

FOURS POEMS



Conor O'Callaghan

LANDSCAPE WITH CANAL

So this, the means to an end, is chosen
as the landscape of a private fiction
where the tracks you make are all-too-well-known.
Though this time, since whatever will happen
will happen most likely in the open,
you set in in a derelict autumn
when all its symbolic fruit has fallen.
The action is yours alone to govern
As long as you make the silence broken
by the presence on the bank of someone
that's both anticipated and sudden.
As long as you don't forget to mention
that the voice at once without and your own
is the one that leaves the rest unspoken
and between the past and town has taken
the long way around a simple question.

Say if you wish your surrogate father
who charmed the birds in a yard of feathers.
Or say the shade of the young schoolmaster
who sometime during your last free summer
was dumped by his girl for something better
and found with a shotgun two days later
on a disused farm before the border.
The choice is yours—it will scarcely matter.
There'll be in the distance a curfew hour
knelled across the not-so-familiar.
Walking back the short cut none the wiser
through the mill and the gates of the manor,
there must always be some faceless other
on the towpath by the slick of water
who'll call in the murk ahead "Who goes there?"
and call once more when you don't quite answer.

THE HALL LIGHT

An edge, a last chance among many others,
a halfway point in which to choose
to stand while outside January gathers
and your kitchen watches more bad news.

The hall light fills where nothing was
in adjoining rooms. It has been on
from four until this momentary pause
that falls between going and being gone.

A mile from now it will disappear
in a past tense where all day it snowed.
How far is Riverstown from here?
How far is Lordship from the road?

The television promises more bad weather
in the darkness behind our backs.
Putting the hall light out, I dither,
I find little to say, I make tracks.

THE BALCONY

The light glitters on the outskirts of the city.
Three months and already your letter and calls
are few and far between. Each dusk only falls
so you can distance yourself farther from me
and from a world beneath you you can hardly see.
On a south-facing block, in shades and sandals,
you sit to all hours while nightingales
serenade the empty parking lot from obscurity.

This one's no different. Its song will keep you up
long after you close your glasses on a book
and stand at the French doors. Out there
the space between us darkens as I speak,
the heat drains from the day, and you step
from your window into the night air.

COME AGAIN

You're set once more, and someone else
picks up their life above a shop
where you leave off. It never ends,
never changes. Friday is hope,
Sunday failure. Somewhere between,
all the words for returning drown
in the light of the same old scene
and rush hour in a seaside town.

Given the time and space to care
what lies past any need for this,
given the length of days out there,
the yachts drifting on other skies,
it's unlikely you ever will—
although you couldn't ask for more
and evenings are brighter still
and you hold a key to their door.

Take then your leavetaking as read.
The future seems warm and lucky
beside this room, its couch-cum-bed,
your dog-eared *Farewell, My Lovely*.
Take it from now on that the road
and only thinking-the-world-of
and lately your weekending mode,
are more preferable than love.
How long will you carry it off?
Pretending to have gone too far,
without going half far enough;
expecting no-one to fall for
that smile and transitional air;
acting miles away and as though
whatever has been said to here
has escaped you from the word "Go".

TWO POEMS



Tim Kendall

PUCCINI: GIANNI SCHICCHI

*Per questa bizzarria
m'han cacciato all'inferno...*

Hateful to a fault, Dante
damned our hero deeper
than blasphemy or bloodshed
just for swindling a Donati.
A dozen lines portray
Schicchi scampering
demented through his sphere—
all mouth, the bite to match—
as Dante passes by,
content with cold revenge.

Five, six hundred years
leave Schicchi shrunk
to a scholarly note of
dates and misdemeanours
(forging wills, stealing mares,
mimicking the living dead)
until—redeemed, reborn—
he serenades a world
of easy sentiment where
laughter and disdain,

and nothing else, ring true.
His the ethical deceit,
ungarnished with
love, or pity, or grief.
His the voice which grants
the courage to reject
most diligent Virgil,
impeccable Beatrice.
His the guiltless life.
Gianni, be our guide.