

Family Photos

"Time makes us old. Eternity keeps us young."

—Meister Eckhart

by Kevin C. McHugh

They lived back then, in a world of black and white
that seems to awaken only at the turning of the leaves—
the unfolding of the album to the epiphanies of light,
a mystery rife and ripe as the Second Coming.

The spinal pivot of each thick, thumbled page
transports us all, them new arrayed in trim toques,
brimming felt fedoras or flat caps, frocks, ties and tweeds,
to the brink where we meet again and forever anew
in these illuminated manuscripts of our snapshot lives.

Perhaps it is the illusory stasis of the page that draws us in
from the daily disorder and gives us pause in shared reflection.
Or maybe it is the austerity of the antique prints, preserved
against their fading, the unquenchable gravity of the spectrum,
the presence of all colors—and the absence—in whose bright shadows
we stand now in awe at this bound and swinging door.

Here, the white and black define each other—and all of us,
the pictures taking shape in the complementary interplay.
An intimation of the symmetry of some divine design,
like the polar architecture of the mind, the dawn and the dusk.
So, too, the past and future play off, their open ends on end
like a living hourglass, their vortices intersecting here in the now.

The faces rise again, ever and forever in fragile transfiguration,
in the kinetic interface of the spectral bands of light—
where the silent white makes possible the vocal black,
like lovers on the eternal brink of surrender and possibility.
The invisible, illuminating rainbow and the warm, all-absorbing dark.

The faded forms are therefore neither fixed nor gone;
they live on in us and we in them, but witnessed only
intermittently, in the turning to the light as with a strobe—
a sporadic sequence of one-time introspections.
From the wordless within the spectres stare without,
while we, without, gaze within and see—our ghostly selves.