

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/3

Tomas O'Leary

Angel Orients Lost Soul

At the Oasis of Lost Souls
where dreams defer to reason
and dogs all night are fast asleep

you will find your missing face
in the course of a pleasant stay.
Rest assured this all was created

with you in mind. Come, let's link arms
and stroll about. Consider us
angels embedded in you.

Did you know that when you're smiling
the whole world smiles with you?
Well, it does. No response expected,

you just got here for goodness sake,
but take note of our residents' faces.
Not one is not smiling, and for bonus

non-threatening sparks of irony in their eyes.
We encourage humor here, we strive to keep
abreast of stray chickens, ha ha, you're

very quiet, eh? -- which is perfectly normal.
But listen: Forget that sadass rehab claptrap
you think you've been signed in for.

This is Limbo without the angst, a humane
and pleasurable space between Heaven and Hell.
Our sole requirement is: Enjoy your stay

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until They say, okay, be on your way.
Have you noticed I'm wearing a white coat?
I'm an angel; wings are so yesterday.

Only angels can pass through the Big Doors
in our white coats. We sincerely request
you not think those doors even exist.

Once your heart and mind start conversing
you'll want fresh supplies. We'll give you
everything but knives or rope, matches, guns,

ephemera that might lie in your dark reservoir
of impulsive resolution. The Oasis of Lost Souls
hugs you fiercely to its breast of welcome.

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Away With It

I need to save everything
because what I would throw away
would surely come back to haunt me
and I'd be nagged by ghosts of words
I'd likely never have revisited
but now can't, leaving me bereft.

This very thing I just retrieved
tosses its mask, strips to the bone, yet
parses insecurely, makes no leap
over the chasm between itself
and what I'd save. Away with it then!
Fat chance I'd ever return.

But no, I must save everything. And once
in a thousand times, called back
to what lies buried, I dig one up
and practice life's attention, if only to see
how blest or damned I am
to give the common dead a fresh kick.

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Off With the Layers

Off with the layers, off they go
to flash and settle on the sprawling lawn.
We answer the call of the Solstice
encrypted in tiny breezes.
What body not slowed by rigor mortis
would spurn the full touch of this night's moon?

How naked we are is the measure
our skins like to take of our spirits,
while the drummers drive our bodies
in heated, hilarious dance.
The night is warm, the grass
a dream of heaven to bare soles.

We are wildly modest,
getting younger by the minute
than the older we grow.

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The Prophet's Barbecue

I roast on my spit of thought
a leg of lamb big as the sky

I flap my hands fast as hummingbirds
to send out my invitations

The idea of a savory aroma
fills the noses of my followers' minds

They'll not squander their hunger this night
on bellies that growl like chained lions

Tonight they will feast on the best idea
I have ever cooked up: to cook up an idea

Vegetarians, carnivores, even vegans
may consume my idea without caution

I, Prophet, foresee a fine evening
gleaned of lamb off my spit of thought

There's nothing that calls out the hungry
like hunger, well spitted, well turned.

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Scratching on Frost

I speak to him who writes this note.
He eyes me as if I'm the goat
of my conceit it is not I
who writes the note. I don my coat

and feather me with thoughtful snow,
the woods just near enough to know
I never stepped outside to sigh,
but stayed inside and thought of snow.

I thought of snow, and of the wood.
I took my coat off and I stood
before the window like a shy
cello, loath to sound too good.

And yet, the strains attained the spheres.
My past, my present, all my years
were like a horse that thought it queer
to find itself inducted here.

As to this note: It is a note
scratched on a frosty pane of dream
which fool might scry, and think to reap,
while I, who do not write it, sleep.

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Shadow Day

One day when the sun was our cup of tea, the air
crisp as a biscuit, our shadows proclaimed Shadow Day.

Did they give us a heads-up? Not even a wink,
so we were our normal selves, just all out walking,

parades of purpose, all in our shoes, knowing
somewhere was where we were going. Our shadows

came on as a tickle at first, then feathery kisses,
then frenzied caresses. We tried hard to keep up

appearances, stay in step, show no face
of this weirdness we failed to remember

ever having felt before. Long ago we were glad
of our shadows, best friends at prayer or play.

Together we took little steps in every direction
that called us by name. Today the tense shifts

and the present we walk in knows only
our footfall, not our name, and we measure

our steps by the shadow,
and gather our thoughts in the shadow.

Today, we are lost souls gone walking.
Wake up, lost souls! Shadow Day!

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Silence

Imagine silence is itself
imaginary. Imagine
we who long for silence
find it. We taste it
on our tongues and in our ears.
We are abstract, as silence
is abstract. Philosophy
is deaf to its abstractness.
Silence is deaf to philosophy.
Deafness is deaf to silence
and to deafness.
Imagined or not, then, silence.