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Poems

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Poems

Abstract

RHINELAND, CITY LIGHTS, ECHOES, THE NIGHT BURNS WITH A WHITE FIRE, THINGS, SUMMER NEAR THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

bad faith with people, bad faith with Ottoman empire
bad faith with Mohommad Ali Pasha.

So Pasha invite Mamelukes in dinner.
This wooden couch where you sit, see how it open?
Inside he place musket, many musket.
Then lid closed; no one know where muskets sleep.
He called *Baltagis* to serve meats and viands.
You know *Baltagis*? Axe-men;
people who were paid to wield axes once.
Pasha start paying them now to wield guns.
When Mamelukes take dinner and finish coffee
Axe-men take muskets and finish Mamelukes.
Only one Bey escaped, all others killed.
Mohommad Ali Pasha, very clever man!

Lauris Edmond

RHINELAND

I walked in the early morning
down the path by the water, and there
I could smell the old river smell

of the brimming Rhine, hear
its purposeful lapping, see the long barges
linked together GEFO TANK2GEFO ROTTERDAM

out already, stooging steadily,
and brown-stained, long abused as it is,
the capable waterway taking on yet another

of its numberless days for shouldering
Europe's cargoes, bearing its poisons
on that wide and glistening back;

and it was as though it turned and looked up
from its liquid trudging, to remind me
that a continent's dying still richly harbours

the knowledge of ancient endurance — which
I acknowledged, nodding to the Old Survivor,
though all round me the elderberry flowers

narrowed, going down with their season
and the faintly acrid-scented may sprigs,
dying too in their own stiff arms.

CITY LIGHTS

for Anne French

On a still evening you stare at the sea's glistening
till it calls up the sheen of that more or less oval pool

of light on your bent knee as you sat marvelling
at taffeta and sophistication at 17 say, or 18

and had to stroke it in wonder till it merged into
the whole temple of light you had gloriously become.

Now as you watch the gleam separates without moving
into needles, stilettos, rapiers, points plunging down

as they form, till the whole darkening body of the sea
is deeply, brilliantly divided. Light on the surface

has produced a total internal exposure. As for the city
that turns on the current, it lies as always out of reach.

You took your hand away of course from that wondering
caress, to dance the two-step or was it a waltz

pursuing the light on the arrived moment towards
impossible fulfilments, unimagined treacheries.

In the end you don't see the city at all, only
the reflections stabbing the motionless water.

ECHOES

You have to learn solitude,
perhaps by recalling echoes, how they
taunted the hills you clambered over as children
(how you laughed at so small a miracle) —

you learnt of course to change the vibrations,
stand on steeper ground above the sheep tracks
so your call came back awry, turning
your name to loony syllables.

It's different now; it's the ache
of the unknown, the trying
for reverberations
from a voice you do not know

as though you stand in plantains
shivery grass and sorrel
and call with a rising intonation
when the cadence of your life is dumb.

There was a wild dog too, in the house
below the hill; that's the silence
leaping forward, always from behind
so you know you have no time to run away.

THE NIGHT BURNS WITH A WHITE FIRE

The night burns with a white fire
and the moths move silently
among the moon flowers; I see her
in the garden standing quite still
beyond the blurred darkness of the fig tree
smiling a little, her pale face
familiar but smaller than I remember it.
I cannot go to her; the Acheron,
river of sorrow, lies between us
and the moon flowers' unearthly forebodings.

THINGS

Yes I like it here
things have their place
at night there are lights in the water
if you offered me something unexpected
a fast car, a bantam hen
a small bunch of violets
purple velvet and looking authentic
I would be touched
though I could easily refuse

I have choices galore
but the same grey trees lean to the wind
at my window
the same unwary bird is killed
every day on the grass
and I long to long for something attainable
by sheer hard work
— like cars or clothes —

whatever would not, when achieved,
stay in its place looking perfect

with death's shadow
slowly deepening
behind it.

SUMMER NEAR THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

Midnight and still light, Leningrad and I
awake to another white night, that spare
other world where each leaf and stone
is not to be approached, scarcely named,
so rare, so unearthly has it become.

Somewhere there must be a temperate time
the plain night and day that I know, and there
I imagine the green oval of some tiny park
glowing dewy and crisp, lovers walking
just such a path as this, reaching up

to real blossoms (tree-sized narcissi,
white, scentless) the gold dome of a solid
St Ives, as grand, that gleams
in a simple cycle of night-times and noons.
This is more strange: time, caught

in a soft frost of seasons, has left us
outside the door of the days, strangers
to ourselves, opaque shapes in some
neutral clarity — we can't call it light —
on the other side of the air. Half afraid,

I touch the bright grass, dandelion-studded,
the white flowers that perch on the trees,
and hear incommunicable whisperings
from a white Polar noonday stalk the silence
between the Russian lovers and me.