

James Matthew Wilson

Catullans

Washed and buried beneath the earth, the dead man
Lies, outfitted with jacket, tie, and collar.
Only those of strict conscience come to mourn him;
They, that is, who could see how his collecting
Doomed his life and perverted all his pleasures.
Bolted up in his house, he hoarded papers,
Newsprint, magazines, boxes of old files;
Guarded piles and great heaps on beds and tables,
Where he left his half-eaten meals to molder:
Scrambled eggs now long hardened into plate ware;
Crusts of toast that retained his absent bite marks;
Mugs of tea in whom teabags steeped for seasons.
Such things welcomed the flies and curious mice who
Made amid them a feast and maze and brothel.
What, they ask themselves, those who watch the gravestone
Lashed with rain and now scoured by Boreas' bellow;
What could any have said to save him from his
Wandering through the great wreckage he had gathered
With a hunger that knew no other purpose?
What could halt his own burial but this burial?

James Matthew Wilson

A Prayer to Christ the Lord

O Christ, you are the everlasting light
Who shone upon the darkness that was not;
The Logos who called out to the abyss
And summoned all things into being and form;
Who walked among us in our shame and death
And bore them naked, nailed upon the cross.

Now, give us eyes to see what you reveal,
To stare upon that light which cleanses all;
And give us ears to hear your single word
That speaks from far away and from within,
To bring us, scattered, unremembering flesh,
Into your body that shall reign forever.

“Starting Out from Such Emptiness . . .”

Yes, I say, yes, this emptiness,
This desert land without horizon,
This mass of hollowed faces staring,

Complacent faces curled with smiles;
This music sweet above the void
Distracting from it, here, and here;

And all those seething choruses
Who make their arbitrary wills
A cause of right and demolition:

Yes, I say, yes, we know it well,
But who has left the limping gait,
Who left the unexhausted heart,

The heart unsullied and untrammelled,
The brazen, purged, assenting heart
To start out from such emptiness?

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For an Anniversary

Although the spring comes whirling in and brings
A faint green to the dry stems on the rose,
 Reminding us life's fragile and will pass
As fleet and fiercely as the March wind blows,
It says as well things circle back, like rings
 Cut by young lovers in a window's glass.

Young Red

I

The son was upset by the world's strange injustice,
And so he turned leftward, moved into the city,
Where like minds could find him and give rage expression.
Baristas in cafés directed him into
The shadows of meetings and plottings, and secret
Agendas known only to rebels who fed his
Deep thirsting with tales of utopias arriving.
A shepherd, if you will, one given to guiding,
Took this shy one's lust just so gently in hand
That platforms were swallowed, strict doctrines digested.

This youth from Grand Rapids now thundered in typing
For pulpy newspapers that only his fellows
Subscribed to or opened or could understand.
But, one night, the sink full, his hands in the soap suds,
He saw that he, finally, would leave his wife, leave her
Pale skin with its freckles, her hair all of scarlet,
And lips that filled his ear with words that were tender.
As soon as the dawn licked the land with its light, he
Would park in the thoroughfare a pickup packed tightly
Its trunk weighed down heavy with dangerous explosives;
And as his shape vanished toward some far north border,
He'd click a small button and set off the charge.

II

Another was also despairing of all that
He saw in his life and the world's hammering ways.
"What *is* man? What matters his doings?" he asked of
The one who tried her best to tenderly love him,
Though she failed, or mostly, and poured out the wine.
She dreamed of a doctor who'd turn his black humor
Shades lighter, and cause him to see all his actions
That slight her and sting her, the way his words bite her,
As slighting and biting, and to her heart stinging,
Not pardoned by some quest to find his life's purpose.

Alas, she could now see no answers could stir him,
No treatment would cure him of helpless dismay.
Her sex was a bottle of doubtful new vintage,
A merlot to drink up and put him to sleep.
Then wake him and ache him, till he knows that sorrow's
A cancer that feeds on the thoughts that would kill it,
All wondering on purpose a pompous malfunction
That gives us no answer to what we desire.

One drinks so one's fate is forgotten a while,
Is dulled and exiled to swim the abyss.
It may give some measure of pleasure to fill in
The voiding, to hold off the groans of the day.
But learn this as you learn all shadows and jesting:
That fate stands in waiting for brain's old unsightly
Dark humming to rebirth, relentless and dull.
Its stale breath and bleared eyes will curse at the daylight,
Will join you in smelling the stink of the day,
But only to show you that there's no escaping
And each tranquil hour we must soon repay.