Classic Poetry Series

Terence Winch

- poems -

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Terence Winch

Terence Winch,originally from New York City, now lives in the Washington, DC, area. In the early '70s, he was one of DC's "Mass Transit" poets and was closely associated with the New York writers connected with the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in lower Manhattan.

Winch, the son of Irish immigrants, has also been part of Irish-American cultural life, both as musician and writer. Some of his poetry and other writing takes its subject matter from his upbringing in a Bronx immigrant neighborhood.

His newest book, a collection of non-fiction stories called That Special Place: New World Irish Stories, comes out of his experiences playing traditional Irish music with Celtic Thunder, a band he started with his brother Jesse in 1977. Many of the songs he wrote for Celtic Thunder recount the story of New York's Irish community: with "When New York Was Irish," "Saints (Hard New York Days)," and "The Irish Riviera" the best-known of them. Celtic Thunder's second album, The Light of Other Days, won the prestigious INDIE award for Best Celtic Album in 1988.

Winch has published three books of poems:

Irish Musicians/American Friends

(Coffee House Press, 1985), an American Book Award winner

The Great Indoors

(Story Line Press, 1995), which won the Columbia Book Award

The Drift of Things

(The Figures, 2001)

He has also published a book of short stories called Contenders

(Story Line, 1989).

His work is included in more than 20 anthologies, five of them published in 2003 alone: Best American Poetry 2003 (Scribner's); Poetry 180: A Turning Back to Poetry (Random House); Great American Prose Poems: From Poe to the Present (Scribner's); Poetry Daily: 366 Poems from the World's Most Popular Poetry Website (Sourcebooks); and From Totems to Hip-Hop: A Multicultural Anthology of Poetry Across the Americas (Thunder's Mouth).

His work has appeared in The Paris Review, New American Writing, The New Republic, American Poetry Review, Arshile, Shiny, Verse, Western Humanities Review, Agni, The World, Hanging Loose, Crab Orchard Review, New Hibernia Review, Irish Music et al.

Winch's poems have also appeared in such ezines as The Cortland Review and Poetry Daily, and have been highlighted several times on "The Writer's Almanac" radio program. Featured in a 1986 profile by Geoff Himes on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered," Winch was also the subject of a two-part interview with George Liston Seay on Public Radio International's "Dialogue" program in 1998. He has interviewed several leading Irish writers for the cable TV series The Writing Life, and was himself the subject of an interview with Roland Flint for the series in 1998. (For the entry on TW in The Encyclopedia of the Irish in America, see www.nd.edu/~ndr/issues/ndr10/winch/winch.html).

TW has also written for The Washington Post, The Washingtonian, The Village Voice, The Wilson Quarterly, The Dictionary of Irish Literature, The Oxford Companion to American Poetry, and other books and publications.

Terence Winch has received an NEA Fellowship in poetry, as well as grants from the DC Commission on the Arts, the Maryland State Arts Commission, and the Fund for Poetry.

For more on Terence Winch, please visit his official website:

<a
href='http://www.terencewinch.com'><u>www.terencewinch.com</u>

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Diagnosis

for David Lehman

I woke up this morning feeling
incredibly Gorky. So I made an appointment
to see my Doctorow. He said my Hemingways
looked a little swollen and sent me to
get an M.R. James and a complete Shakespeare.
By that time, I began feeling a slight Trilling
in my Dickinsons and some minor Kipling
in my left Auden. The entire experience
was extremely Dickey.

I was referred to an H.D., who asked
about my cummings. She detected traces
of Plath in my Sextons and suggested
I might also have some Updike
trapped in my Yeatsian system.
She recommended that to keep Orwell
and prevent inflammation to my Balzac,
I elevate my Flaubert once a day.

[from <u>The Drift of Things</u>, The Figures Press, 2001]
http://www.terencewinch.com

Terence Winch

Mission Statement

When I die I promise to haunt
all my surviving enemies,
may they be few if any at that point,
because I hope to outlive them all.
But if any of them are left
I'll keep them awake at night with weird noises.
I'll whisper words in their ears while they sleep
to encourage feelings of low self-esteem when they awake.

Actually, I'll never let them sleep.
I'll kick them out of bed
just as they're falling
into deep slumber.

