

POND'S COLD CREAM



Patrick Warner

Where they stood together, in quiet devotion,
The empty space between made a spindle
Whose outline wavered with their bodies' motion,
Flaring from time to time like a penny candle
When it hits some flaw or kink along the wick,
Or touches the wax-well in the candle-stick.

Through this space I could see the priest perform,
Hunched over and whispering, holding the host
As a scientist might hold a moth for collection,
Flanked by this man in Tweed jacket and vest,
And by his wife whose youthful complexion
Made me think of Oil of Ulay, Pond's Cold Cream.

Something about it all dragged up the morning
I stood by a boghole, half watching the weather,
Half watching myself in tea-coloured clouds
With no thought at all that I might be sinking
Until I felt the first cold dribble pour in over
The two yellow lines at the tops of my boots.

Perhaps it was the gentle way he took her hand—
When I knew he, in his youth, was a hurler—
That conjured up those leggy water spiders,
Whose playing turned this way and that way
In and around the outline of my shadow
Which now, more and more, looms as a grandstand.

It was the hesitance that briefly showed in his face
As he turned to guide her out of her seat—
That had me wishing for that last-minute cross,
That had me catch myself holding my breath
As a group of players rose up like a sculpture
And one hand perfectly grasping the sliotar.

Perhaps this was the reason that I reached down
And scooping a handful of frogspawn and foam
Began to apply it, slowly, all over my skin,
Working for an atmosphere of timeless ennui,
And building up to the high point of the ritual
When I swallowed back this primordial cocktail.

To any observer—a passing farmer, or a hunter—
I might have seemed part penitent, part heretic,
For the next thing I knew I was down on my knees
Lashing my flanks with bundles of heather,
And speaking in a language, mostly monosyllabic,
A sermon in tongues for the bicycling hares.

And indeed, for a time, I was around the twist
And shinnying down that spiral chromosome ladder,
Unfastening the colourful genes as I went,
Unzipping them all from attic to basement
Until, at last, I held her X in my right fist
And his humble, fatal, passive Y in the other.

In *Secular Epiphinorum* it all came clear to me—
That if I could wield each strand as a cable
I just might jump-start their ancient vehicle,
Be there for those mornings the engine won't catch,
Be there while they idle the day making tea,
Be there for that late evening spin to the church.