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New Hibernia Review, Volume 5, Number 1, Earrach/Spring 2001, pp.
25-32 (Article)

Published by Center for Irish Studies at the University of St. Thomas

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/nhr.2001.0012>

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SONNET ON THE OPENING OF WRIXON'S WINE CELLAR

Arrayed, they drowse on their flanks,
slender-throated bottles of Burgundy, Bordeaux,
slowly mellowing in cobwebbed, umbral silence
before we broach their tilted necks.
They dream of burgeoning upon the vine,
nourished by the soil, the sun, the rain:
empurpled Cabernet, effervescent Couvray,
the lusty, florid Chinon of Rabelais.
Wine, the new empire, garlanding the earth,
with all the noble rottenness of grape
stored in cask or vat or magnum shape
to slake our thirst, provoke our mirth,
till we are drawn into the dance by Bacchus,
wreathed in vine leaves, smiling upon us.

CHAIN LETTER

Love letters, like messages, telegrams
from a more real world. You write
or read them, elated, trembling,

then stumble across them, moons later,
bundled in a corner, in a drawer,
where you had hidden or dropped them,

as you might a tingling live wire
after the shock has flooded your veins,
and you scramble back to your daily situation.

Or buried in the proverbial stray volume
hoping the bulk of the pages might deaden
that raw pulse of exposed feeling.

And now, to come upon them, all over again,
a different, “a sadder and a wiser man,”
bemused by the fury of these wild lines

to someone changed, estranged, or gone.

BETWEEN

For Michael Viney

That deep, dark pool. To come upon it,
after driving across the Gap in midsummer,
the hedges freighted with fuchsia, hawthorn,
blood-red and white under shining veils of rain.

A wind flurry fincombing the growing grain
as a full-uddered cow precedes us along the lane,
a curious calf poking its lubberly head over stone
while the country road winds betwixt and between.

Sudden, at the summit of the Knockmealdowns,
a chill black lake, a glacial corrie or tarn,
some large absence, hacked, torn
from the far side of the dreaming cliff.

A brooding silence, a hoarded font of nothing,
lightless, still, opaque . . . severely alone.
Except when a shiver, a skirl of wind
makes the waters tremble, mild as that field of grain.

But on the shorn flank of the mountain,
a flowering, flaring bank of rhododendron,
exalted as some pagan wedding procession.
Fathomless darkness, silent raging color:

A contrast to make your secret self tremor,
like a child cradled in this quarry's murmur,
delighted but lost between the dark, the blossoming.
On one side, a moorland's bareness, rufous heather

Sheltering a long-nebbed curlew, bog asphodel or lobelia
and, on the other, that terraced orchestra of color,
avenues of lavish amethyst blossom.
Chill of winter: full warmth of summer,

colliding head on in stillness, and heavy aroma.

LOOKING GLASS

Combing her long hair out, like some heroine
from the Fenian tales, my aunt, Mary O'Meara,
confronting her bedroom mirror in Abbeylara;
her hair was graying, but still plentiful,
thick and burnished as a horse's mane
beneath those slow, luxurious strokes,

Myself, perched by her side, a motherless boy,
fascinated by the crackle of static electricity,
(a Brooklyn trolley swaying, sparks flying, lickety-
split; or clickety-clack, knitting needles clashing),
the way she tossed its heavy length back,

Or, mumbling through a mouthful of hairpins,
ransacked her memory to amuse me:
her Old World courtship, her favorite story;
the way the young Waterford schoolmaster
came down the valley from his post in Rarogan
to visit her, in her father's house, in Garvaghey:

"He used sit beside me, where you are now,
watching intently: my hair was chestnut brown,
my crowning glory, he gallantly called it;
one day, in the mirror, I saw his hand reach out
and almost touch it: our love's first secret."

THE WELL-WROUGHT URN

Ancient vessels were ceremonial,
lofted by druid, rabbi, priest.
Once the temple of the body shone
like the dwelling of the Holy Ghost.
A lonely vigil before the altar
cleansed the knight for his quest.
In the silence of the ornate urn

princely dust was laid to rest.
Now such rites fade, spectral
as a chrome or plastic vessel.
Part spirit, we long for past ritual.
Brightness of flowers on a lit table
ignites memories of goblet, grail:
each petal powerful, still, frail.

