

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/3

Tom Sheehan

Lines Written to My Muse

Oh, Christ, Devon, You smother me, the highs and lows
of such long pursuit, the sands shifting over the spectrum
of lore binding our ends, as I move the English Ford
between obstacle barrels like crude orange chess pieces
on a Limerick bridge guarded by a new army, their automatic
rifles hung bore down, their faces stiff as clock faces, lips set
at nine and quarter past the hour, an army you never knew
and yet began.

I impelled myself out of the city ganging at me harsh as Lowell
or Lawrence or Worcester with the ghosts of their mills
forcing thousands of aimless steps on every corner, every street,
their red bricks inanimate, bearing the wrong breathlessness,
usurpers, idle squatters; then only to find that new army
in wayside patrol, slow meandering, a bore-down search for time,
and I know you are near.

Will I find you in Elphin-Mere, by the crude hut of Johnny Igoe,
blue and thatched on the far turn, or out from town, toward Cassidy's,
where that lone statue stands, the Gaelic names burning stars.
Your army, Devon, your army, imprisons me at Elphin-Mere!

I struggle for the Bulliwicks moving nowhere in the tide
rushing through my limbs, helpless as my son crib-bound
looking up to me, only eyes reaching, and I am my son!
I am that babe beneath the power.

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Oh, Christ, Devon, I am you! I am you! And the Bulliwicks fade,
the hawthorn fades, sweet smell lost in the granite pull,
strong stable smell up in smoke, Easter names popping bullets
of letters in my eyes, and I am caught, we are caught, in a freeze
of time.

Ah, Devon, will we never go home again?

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Front Stoop

From here night is the universal
shade, only stars wheeling
their slow orbits through trees,
clocking against the mountain top.

A skunk now and then joins late hours
and meanders nose-down like a hobo
scavenging for one half cigarette.
An inordinate amount of aircraft

settles down into and rises out of
Boston hanging red below the horizon;
passengers carry London or Paris
or Dublin dirt imbedded in their shoes,

move handshakes still in their hands,
freeze images behind their eyeballs.
They do not know how they are counted
upon, how they flesh up much of dreams

and ease all these nights into place.
Even the moon is a swift companion,
carrying its torch from limb to limb
of this sidewalk maple tree splendid

in its soft flames, its gold fire.
Some nights, perhaps in the right
corner of August, the moon explodes
all its mystery on leaf and limb,

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shatters a coin collection at bare feet,
colors each step with tomorrow.

The minted buttering of such nights
spills heavy weights on shoeless feet,

throws its own shadow into concrete.

Under such lights we are bright naked;
particles of bone are deeply touched,
tremble, and know the sudden absolutes

choice moons give away for nothing.

We have sat here half way past dawn,
fending insects and rodents, and shadows
from the naked elegance of one maple tree.

Friend to Perdition

Good friend has a problem:
he sees the moon through
a black window, an eye
of a tiger in his mirror,
space where there is no space.
We have talked under the edge
of morning's knife, the cut
moving where the cat last sat
beside the fire dog in the fireplace.
How lonely dawn cracks down
into entrails, visions, dreams
of coming back home again,
how much fire liquor has
in the small brazier of a cup,
or the first friendly toast.

He lets day tutor evening,
lip tutor his almighty throat,
the dry ravine he thought he wore;
he lets a tilted rose-colored glass
talk to his eyes, move his hands,

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tell him where alleys of night
move under his feet scant as fog,
neat as the rainbow's ending leg.
Nothing matters anymore, he thinks,
nothing beyond ice, a glass, a pale
shade of bubbling to the brim.
Nothing is as real as the shadow
in the hallway or bedroom ghost
sitting on a bare windowsill,
or the dry notice his throat gives
out in the middle of the day.
Nothing is real or fixed in place,
or hot from the tropic vineyards,
or France's endless fields
or California's cool.

Nothing he ever mentions
comes to terms with the grape,
how it wizens and twists and ages
in the blackening vats and urns
tipping outward to his lips.