*Night Rooms*,by Gina Nutt rev. by Mia Alvarez

Two Dollar Radio

Gina Nutt’s collection of personal essays, entitled *Night Rooms*, explores themes of life and death, anxiety, depression, suicide, grief, and survival. Fragmentary, poetic, and necessarily intimate, the book weaves together personal experiences of the author, pertinent research (the etymology of words like “grief” and anxiety”, excerpts from other essays and poetry, the history of Nutt’s hometown, etc.), and images from horror films to meditate on these topics. Gina Nutt is the author of one other book, a poetry collection by the title *Wilderness Champion*, and her poetic style is readily observable in *Night Rooms*. The inherent poeticism of the work, as well as its emotional honesty and profundity, unique structure and research, and universal themes, lend the book its singularity and make for an altogether enjoyable read.

The horror trope which Nutt most frequently references is the “final girl”—that is, the one who survives at the end. Nutt implies that she, in a way, is a “final girl”, having thus far survived depression and anxiety, loss and grief, most recently the death of her father-in-law. But survival is ongoing, even mundane. “Survival”, she writes, “may have less to do with strength and bravery and more to do with tenderness and vulnerability” (Nutt 133). Nutt’s essays are extremely vulnerable, and vulnerability cultivates tenderness, in this case between writer and reader. Reading *Night Rooms* feels like a late-night tête-à-tête with a friend, like being told something in confidence.

The most vulnerable moments are perhaps when she asks questions:

Are my feelings old feelings?...Is each sadness a new sadness or a new way to feel sad about the same thing? Is *sadness* the right word and how much of it knits with worry and fear? Is my sadness about anything? Must sadness connect to a specific moment or experience for the feeling to matter? (Nutt 139)

This passage, composed entirely of open-ended questions, is deeply vulnerable, but it is also universal. Readers will have likely asked themselves similar questions. The question, “is my sadness about anything?”, and the subsequent question, *does that matter*, are likely to be familiar to anyone who has suffered from—and survived—depression. In another essay, Nutt describes depression and grief:

“An all-encompassing ache. A numb, expansive void. A never-quite-full-enough-ness, not always an emptiness. What can feel like a low E on a piano, held for an ongoing time…” (Nutt 138).

Here we may again observe vulnerability and universality, but also Nutt’s writing style as a poet. The sentences are short and fragmentary, each evoking a vivid image and/or feeling.

Many of the images evoked in *Night Rooms* are from horror movies—*Jaws*, *Poltergeist*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, to name just a few. The parallelism between Nutt’s real life experiences and the events in horror films, between cultural tropes and horror tropes, is doubly effective: not only is it unique and engaging, but it also offers a sort of respite from the emotional weightiness of the essays, which is otherwise only relieved by the occasional witticism or darkly amusing anecdote.

The tone of *Night Rooms* is not exclusively grim. While the book does more often discuss feelings of despair, it is not wholly bleak. Just as within reality, there are vicissitudes of hope and hopelessness. *Night Rooms* is about death, but it is also about life. It is about the coexistence of the two. It is constantly positing questions that cannot be answered, with the hope not necessarily of answering them, but with becoming comfortable with not being able to. “The moral”, Nutt writes, “is that there might not be a moral” (69). Gina Nutt’s *Night Rooms* is deeply personal and honest, poetic, and overall a memorable and meaningful read.