

Shane Neilson

St. Anthony's Fire

alights. Imagine Christ rye-laden, his gangrenous fingers full of blessings, the witches of Salem dancing in the fields, the ergot lysergic constricting throats and vessels and sanity, filibustering the guts and men asking *why*, the monks of St. Anthony with the perfect cure: all things in abstinence, the attendance of attention on doomed limbs and poultices that were applied to god in our image. Robbed of touch with peripheral neuropathies and the visible sores, the manna from heaven contaminated with *Claviceps purpurea*, whole civilizations monster-movied, disease being the measure of purity in a lost, misbegotten heaven, break bread with them, O lord, break bread with them and have them hallucinate you, have them taste the manic, delusional essence, have them wither and waver and tuck their too-suffering children in at night, quivering in the fear of all unknown, this ingested pestilence, this rictus gift. The truth: your curses are the miracles we know first.

The Perfect Fatherhood

And love is the medium here: kids on the swingseat, twisting it up to the overhead bar; the lineup to the curled slide; the sand studded with broken glass; the phalanx of teetertotters that I crouch on, to lift you up; the rebar car you pretend to drive; the bouncy multiseat, author of plastic concussions. You peruse all, kid king, and decide what's best. Other children, possessed, flit, but you choose and stick: the car, with the oversized metal wheel you spin, always turning right.

Older kids let you drive,
pile into the spacious interior, dump sand in each other's hair.
I imagine you telling the kids to settle down, that this car
will not move one more inch until the punks behave,
but your gaze is faraway, deeper in the park, where the football
field's uprights are the place of a thousand high-school dreams
and I wonder, you in your knitted sweater and little leather sandals
dusted with sand, if this is the perfect fatherhood, the steady,
unmoving destination, the background noise of fractious siblings,
the time limitless.