

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

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Why I Am Moving to Ireland

Because I, like Dedalus, cannot pray to my mother's liking
and North Sea fog is this poet's filter. Since my mind seems
predisposed to the efficient burning of peat, and gunboats
on the Liffey set fire to my inheritance of anger,

I will arise and go to a land held siege by water
and bound by regret, where they yearn for those lost
to the promise of elsewhere. I will drink to a forgotten
language flourishing in worth.

Because I emerged, hat in hand, from a White Star Line
and still pass through St. James' Gate to get my bearings,
I sing "Nearer My God to Thee" each time I'm told
vengeance belongs to the Lord.

I will arise and go to a land scored by poets, where the
wailing of pipes draws blood and tears from a bottomless
well. Fogged in by an empire, I will hoist the tricolor and
buff the chip on my shoulder until it shines.

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

Oklahoma Wind

At three, they say, you raced the gritty wind
that howled without a pause in Texola
or a thought in Shady Grove, outrunning
the restless souls of Sak and Fox. Oh Jim,
so prone to battle with the blood beneath
your skin! This bitterness, it followed you

across plains sown in expectations fixed
by every president's lieutenant since
the futile Black Hawk's war. Your father said
a trade was in the works, and printer's ink
or cabinetry would suit you properly.
He never considered you learning Greek;

to prove him wrong, you chiseled that entire
decathlon field to stone and fashioned cold
spectators, stoics, contemplating Thorpe.
A king bestowed your laurel crown and by
his proclamation people declared you
the best on Earth. But irony, perhaps

the weapon whites employed against you most,
dissected buttressed muscles, pulled them off
those weary In'jun bones. What cabin-born
boy would have turned his back on solid cash
for Sundays playing ball? Nobody warned
against a deal of gold for paper, thin

as every promise stamped United States.
They simply told you "Run and jump and throw."
'Ole Pop and Captain Pratt were only hitched
around your waist for seasons steeped in sun,
but, soon enough, they blanked when asked your name.
Before you knew it, games you'd loved became

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

a chore. Barnstorm tours required a headdress,
promoters made you dance for rain. And still
you dragged bunts, belted backs, and sank your shots
to batter adversaries young enough
to be your grandsons. Canton called, but it
appeared to you they preferred the bulldogs

to redskins in hollowed American
halls. Once again they asked you, Jim, to play
the token role, requested you assuage
their feeble guilt. Then finally fate assigned
your permanent place toward the back of small
minds, where the grainy pictures crumble, fade,

and grow tattered along the edge. So by
the end, your wife was forced to cut a deal
to pay your tab. And so you sleep, alone,
lie restless underneath cold ground unknown
to feet that once outran the gritty wind,
left Sack and Fox to chase the dust forlorn.

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

Fish

I pause at eight laps and consider this sky,
too looming for distance too brilliant for sight,
it must be a Kodak glossy pasted to the roof

of this diorama, another construct preferable
to life on the stage we dub real. I savor suspension,
the feeling of being within and one with the water—
weightless—
like sugar in a summer's worth of tea.

To imagine grace, I draw on a template of gulls
and wrens, the occasional peregrine falcon playing
chase on a course of concentric circles, above the lane
where I swing my arms in an effort to soar.

It's my attempt to overcome limitations, the gravity
of my condition, the tide lapping at the tile-trimmed
shoreline where I pause to spit in the slough
and measure my resting pulse.

Sans glasses, I see two flecks, perhaps protozoans,
scuttle across the surface of each eye, incarnations
of seventh-grade science labs and reminders of the
imperfections bobbing across the surface of my sea.

I rue voices, even on the radio, and the throaty
growl of aluminum raptors obliterating the serenity
of nature as I prefer to construct it. It is amazing
what I see unaided, a blending of vision and truth,

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

that compels me to rip my cupped hands through the stiff broth and slide into a rhythm with each arm accompanied by its opposite leg. I break through the crust of convention to reconfigure myself as a torpedo targeting wall upon wall.

This is my blue water, a habitat full of diverse species: green-goggled frogs stretching their necks as arms fan away from a central line, dolphins breaking the surface in a series of silver flashes

with humped backs dragging up full rear ends that offer a pleasant reminder of motherhood. Helpless, I stop to celebrate this advantageous display of skin and glory in my baptism—the maternal act revisited—and wipe sparkling

beads off my naked chest. As I glide, I hear the zealot sermonize, claim it's the fear of the unknown that makes us dread death. But how does this explain the newborn, swimming

blindly but willingly, toward a world of trouble? It seems to me we are predisposed to recklessness, a life with our heads underwater, where we push the delicate boundary between the world of the living and the remembered. No, foremost among the fears

filling our hearts is the notion of irrelevance—being blended in—like an error in a water color. Lest all our motion and efforts to portray celestial brilliance are just a slight disturbance and fading foam.