

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

Bruce McRae

Upon Demand

What we want is a river
we can wade in to up to our necks.

(cue rolling river)

What we want is a bit of friction
(sparks fly, hair stands on end)
and an approximate diameter.

(audience fidgets impatiently)

What we want, no, need, is
a burning bridge or possibly two.

(woman leaps from cake)

It's only then can we save our island
(show picture of island)
from the demons of iniquity.

(a child in a sandbox, weeping)

What we want is total control
and a media-friendly catchphrase,
(sound of fly buzzing annoyingly)
as well as several newsworthy items.

(woman in back pew of church sneezes,
her germs spreading like a bad idea)

What we want, what we demand,
is unity and peace and apple pie.

(run grainy film of gallows
being constructed by chained apes)

Then, and only then, will you
and I live in, and share in, prosperity.

(flash peace sign)

May the Lord have mercy on us.

(show face pushed into mud as music
blares for a thousand years)

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The House Of Being

Can't say what it was or wasn't, isn't or is.
Dipping a cup into the well of narrative,
sipping words, lips like parchment, throat sand-dry,
wiping my brow with the last page of the last book,
the mind, or at least mine, like a hot wind blowing
mouth to mouth, opening and slamming doors,
scattering the poet-plumber's papers far and high –
there being so few to read what so many have written.

I've been writing this same line for half a century,
precepts and principles taking an ear-bashing, joining the dodo
as a fine example of what not to do and how not to do it,
learning the ropes, of which I now have enough to hang myself.

In other words, the words of others prove a balm:
A tongue has no bones, and yet it breaks bones.
Words leave no scar, but to kill with words is also murder.
A word is no arrow, but it can pierce the heart.
Grant me wild expressions, Heavens; or I shall burst.

Or we simmer in the sulk of silence,
a noiseless noise heard round the world, this blue world,
its embattled landscapes and assorted scented sceneries,
this wordless globe, speaking in signs and sing-song soliloquies
of continental drift, of waterworks and weather,
a place where one word is better than many,
a good word drawing a nail from the heart,
golden words able to open an iron gate,
bringing the lizard out from its hole.
Cold water to a scalded tongue.

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The Disinherited

My parents' souls lie under the silt.
They flap like laundered sheets on a line.
My parents' souls are inexact opinions
darting about in the spatiotemporal continuum.
They're wandering over the lonely downs.
They scratch their names on my windows.
Bump into the furniture. Unsettle the dog.
Their footfall is infinite
and makes a noise like feathers ruffling.

My parents' souls fit into the jar
you save your spare coppers in.
Always they seem on the verge of departure.

And they're shy, never coming when I call.
Their short tempers are flaring, if very quietly.
They appear infrequently, like mist in the mountains,
like harbour seals in the bay,
like winter lightning.

The angels say my parents' souls
are two rivers merging,
two lines converging in a theoretical distance.
Like smoke going in and out of God's mansion.

Sometimes their scent informs the emotions
I've been fostering all these lonesome years.
Sometimes they speak in soon-forgotten dreams.
My memories are haunted.

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Alive, my parents toyed with the self's destruction;
but they're not ghosts.

Souls aren't to be confused with spectres.

A spirit and a spook are two other things,
two separate matters, like iron and rainbows,
or vaccines and honey.

Like death and despair.

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Some Sentences

"Backward ran sentences until reeled the mind." - Wolcott Gibbs

Behold, the complete set
of obtuse diversifications.

Very slowly, back away
from the mouse's intentions

The crickets are thinking.

In my blood are tiny Amazons
whipped into a frenzy.

I'm churning death's butter.

It's as if finding a flaming peach pit
in every box of cereal.

Then come, come and bow to your master.

There's a shoe singing down a well.

Lightbeams are struggling with calculus.

Go to your blind woman, Dr. Anubis,
and tell her about the dark in your shoes.

No one's going to swallow a story
about a bobby pin on a killing spree.

Run along, little pair of legs,
back to the cause of Mother's ruin.

You're the thing in me

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failing time after time.

To believe that death and love
are soon to be married.

A pig has fallen in love with a spoon.

The apocalyptic dog is talking.