

Maryann Corbett

The Vanished

In the autumn of 2015, the production of paper cards for library catalogs ceased.

No matter how long ago they completed their disappearance,
I still expect them,
perhaps in a sort of narthex just past a pillared entry,
or off to the side
as if in a private chapel, or straight ahead like an altar.
Shrined in the silence,
modest and single, or ranged in ranks and banks and rows,
the gods of Order
lived in their tabernacles of honey and amber maple
or oak like chocolate,
darkened at times from the touch of a hundred thousand fingers.
On every drawer-front
the face of a tiny gargoyle wagged its brazen tongue out.
And so we pulled them.
And the drawers slid waxen-smooth, and the fingers flicked like a
weaver's
through card upon card,
and above the drawers were our faces, our heads all bobbing and
davening.
A kind of worship
it was, with an order of service. A physical act of obeisance.
Its cloudy replacement
(perfect in plastic efficiency, answering almost to thought,
near-disembodied)
hurries us past the notion of order itself as a Being
worthy of honor.
So here I am, misplaced as a balky fourth-century pagan
mulling conversion,
but nursing doubts that the powers should be called from the
general air,
seeking the numinous
still in its tent of presence, and longing to keep on clutching
the household gods.

Monuments

Pioneers and Soldiers Cemetery, Minneapolis

They look us in the face. Their brokenness
is scarred where bits are grafted back with mortar,
their attitude off-kilter where the world's
upheavals knock them sideways. Their stone speech
comes garbled through the acid bite of rains
sour with the hundred-fifty-year-long progress
that vaunts down Lake Street in the August glare
outside the wall's wrought-iron rectitude.

Each stands, a presence. Bevels, obelisks,
round-shouldered roundtops, green cast-metal crosses,
three regimented rows of Civil War
martyrs (a name, a date, the one word "soldier"),
a few actual statues. Where the words
are legible, here German and there Polish
keep their detente, the long truce undisturbed
by a versified Last Trumpet. So the thought
of variousness feels apt, an old-shoe comfort
fit for the neighborhood as it now stands,
its business signs relaxing into Spanglish.
And we stand, roughly vertical, if damaged.
Tolerant of our shorts and broad-brimmed hats,
the stones pose coolly while we snap our selfies.

My dead lie down a thousand miles away,
scattered across three states, in cemeteries
run with a view to simplifying upkeep.
Their rules enforce a flat equality:
no standing stones to look us in the eye,
only the flush bronze markers, silhouetteless,
staring upward at God without a thought,
unfindable without a shamefaced visit
to some Dickensian ministry of death.
The snows of every winter white them out,
and with the summers, over all this absence
the great blade of the diesel mower scythes.