

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

John Grey

THE GANG'S ALL HERE

Too bad they've not the wits enough
to recognize the sameness.
the grueling passage of time.
nobody has a wrist-watch,
these men on the steps of St Rita Church of the Poor;
the priest will be along at nightfall
with his key to the side-door and the warm beyond.

Not a one feels guilty about charity,
not when the stomach's turning over in its grave,
and besides they've been coming here
since they were first out on the streets.
every night hustled into shoebox rooms,
a table and some rustic chairs,
while white-haired women ladle soup
into their bowls.

A less lenient street would have them hung
or butchered by gangs beneath the overpass.
Kids would line up to kick them in the shins
like each one was a Santa Claus.

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A month later, the faces are changed,
even if it's some of the same people in them.
Winter-fogged memory, rain-matted hair.
they struggle up the hill like they're bearing
their own coffins.
They fall down like the dead on these same steps.
And someone always has the key.
is forever late,
maybe tending those with the wherewithal
to die in houses or in cozy hospital beds.
Never mind where the white haired women come from
or the soup.

It's an odd clock that measures their time.
Seconds are shivers, minutes are coughs.
hours are hairs hanging from their chins.
The days are soup in bowls,
even bread sometimes.
The months are coats that stink to high heaven.
And the years...well there are no years.

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YOUR STATE

Muscles relax, heart and breathing rates slow,
take awareness down with them.

The world is no longer a cuckolded extremist,
a crazed pessimist with a spray gun.

Gradually bliss becomes nothingness
becomes deep black hole.

Nothing better to do, the brain emits delta waves,
just gentle lapping at first, but eventually,
from vertex to parietal and frontal regions,
a full-blown tide.

And then, just when coma is about
to get totally uninteresting., the mind pulls back.
Some paradoxical sleep, more awake than waking
and REM sleep, with eyes fluttering like a coquette's,
and then the dreams begin, black and white,
super 8, with actors and plotlines
only you would pay to 'see.

Muscles twitch, up goes the blood pressure.
That most useless of erections points
toward the coming hour.

And then the cycle begins anew.

The body slips into these relentless rhythms
when nobody is in control.

But eventually, you tire of restoration,

The horizontal longs to be vertical.

Mind-float visions would rather be everyday sights.

Besides, there's other people to attend to,
all locked out for hours by the selfishness of sleeping.

It's a warm morning, and lights in bright agreement
with the temperature.

Decisions are required. And no sleeping body
is making them.

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HOW I REPLY TO "DO YOU LOVE ME?"

Yes, that's my head you see
sitting atop my voice.
It is responsible for the machinations
of the tongue, even the gestures
that conduct sound into meaning.
Behind my brow, are my thoughts,
my motivations.
Sorry you can't chisel through
and see for yourself.
You'll have to take my word for it.
And my head is perched
atop my word.
Containing a heavy brain.
it can't help but exert pressure
on the throat,
So that's why sometimes.
the explanation comes out garbled,
like a wrestler struggling
not to be pinned.
Or it's whispered
as if it's trying to avoid
the attention of the giant above.
Or it just gives up,
says nothing,
despite the head's
stream of instructions.
Right now, I'm silent,
though the head is loud.