

## Albert: Observations Upon Aging

That this life at last comes to resemble a lengthy novena  
with a very short intention.

That old men both shrink and expand: the weight of guilt or memory  
seeming to compact both neck and hip joints, drives the belly outwards.  
Thus like spheres at this point in life's journey we glide not stride  
towards our end. Amen.

That the work old men have done expands as they diminish: youngsters  
construct fat codices upon even abandoned texts, as has been observed.  
That old men often find in their own manuscripts a phrase they'd thought  
new minted only yesterday during an argument with What's-his-name.  
Surely a sharp phrase to have pierced the mind so deeply: borne for years,  
a lost hook in the jaw of a great salmon, towards that disputatious end.  
Amen.

That old folk realise one autumn day: even the threads in my coat  
will outlast me. So they cease to buy new ones but wear their old coats  
and familiar smell. Contrast our habit's worth: plain black and off-white,  
always in fashion because always, like goodness, slightly out of fashion—  
a blanket or mantle or winding sheet for the road, that we may come  
securely to our hoped-for end. Amen.

That the life of the mind becomes at last like the life of animals:  
subject to anxiety and times of hibernation.  
That the seasons pass differently for the old, feeling the heat  
of summer less and bearing winter with them into spring:  
cold feet and fingers, clouded eyes and a raindrop  
ever at their nostrils' end. Amen.

That old men's memories are like vintages, some sour and thin but most  
when the barrel's broached yielding the very smack of summer—  
that hill slope, yes, from that domain and soil, those days.  
That days float by now like the Danube. Once hunting with my friends  
along its bank I saw a swan and eagle battle in midair and fall to earth.  
Swansong, that aching cry, who ever heard it truly?

We chased the eagle, cooked the broken bird, remembered what it signified.  
I think our souls might enter white clouds as the birds do  
in flight without end. Amen.

James McGonigal