

THREE POEMS



Christopher Pilling

GONE FISHING

H. Matisse

I feel by
colour, pallor
leading me
by quiet water, red and I
'm pursuing or
pursued by a bare, urgent insanity:

a fisherman's cast
of mind, bob
bob in at first a ripple,
then all past
still waters are robbed
of their present in a present loud stipple

of light on
the canvas of bump-starting
waves that drive
me to embody what must have shone
up from the darting
red blooded fish that bring my colour alive.

I cut
into living
God help me flesh colour, and lift the back-
bone which is where but
for the grace of God I'm giving
up my lack

of spine.
I feel by
baited hook, swingtip or quivertip and long trotting line.

A NEW WAY TO PRESENT MOZART

Would you prefer your Mozart black or white,
Or with a sweet chocolatey flavour, boxed
Like acoustics in swimming baths; xeroxed
For posterity as print-out on a tight
Grid that will still allow a choir free flight,
Against all the odds, to heaven, when coxed,
Not by an oarsman, but a slightly foxed
Genuflecting priest fighting the good fight...?

Mozart on stilts is the latest: in masks,
Only eyes and lips in view—emotion
Zipped up so the music seems faceless. Is
All hell let loose if a buff comes and asks,
Right out of the blue, for something quite sun-
Tanned or rosy-cheeked with some umph and fizz?

FRENCH WINDOW

I *By Night*

Four slight horizontals on the shutter
with their shadows and one dull sill
are all the incidentals his brush could utter
to prevent him falling into the dark hill

which rears in his going-under mindscape
before he can tell you, not innermost thought,
but pressing must, self-inflicted ought:
a cliff-edge rape

field that carries the bright yellow burden
of itself. His hand's over his mouth, not a word
here of joy, he's kept it dark, running

its absence out across a sea that isn't sunning
itself in splashes of what might amount
to brilliance if only daytime scenes should count.

Dark thought can block out all the light.
Even more than this view of the bay at night.

Matisse painted window shutters
for William IV. How could I lie
like that? But it's said that the king thought a picture clutters
a drawing room. So do I,

said Matisse. Another lie! A drawing room
is a room with shutters, random
furniture... Where shall I put it? said the groom.
Who's he? And what's it? William IV rode a tandem

but as he couldn't see the seat
beneath him, took it for a horse
with handlebars. On getting as far as the local hunt meet
he reined it in and fell off of course.

This quasi-regal rigmarole and untruth
about a painter I've translated
from the Picardy French can be blamed on my youth.
If it squeaks you'll know it's dated!

Was that the bicycle? Rather
like these hinges, said Matisse, pushing aside
an obstreperous shutter. It's painted ones I can't fathom
(does he mean fathom?) without a feeling of pride!

And William, proud too on his tandem, canters in pursuit of the
bride.

Matisse: French window at Collioure (1914)

LOCO IN THE CABEZA



Brian Henry

JAMES TATE, *Selected Poems*. Carcanet, £9.95

Although only twenty-four years old when he won the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award for *The Lost Pilot*, James Tate already was a lyric poet of considerable linguistic skill and subtle emotive power. Consider the ending of that collection's title poem, an elegy for the poet's father, dead at twenty-two:

My head cocked toward the sky,
I cannot get off the ground,
and, you, passing over again,

fast, perfect, and unwilling
to tell me that you are doing
well, or that it was? mistake

that placed you in that world,
and me in this; or that misfortune
placed these worlds in us.

It is those worlds in us—and between us—that occupy Tate's mind throughout his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Selected Poems*, a culling of more than 160 poems from nine previous collections.

Because Tate's inimitable comedic sensibility is the most obvious feature of his poetry, many critics have overlooked his ability to join that delight with terror—to render simultaneously the heart-breaking and the humorous in his poems. Like Beckett, Berryman, and Ashbery, Tate is aware that seriousness in poetry encompasses both the comic and the tragic. His complex tone—jaunty in one line, anguished in another—pays tribute to our emotional complexity, which too many other poets approach with hackneyed and sentimental language, overwrought emotion, and tautologies. A reader engaging Tate's *Selected Poems* will see that he is no mere jokester or poetic huckster: humour is neither a weapon nor a defense for him, but a part of life, just as pain is. Sometimes that pain appears in a subdued tone similar to that of