

THE FABER BOOK OF CONTEMPORARY IRISH POETRY

Maguire is not afraid of death, the Church will light him a candle

To see his way through the vaults and he'll understand the Quality of the clay that dribbles over his coffin.

He'll know the names of the roots that climb down to tickle his feet.

And he will feel no different than when he walked through Donaghmoynne.

If he stretches out a hand – a wet clod,

If he opens his nostrils – a dungy smell;

If he opens his eyes once in a million years –

Through a crack in the crust of the earth he may see a face nodding in

Or a woman's legs. Shut them again for that sight is sin.

He will hardly remember that life happened to him –

Something was brighter a moment. Somebody sang in the distance.

A procession passed down a mesmerized street.

He remembers names like Easter and Christmas

By the colour his fields were.

Maybe he will be born again, a bird of an angel's conceit

To sing the gospel of life

To a music as flightily tangent

As a tune on an oboe.

And the serious look of the fields will have changed to the leer of a hobo

Swaggering celestially home to his three wishes granted.

Will that be? will that be?

Or is the earth right that laughs haw-haw

And does not believe

In an unearthly law.

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PATRICK KAVANAGH

The earth that says:

Patrick Maguire, the old peasant, can neither be damned nor glorified:

The graveyard in which he will lie will be just a deep-drilled potato-field

Where the seed gets no chance to come through

To the fun of the sun.

The tongue in his mouth is the root of a yew.

Silence, silence. The story is done.

He stands in the doorway of his house

A ragged sculpture of the wind,

October creaks the rotted mattress

The bedposts fall. No hope. No lust.

The hungry fiend

Screams the apocalypse of clay

In every corner of this land.

Pegasus

My soul was an old horse

Offered for sale in twenty fairs.

I offered him to the Church – the buyers

Were little men who feared his unusual airs.

One said: 'Let him remain unbid

In the wind and rain and hunger

Of sin and we will get him –

With the winkers thrown in – for nothing.'

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Then the men of State looked at  
 What I'd brought for sale.  
 One minister, wondering if  
 Another horse-body would fit the tail  
 That he'd kept for sentiment –  
 The relic of his own soul –  
 Said, 'I will graze him in lieu of his labour.'  
 I lent him for a week or more  
 And he came back a hurdle of bones,  
 Starved, overworked, in despair.  
 I nursed him on the roadside grass  
 To shape him for another fair.

I lowered my price. I stood him where  
 The broken-winded, spavined stand  
 And crooked shopkeepers said that he  
 Might do a season on the land –  
 But not for high-paid work in towns.  
 He'd do a tinker, possibly.  
 I begged, 'O make some offer now,  
 A soul is a poor man's tragedy.  
 He'll draw your dungiest cart,' I said,  
 'Show you short cuts to Mass,  
 Teach weather lore, at night collect  
 Bad debts from poor men's grass.'  
 And they would not.

Where the  
 Tinkers quarrel I went down  
 With my horse, my soul.  
 I cried, 'Who will bid me half a crown?'  
 From their rowdy bargaining

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Not one turned. 'Soul,' I prayed,  
 'I have hawked you through the world  
 Of Church and State and meanest trade.  
 But this evening, halter off,  
 Never again will it go on.  
 On the south side of ditches  
 There is grazing of the sun.  
 No more haggling with the world . . .'

As I said these words he grew  
 Wings upon his back. Now I may ride him  
 Every land my imagination knew.

### Temptation in Harvest

A poplar leaf was spiked upon a thorn  
 Above the hedge like a flag of surrender  
 That the year hung out. I was afraid to wonder  
 At capitulation in a field of corn.  
 The yellow posies in the headland grass  
 Paraded up and down in loud apparel;  
 If I could search their hearts I'd find a moral  
 For men and women – but I'd let them pass.  
 Hope guarantees the poor that they will be  
 Masters at haw-time when the robins are  
 Courageous as a crow or water-hen. O see  
 There someone on an ash tree's limb  
 Sawing a stick for a post or a drilling-bar!  
 I wish that I this moment were with him!

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