

Three Poems

.....
JOHN STEFFLER

Walls

Through the damp whispering draft, through
my ringing ear and the echoed plink, plink
of a distant waterdrop, I hear the people's faint
blended voices seep through the cavern's walls.
They are talking or singing in a neighbouring
chamber, their voices close but blurred through
thousands of years. I think they are here to
honour the animals' birthplace in the earth's
night. I hear them come closer. Just on the
other side, they reach toward me brushes
dipped in ochre and black manganese and
paint my shape on the thin surface between us.

Woodshed Hill, Late Winter 2018

Woodshed Hill is just beyond the window where I write. I am alone with it for hours. It rises from underneath the house and is not separate from the sky. It is a large animal with a profile beautiful in all its changes. It extends beyond where etymology can go. Old snow, all gaps and tatters, plasters its lumpy slope. Last fall's leaves show through the tears, and each grey oak and elm pokes through a stretched hole. On the steep south face the snow hangs on rocks and stumps like ripped lace. In a few months sedge and low boughs will hide it all. Yesterday I found the draft of a poem from March two years ago. I wrote that the hill was "stepping out of a white distance where it had disappeared." I said it was "moving back into its half-wrecked home, awkward, gawky, starting again in grade nine." As though I'd written that on the window and blocked the view. The hill is always full-grown. It feasts when the sun comes with its followers, but I see no end to its patience and dignity. It gathers its history in each leaf and bone, and I have a few years living beside it, facing it. I look up from the page to something I've never seen.