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Poems

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Poems

Abstract

DISCOVERY, PORCH

Brian Henry Hughes

DISCOVERY

Of course no one sets out to discover
 artificial insemination, natural selection, wooden dentures
 while removing the garbage or paying the cleaner
 or adhering to the missionary like an upright quaker:
 no one is adequately prepared for the sight of the unfamiliar
 for the unfamiliar sight precludes preparation (not to over-
 emphasize vision's importance, being the faultiest of our
 senses, open to trickery at every global corner:
 instances of vision's failures dwell everywhere,
 as do instances of failures caused by those failures –
 the veteran vacationer who neglects to remember
 that abandoning one's spot is always a risky venture
 (why someone recommended in some handbook or other
 to slip some kid a fiver to sit by the meter
 and say he's waiting for his father) –
 others' fortunes have been made while some of us rehearse:
 cases have been settled, fines levied, and the town's coffers
 topped off while we earnest myopians squint into the future,
 on the verge of deciding to settle a colony or further
 wander, unable to see beyond the third row in the theatre,
 if the woman on the screen is laughing or dry-heaving: how much richer
 our home movies and moving patterns would be if we relied on another
 to show us to our seats – if we let the tongue be our usher).

From *Half-baked Dreams*

It was scribbled on at home
 His mother's mangled, throwaway words
 Sank post-mortem in those soft, white brains,
 Until he saw himself, a shape of shadow parts
 And other people's pleas.
 He had been wanted in by everyone,
 Their fingerprints missed him.

Old enough to shave,
 He took the blade and made
 His own shape from his chin.
 He paid his checks and accepted stamps in
 He made his face a famous wrong
 Until it was the signature
 With which he built his prison.

PORCH

The last resort? To inch along, naturally.
 And the cultivation of a pure anything.
 Pollen is our primary cash crop,
 as in Short Pump and Powhatan County.
 The pharmacist works over-time sorting antihistamines,
 his nose now mucronate in its glaring.
 O the fragility of the nasal cavity!
 The etiolation of devotion!
 Margining profits from phlegmatic effulgence!
 Not for this do we hold our noses
 to the learned tomes. Febrile hours are upon us.
 Witness: the distribution of cotton swabs
 to the exclusion of other respectably perfect implements.
 (The competition folded years ago, –
 a classic case of mismanagement
 and weaning from the trough;
 such a laissez-faire languor can lose thousands,
 more if you've got it.) (And the opportunity costs involved:
 unthinkable!) The ledger has superseded the finger
 as gesture – the platonic and the downright erotic.
 The prescription should be a carpal affair.

My hand is cramped from work
 My gut has a twisted turn
 In bed with books a quiet talk
 Rustle speaks of me

Window keeps ticking in minutes
 Front my low-drawn, yellow head
 Rhinoceros of the yellow
 Of ink from green shined belly

My hand rummy pen keeps going
 Through notes, through book and life
 To enrich the scholars' holdings
 Penwork that cramps my hand