroit childhood toward autumnal realizations.

In Joseph Nicks's poetry collection *Can't Forget the Motor City*, aging and its various indignities take center stage.

Tightly stylized and holding to clear themes, the poems of this collection avoid inherited forms, instead using their stanzas in ways that suit their scenes. Anaphora is used to create rhythms in lines that average nine syllables. "Eternitude" features imperatives at the start of each stanza, demanding that the audience listen, watch, breathe, and remember, becoming instructional and immersive.

Poems address an unknown "you" that moves outside of their boundaries and sometimes seems self-directed, as in "Some Assumptions":

*you thought you'd just keep working,
that there'd never come a day
when you'd outlive your
life-sustaining usefulness.*

Eschewing surprising images and metaphors in favor of matter-of-fact acknowledgments of experiences, the book adopts a blue-collar persona that fits in with its themes. The prologue covers a hundred years of Nicks's family history, and a piece with the same concentration ends the volume, working back from family deaths in 2018 to the birth of Nicks's father in 1918. This bookending creates a sense of time and change that places the poems in broader cultural context.

Poems are consistently written in a direct tone. They tell straightforward stories with big ideas at their centers, as when a heart grows so heavy that it drags the lungs with it. In "Awaiting October Again," corporeal reality becomes a means of investigating metaphysical questions:

*can you honestly not see
that there are no little deaths—
every one of them is the same size,
no matter who it happens to:
each one is big enough
to exactly negate a life.*

The second half of the book focuses on nature and the calendar year as metaphors for aging: autumn has come, and with it, a slow death and resistance. A Dylan Thomas reference comes in. Poems in this half are melancholy and discontent, but they gather strength as they progress, becoming more honed and focused on apt images. Fine-tuned poems like “November No More” muse

*It's the scarlet, sulfur
flaming of the forests
in farewell.*

The book also becomes more organized as it progresses; poems in the second half move from autumn toward winter. The concluding entry, “Subfossil Snapshot,” focuses on a “you” forever frozen in winter, waiting to be unearthed, perhaps, thousands of years later. Its lines pay close attention to the angles of the body, creating a fossilized image that engraves the volume’s intent.

The poems of *Can't Forget the Motor City* strike similar notes as they address the process of aging.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (May 15, 2019)

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