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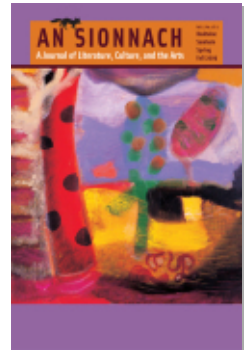
Painting Rain for Paula Meehan

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Painting Rain for Paula Meehan

It only seems like yesterday. Emerging from the Blue Mosque we glimpsed a sky of tattered blue above the Bosphorus that put me in mind of the blue baling twine you used to talk about, wisps and snags of it like blue sheep's wool flickering on the barbed wire fences of Leitrim. A sudden shower. Up in the Iron Mountains the old lads would be playing full-throttle bouncy fiddle and flute music, and I imagined you lilting the tunes to yourself in the barn—or maybe it was me, putting myself in your shoes—as you tried to undo the hames in the corner; the word being, as you pointed out to me, the entanglement a horse's harness becomes if discarded. Haywire, so to speak. A yesterday word which still serves a purpose. I spent today thinking off and on of blue baling twine, and the ramifications it might take.

The beloved adze and auger, bodkin and borer, chisel and clamp, diestock and drill, you wrote. I heard the alphabetic shuttle clack behind the words that time we watched the carpet-weaver tread the loom to such a beat as yours. We followed the pattern through the stone corridors and dead ends of the harem, the incommunicado writing on the blue tiles. I remember you fingering a length of cloth in the market. Spun into the yarn, fibres of blue & yellow & purple, the occasional wisp of orange. You were wearing blue shoes, more of a turquoise to match your earrings. Turkish turquoise. I hear you read your poems aloud and your feet keeping counterpoint to their music untwining the lines widdershins. Your eyes looking into whatever elsewhere the words have taken you to. Who snagged that book in the high reaches of the oak?

The sequins turn up everywhere, shed from the white satin dress she'd worn this side of the threshold. She stared Death down with a bottle of

morphine in one hand, a bottle of Jameson in the other. Sequences of red sequins found in cracks and crannies, from the pillowcase to the split in the sofa to the hole in the lino. Droplets of blood on snow as red as the lips of raven-haired maidens. For the unlettered gypsy girl looking into a written sentence is like looking into a bush. Numbers are blackbirds that flap up together from the page. From Istanbul you would have flown on to Ikaria but a neighbour's illness called you home. In the process of lost wax the boy who flew too close to the sun drifts down through the airwaves, his body unfeathering into green bronze. The maid becomes a tree.

The wolf tree is the one with laterals. Ramifications. We look and look for it, the original one and only tree, until it snags the eye. Those branches growing out and sideways from the bole are like the lines of songs that lie behind the words we write, the verticals becoming horizontals. Stave and staff. We spoke of the holy trees bedecked with rosary beads and bandages, snagged with plastic bags. Where a saint once planted his staff, or the hoof of his horse struck the ground, a healing well was sprung. Time enough to lose track of time. At Shelling Hill a lady made of flowers lies buried. Your grandmother picks lilacs and roses for the May altar. A ten-storey apartment block goes in over the overlapping tracks of your feet and your father's feet in the back field. You stand on the threshold. Is that the door opening or closing?

You jig and you reel through molecular spin. From some unknown tree a blackbird casts a line of loopy music. Day after day you go out into drizzle, shower, downpour. Spring rain patters in the memory each perfect drop. The lives of the dead run through everything. The end of the field is the start of the new estate. The linen napery you gave me has become blue flax blossom all summer long. You write a name with a hazel wand on the ebb as reams of geese descend. The tide comes in, the words dissolve. Disheveling, unravelling the skeins. Every single thing stands for something else. I take your words. They change. When they go out into the world, they are no longer yours or mine. What is there to be done? When everything is done, we start again from scratch. And yesterday becomes today. 