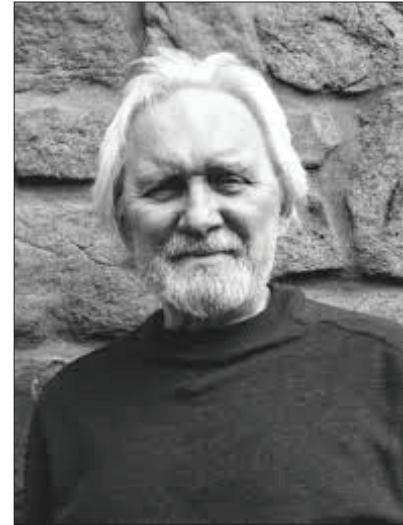


## Wilderness House Literary Review 15/3

**Born With**  
**By Michael Daley**  
**Dos Madres Press**  
**www.dosmadres.com**  
**Loveland, Ohio**  
**ISBN: 978-1-948017-85—5**  
**85 Pages**



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*Review by Dennis Daly*

*The art of narrative indirection requires not only a studied callousness, but also an abundance of fervor and a willingness to change course on a dime. Many of Michael Daley's poems initially spit mulled anger and resentment through and out of his earthy stanzas before metamorphosizing into the most hopefully dressed, delicate winged lyrics (or vice versa). Daley manages this by strategically interrupting his story-line or ending it abruptly, then dwelling on the word power that got him to that point.*

*Among School Children opens Daley's poetic collection with a delightful tale about the utilitarian use of a student's ugly suspenders by a frantic schoolteacher. The poet, himself brags that "I've lifted hundreds out of sorrow with my story. / If I've known you a week, I've told it three times." The story ends predictably enough with the protagonist child lashed to his chair with said suspenders as the fire alarm rings. But the piece doesn't end there. Employing a metaphor of life altering implication, Daley comments on the rest of his artistic career with his fearful ending,*

*After a lifetime, I understand her calm, her need  
to reassure us—we were babies—but I knew then—  
her eyes on me—my best friends giggling as they filed  
to safety, some looking back—her eyes on me,  
that silent glare from my first cherished Muse—  
I knew she would leave me to burn.*

*Another poem set early in his collection, Daley entitles *Awakening in Five Irish Towns*. In this eight-stanza piece the poet takes his own measurement foretelling the general bent of his future from the lifelines on the palms of his hands and the posture of other hands. His narrative documentation devolves into an historic dreamtime and back again. In one stanza, set in the legendary city of Cobh, Daley confronts the statue of a rebel ancestor, Eamon O'Dalaigh (Ned Daly), a leader of the 1916 Irish Rebellion. O'Dalaigh was later shot by a British firing squad for his troubles. The poet laments the loss of focus as the stubborn courage of his contemporary Bobby Sands and other Irish hunger strikers are barely remembered,*

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*Later I awoke, my clothes still drenched,  
in a train car next to a man and a woman  
who knew him as Ned Daly,  
citizens who barely could recall the Maze hunger-  
strikers wiped out of history as if a tornado  
scoured prayer beads from their hands.*

*In Daley's poem, Children of the Storm, his persona encounters hurricane refugees from New Orleans, flush with cash. The man, who has a patch over one eye, hopelessly in love. The woman on a mission. They buy an oversized desk to take with them to Montana in their van. There is mystery here. Possibly alcoholism and violence. They also own a dog and a gun rack. But the rest of the story is not forthcoming. Instead, the poem becomes an internal conversation and a judgment of good character. The poem concludes with that judgment,*

*Wish I'd shown some sympathy for the eye.  
Or his Homeric allusions. She's loved him at least  
the dog's whole life. She hunted this desk, after all.*

*She and Polyphemus will lug it boover twelve steps.  
Is that how they me?  
Sobered up and blasted out of New Orleans?*

*It swells their estate of antiques.  
A gun rack great-grandfather milled,  
a thing he'll never pawn.*

*Gentle people, small talk.*

*Perhaps more than any other piece, Daley's title poem, Born With, delivers both his pragmatic narrative pull and extraordinary lyrical power that works in another dimension, a more ethereal plane. The two angles of perception almost compete in the arena of Daley's page. Yet, strangely, the entire tableau is painted within a phone call from the old man to his poet-son. Hurricane weather had burst into the old man's home and chaos ensues. A 911 call is made and fireman arrive to tend to the old man and plug up the holes in his dilapidated house. After the fact, the actions of these brave interlopers invigorate the man and transport him outside himself. He becomes amazed at the goodness of the external world. Listen to Daley's exquisite language,*

*They came through the howler—winter a curse off ocean-  
driven snows,  
sea wall crushed on, hour by iced hour, wave on top of wave.  
A spray on the porch so nonchalant was ironically gentle.  
In strobe light emergency they bustled in,  
Burley friendly guys, meaty fists lugged soot-pocked helmets,  
one of them bandy-legged with a worried smile—and up  
he said, right up the steps to the bedroom,  
the old marriage bed emptied—  
he wouldn't have mentioned to them  
much less to me—thirty years ago,  
the room itself draped in dust and salt rot,*

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*or that he slept in a room even noisier —  
howl of ghost winters gurgled  
sea rash, wave toss, rock crack —  
a gaggle in the old man's dream...*

*First the poet details the procedure, then fury sets in, then numbness spreads in his piece entitled *The Last Master*—about the euthanasia of a dog. I like this poem a lot, but it is a little too close to home. Glossing past the tendency to anthropomorphize and the obvious emotionality of the moment, the poet turns sadness into acrimony. We are talking about love and the death of consciousness, aren't we? Here is how the piece concludes,*

*We're past the sniff of bush, piss on tree,  
black eye rolled back to the master, last wag,  
past the killing praise, softly voiced, Good Boy,  
that soothes an old man's rage and stops my heart.*

*Some poets are born with an internalized muse, a muse who has a will of her own and a set of contrary aesthetics. Daley is one of these hosts. The lucky bastard.*

The art of narrative indirection requires not only a studied callousness, but also an abundance of fervor and a willingness to change course on a dime. Many of Michael Daley's poems initially spit mulled anger and resentment through and out of his earthy stanzas before metamorphosing into the most hopefully dressed, delicate winged lyrics (or vice versa). Daley manages this by strategically interrupting his story-line or ending it abruptly, then dwelling on the word power that got him to that point.

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