

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

Philip O'Neil
Fall First

Damp from the coll's dew
sodden in high-hill drizzle
we skirted the horseshoe
our black dog dodging the cairns
sniffing at sheep bones
jawing whitened skulls
my cloak billowing in the coast wind
while you shuffled behind
head bowed in self-righteous pain
mocking the heavy weather.

One step nearer the edge of the shoe
all our grievances bunched up
In a smile as the wind lifted my cloak
I stepped blindly into fog
leapt into air
fell like a star onto an altar of stone
in the seconds I flew, I heard
the dog barking wildly.
You were far behind
huddled under your shroud.

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The Demiurge

"I am still the soul of wood and rock.
However hard you rail against my exile
I still watch from my high balcony
Stare across this river and this bridge
Watching shells trace whistling arcs
Necking in the dying rays of flickering fires
Still awaiting a harder chisel to free me
I pace my prison with consolation.
Beware the cynics who mock my absent alliance
Tread carefully as cocoon threads are breaking!
Wait for me in muddied forest paths.
Look for imprints in well-worn tracks
See how far they lie deeper the darker you go
And fall into a shadow of their own making
To hollows once hallowed by men now markers
Away with your trowels and scrapers
Digging idiot foundations. Trackers of nonsense!
The armies of signtoters. Bibles of excellence
Labelling each echo of the singular
With yet more ciphers
Altars to Gods now buried in archives
Buried in the mumbo-jumbo of mediums and wizards
It is I who cast out spirits
I, who threw the mantle over false pretenders
I, who banished the first heresies of fire
I, who have now become a footnote in history
Buried in a shallow grave
Like a raped child
In the peat of an archaeological dig
But beware for I am rising layer by layer
Some will scratch their heads thinking me ancient
Others divide the heavens
And find me a despondent demiurge
Others will fear my revelation.

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I might arrive as a curio in a junk shop
Float from the spire of a cathedral
Or burst from the belly of a child
I was the pillared virtue
Became a pilloried victim
But the God of the Steps is returning
Insulted and Angry.”

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End of Season

The beaches are almost empty now:
A few bronzed boys play handball,
A girl, sweated against the wind,
Sucks on a cigarette as her dog barks
And waves bring with their spit and spume
Bottles of mineral water
And seaweed engaged to twine and plastic wraps.

Time marked by the ebb and flow of the dandruff sea
As the last sun worshippers wish themselves into
A browner tan on boulders and gun emplacements
Which squint out to sea through slits
Whose secret, paranoid entrances
Still afford youngsters rushed encounters.

The out of season night slumbers on through morning,
Snoring bodies secreting Oporto, Jerez Dulce, sec, muscatel and rancio.
Husbands playing dead with the guilt of last night's visit
To the whorehouse by the police station
Where black-eyed girls from the south have time on their hands.

While the night came again and the rains from the hills
Fanned green and grey into
The cold sea with its trawlers rocking on grey waves:
Rains from the hills flushed down the rieras
Where children are plucked from deep gulleys of streets as
Mud rushes in torrents from the sudden storms
Sweeping everything in its path to the sea -
Cars, prams, tricycles, people.

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And the town church takes all in its stride
As it tolls through the day and night, to the hour, to the half, to the quarter
But punctuated, recorded, chimes ushered by batteries run low.
They had long given up the real carrillon for fear the belfry would crack
So timing the tides and floods was a recorder
Whose batteries a priest had forgotten to change.

And like a sleeping Indian hearing his name I woke
To hear the clock catch up with time.
Hearing no echo, no resonance, no longeur
Just a punctuated, slow, statement of fact.
The closed church deaf to all around.