DUMBSHOW

You'll have to run down to the shop:
my head dips, a dumbshow of assent,
as my aunt pens out the lengthening list
of articles no longer found on our musty shelf.

Windswift as Wilson, the Wizard's sprinting star,
I whip down the always widening Broad Road,
then huddle, hang around, hesitate in the dark
cavern at the back of Kelly's newer shop.

Until there is no one left, and then I try
to fishgasp something, but in the end
just push forward the scribbled grocery list
and nod eagerly, as each item is cleared off.

A gas lamp hangs its hissing circle
over the flitches of lean and back bacon,
ropes of sausages, thick crusted bread;
and all those words thronged in my head.

Every time I stand forth, fluent-tongued
in some foreign place, before an audience,
I am haunted, dogged by that mute lad,
as, warmly introduced, I step from the darkness.

A NEW ART

On the way towards a new art
she halts where the ochre earth
drinks warmth all day, to turn
towards evening, a flaring red.

The sparkle of this dry light
breeds wisdom, where herb and moth
blend fragrances, and the cricket
rubs its metal legs against the night.

SUN HYMN

High summer, and Fota Island is in bloom,
flowering cherry and glow of rhododendron;
on country hedges, a fragrant cargo of hawthorn.

Flagrant or hidden, the power of the sun,
life-giving force, constantly streaming down.
In the evening, his consort mirrors him.

St. John's Eve, bonfires curl to heaven.
Day star, *fáinne geal*, Sol, Hyperion,
all cultures bear witness to your warm

kindling at the heart of our creation.
Egyptian Ra or Re, lord of the pantheon,
scarab burning the sands he shines upon.

Dying each evening, born each flaming dawn,
over stark hillsides of Greece, blue Aegean,
Helios rolls the gold chariot of the sun,

white horses trained by his father, Hyperion,
upon steep, cloud-shrouded Olympus mountain.
A change of scene; our Lord is born,

a light descending to transfix the Virgin
a light illuminating the cave at Bethlehem,
where smiles a child, the Christian Sun.

Heart of grace, Dantean mandala of the universe,
where the large rose windows marry light and space
in the medieval cathedrals, the gentle furnace

of his burning love lightens the earth.
Bourges, Notre Dame, Sainte Chapelle, Chartres,
celebrate this glorious dying and rebirth,

which happens so casually for us each day
as the sun pursues his heavenly pathway,
bestowing its grave light, almost indifferently.

While ceaselessly the cloud cattle saunter by
where on Fota, the blue mirror gathers the sky,
transforming light into the pulse of energy.

A slanting cathedral roof for the space age,
a small sun temple, child of Stonehenge,
harnessing for us the suns pretended rage:

gold band of eternity, wedding ring of reality,
Andean ingot of glory, paschal candle of the sky,
flame at the heart of mystery, our system's burning eye.

POSTSCRIPT

A fuel fiercer than love: bitterness!
As I bend to this long neglected page
in my stonecold attic, another, younger man
 bends to your brown face: another less
 mottled hand reaches out to cover yours
 which lately lay so warm in mine
 now desperately trying to forge a line
where furious, calm, I can control my rage,
 wrestle my pain so as to take up again
my old-fashioned courtly poet's pilgrimage
 towards the ideal, woman or windmill;
seething inside, but smiling like a sage.

STARSPILL

That secret laughter
which, on bad days,
 keeps us buoyant,
awaiting the hidden
glitter of accident.

White wave breaking
beneath Mount Eagle;
a guardian, mist-veiled?
 no lift in the sky,
 no glow behind it:
a fierce rain spitting
as we reach Bandon
for a lost day's drinking.

Beyond midnight I push
open the stubborn pub door
to confront a full moon,
 and a spill of stars
across a sky opaque
and black as a bog pool:
dice strewn across
a table of velvet.