
James Matthew Wilson

During the Protests

We praise the clink of dinner plates
Stirring in evening suds, and thank
You for the snow's settling weight
That turns the dark limbs still and blank.

A friendly sort of love, this stillness;
A pleasant peace, quotidian motions,
And in their twilit meeting we'll bless
The hour with our iced oblations.

But on the screen stream curious pictures
Of tanks mobbed in the desert square,
Their cannon draped with bodies: thick, sure
Men, shouting, hungry—over there.

We talk of lunch and laundry, not
To plumb the pleasures of distraction,
But prudent toward an order that
Sustains though not our satisfaction:

To train our hunger it gives rest
By freeing us of the stomach's worrying.
My wife's weight to my side is pressed
As we watch what elsewhere's occurring.

Could a day come when all is peace?
Not from the fullness of the table
That drowns in each evening's ease;
Not just the stop of war, however stable

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And preferable as that may sound.
For, far-flung chaos, present order
Must find their last food somewhere, ground
Their acts beyond some distant border.

It's for that land we thank You, know
The taste of it within our mouths,
The figure of it in the snow,
And in the desert rage, its drought.

The Recluse

Mishawaka

From a bowed plastic chair and balcony
Three stories up, the sun like a hot plate,
Rain gutters thick with blackened leaves, I see
The trailer park, the Toll Road, and a great
Brown dumpster bear their proper loads in peace.

Between refuse and refusal, here I sit,
A blank stare for those passing in the street,
And none for news come in the mail: for it's
More serious than the words my neighbors greet
Me with as they get home from work, has whipped

The back of my pride as deep as I can stand.
I've heard the laughter of rejection, lived
Where bodies turn on reflex from the man
Whose face shows he has nothing much to give,
Felt disdain smuggled in a shake of hands.

In other times, men crushed by sneers or scorn,
Would, with a decent wisdom, beat retreat
From public pain to where it might be borne.
Such men rest dignified and didn't speak.
So I sit, idle, Hamm's in hand—the horns

Of factories letting out, the highway blare,
A chorus mocking, "Who said life was fair?"

Par Coeur

has no equivalent in modern French or English; to dine 'par coeur,' by heart, is to dine on nothing.

—Ezra Pound

In the Garret

Beneath the burning taper of her heart,
She clutches one soaked, wrinkled page; she's pressed
Her lips to the ink, tasted every part,
Swallowed her kindled joy that it might last.
This tattered meal came late tonight; was passed
From courier, to maid, to her, and lit
Her golden lamp: her lover's love unmasked.
This is her feast; she warms to read in it.

The Basement of Empty Bottles

Alchemists sought to make gold in great lots, then;
Belated, he makes an empty place—Pressed salvers
Melted down, gone. Rich flavors now forgotten,
Words mispronounced, their meanings have forever
Been drained to dry arcana, milkless utters.
Beneath my nails: scratch-ticket rubbings. Names
Of old wines lost before first tasting. What other
Losses may we describe, but never name?

Midnight, November

Against the broken stones of the town walls,
He shelters from the rain, his trousers damp.
He'd walked since Margot threw him out, but squalls
Of storm rose, he sat on a mossy stump
To rest amid the lashing wet. The drops
On stone: coin clanks in Margot's hand. To gnaw,
He has his heart, to chew as he chews his lip,
And waits to walk in the gray broth of dawn.

The Equivalence of May

Time spins its treaded tire and sprays in drains
Carelessly the wet mud of all our labors,
And floats both gain and loss down vast flood plains.
The wheels of a new dirt bike that the neighbor
Boy got, a baseball card in the spokes sputters
News of his triumph and our misery.
Throned on sterling chrome and trim black rubber,
“Eat your heart out,” Tom says to jealous me.