



theslowdown_20200529_20200529_128

Wed, 9/30 8:25PM 5:00

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

characters, consistent, tiki, minds, voice, poem, various facets, poetry, college, sit, sipping tea, dined, change, jazz singer, consistency, unified, newly, siblings, slow, held

00:06

I'm Tracy K. Smith, and this is the slow down. Am I consistent? I try to be with my kids. I try to remain firm and holding them to reasonable limits of behavior. But sometimes I fail. Am I consistent as an artist? I hope not. I want to grow, to change to reinvent myself in small and large ways from project to project. Whether or not I succeed. Perhaps the notion of a consistent unified self is just a fantasy. Perhaps it's a failure of the imagination. From the time I first read transcendentalist thinker, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in college, I've loved the way he puts consistency into perspective. He says, quote, a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. When I feel tempted to keep doing or thinking something, simply because I have always done and thought it. That's when I try to remind myself that I am of many minds, many opinions, many inclinations, some are at peace with one another, others are not. And yet somehow I or we negotiate these inner transformations. Ideally, we do so in a way that fosters not chaos, but growth change, evolution. Sophomore year of college home for Christmas, I woke up one morning with a distinct voice in my ear. It belonged to a woman 20 years, my senior, whom I'd never before seen Ormat very clearly, I held in my mind her name, Tiki and threw me Tiki regaled my mom, dad and siblings with stories, most of them equal parts heartbreaking and hilarious. Her response to just about anything, asked her or suggested was to shrug and say whatever. Tiki was me. Of course, she gave voice to a side of me, newly independent, newly jaded, trying on an offhand petulance for size, and so did the other characters who followed her in aging revolutionary, a salty jazz singer. Most of my life, I've been living with characters who give voice to the various facets of me. Not all of them know each other. But the people who know me best recognize the hodgepodge troupe, I carry inside. Today's poem is characters, by gurus don't malakian there are characters in me who do not talk to each other, who fill each other with grief, who have never dined at the same table. in me, there are characters who write their own poetry with my hands, who flipped through stacks of bills with my hands, who make fists of my hands, who place my hands on the sofa edge. And while one sits down, the other stands up leaves. in me, there are characters who melt in the snow,

who drift with the rivers, and years later, rain into me. in me, there are characters who sit on a corner and like death, talk to no one. There are characters in me who arrived too late, who are settling and another one sitting facing this sunset sipping tea. in me, there are characters who stab each other, assassinate each other, bury each other in the cemetery of my psyche, but I with all of my characters, go on caring for you. Translated from the Persian by Akhmad not Aliza de and aedra Novi.

04:41

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