

Grand Canyon Mules

Mute, infertile, the
Burdens of others
Strapped across your backs,
You labor on in
Heat and dust and thirst,
Insofar as known
Without complaint, though
Perhaps what seems like
Dumb resignation
Is both more and less:
What point in braying
Over a karmic sentence
That admits neither
Appeal nor parole?
Better to focus,
One step at a time,
On climbing out of
This life's abyss of
Pain and penance. Get
Out — back to the rim,
The cosmic bondsman
Paid in full for now,
And rest, in sweet hope,
On higher ground.

Reverie

I remember my inconsolable youth:
Irradiated by loss, fearful of
Spontaneous combustion ~
The heart held incommunicado
 against its will.

Out Cronin's Yard, up the slow incline
of Hag's Glen,
Traversing shimmering boundaries of
air and mist and space;
Across the Gaddagh, boulder to boulder,
threading the gap
'Tween Gauragh and Callee, the stealthy mist
closing behind,
Plodding doggedly deeper into a fastness
of solitude
That might just be the sidhe, replete with risk
and possibility.
Peering up the impossible vertical sight-line
of The Devil's Ladder;
Clambering ever upward and finally out
the final chute, spent,
With so much yet to go; fatigue countered
with sheer intransigence,
A refusal to count costs or measure chances
now the goal's within reach.
Finally, then, the summit wreathed in mist which
parted without warning –
Like Ireland herself: revelatory when
unshrouded, marred only
By the somber redundant cross, planted there
by claimants for God –
As if it weren't already His, as if He weren't already there.

Equatorial Blues

Always beneath the play you write is the play you meant to write; changed but not abandoned and, with luck, not betrayed, but shadowing still the play that has come to be.

Alan Bennett, Untold Stories

Substitute 'life' for 'play'
And 'live' for 'write' and,
Ah, there's the rub!
Fifty years on and still
Working on the rewrite.
No, not abandoned,
Not betrayed outright,
But surely the steady
Erosion of long-held intention:
Too many roads not taken,
Too many dreams deferred
Or given up whole while
Flecks of aspirated hope,
Life-blood spatter, pock the
Canvass of a doldrummed life.

Anniversary

Pylons of memory,
Sunk deep, reaching heavenward.
For all I loved him,
How little I knew him --
How little I thought to ask
When I had the chance.

Beyond querying for all these years,
Left only with his last scrawled words,
Written almost from the grave:
"Awfully proud of you --
keep up the good work."
And so I've tried in the five decades since --
With mixed results I'm sure but always
In filial devotion and obeisance
As on that final morning when
I carried his bags to the car
For the trip to Chicago
Where he wrote me the birthday card
That arrived after he'd died.

I've learned there is no end to grief
Or, for that matter, to love.
There are only pylons, embedded
Deep in that which has been and
Stretching toward what is, or may be, to come.

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