Or maybe I'll just let them be.
Enemies are such a responsibility,
and eat up so much time.

Perhaps I'll just travel,
which I didn't really enjoy
much while alive. I'll travel,
eat fish, listen to rap music
and bluegrass, read a lot
of trade association magazines,
have numerous root canals,
and settle down somewhere in Ohio.

[from <u>The Drift of Things</u>, The Figures Press, 2001]
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My Friends

for Doug Lang

They came here first in a car shaped like a heart
and now they depart as brilliant jazz musicians.
They arrived in full costume, rolling north
through a winter of neon.
Now I watch them leaving me
in a moonlight of falsettos.

They are singing goodbye to me in the echo chamber
and I am smiling at them from my king-size window.
You get the idea.

I was always making way for the others.
Now, like an intake of breath, I am beside myself.

They tell me that God is inside us and I tell them
our fathers' teeth were white with fear. The streets
that I used to see from my window have faded away.
The birds I used to hear in the trees have fallen
on evil days. The beautiful girls who used to wear skintight
silver foil now dress in ugly shoes with big square tongues.
And the immaculate boys in their red velour are old men
who rock their bodies back and forth in grief.

But I take comfort in a dreamlike kind of consciousness
in which every breath is like my last breath
and all my friends are quiet as brides
skirting along on sheets of ice.

[from <u>The Great Indoors</u>, Story Line Press, 1995]
http://www.terencewinch.com

Terence Winch

Mysteries

All last night I kept speaking in this
archaic language, because I had been reading
Poe and thinking about him. I read 'The Murders
in the Rue Morgue' which is supposedly the first
detective story. Who dun it? I wondered.
It turns out an orangutan was the murderer.
It looks to me like the detective story genre got off
to a pretty ridiculous start. I used to visit
Poe's house in the Bronx. I used to think,
God, Poe must have been a midget. Everything
is so small. Poe died in Baltimore and I can see why.
In Baltimore, all the people are very big and sincere.
During dinner last night, I told Doug and Susan
about 'Murders in the Rue Morgue.' I said I hadn't
finished it yet, but it looked like the murderer
was going to turn out to be an orangutan, unless
the plot took a surprising new twist. Then Doug
suggested that he and I collaborate
on a series of detective stories in which
the murderer is always an orangutan.

[from <u>The Great Indoors</u>, Story Line Press, 1995]
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Terence Winch

Non-Possession is One-Tenth of the Law

Do not travel over vast distances.
Stay home and contemplate your neighbor,
the old woman who roams up and down the street.
She can never remember who you are
or who she is, for that matter.
This way, you will protect
your precarious sense of self.

Ruin your appetite before dinner.
This will ensure that you'll never feel hunger.
Play the same tune over and over,
driving everyone else crazy.
This protects you from unpredictability.

Find large articles of clothing
and wrap them around the trees,
so you will be as one with nature.
Fill your shoes with rocks
to ensure a suitable measure of gravitas.

Hide precious items from yourself,
then forget where you have hidden them.
This will promote non-attachment to things.
Make yourself dizzy by spinning around
so that the world will seem more steady.

Put all of your chairs in one room.
Sleep standing up. Move the refrigerator
into the bedroom and at night read
by its light. Rub with things,
not against them. Use pain to distract
a sore spirit. You will then be dreamier,
full of strength, able to bark at stars.

[from <u>The Drift of Things</u>, The Figures Press, 2001]
http://www.terencewinch.com

Terence Winch

Sleep Waltz

for MCW

Get old enough so you won't have much to fear.
By then, the music plays inside your head
and everything beautiful must be learned by ear.

In the bathroom mirror I behold my wear and tear.
In our bedroom I try to levitate in bed.
Get old enough so you won't have much to fear.

Meanwhile, my son at six wants to keep me near
and we sing together every night head to head.
So everything beautiful must be learned by ear.

His father's tunes, though, will one day disappear
beyond today's routines and daily bread.
But get old enough so you won't have much to fear.

Remembering my mother was my first career
and the songs surrounding her on which I fed,
knowing everything beautiful must be learned by ear.

We may waltz in the kitchen now, my dear,
or dance out of time in our sleep instead.
Get old enough so you have nothing left to fear.
Everything beautiful must be learned by ear.

[from <u>The Drift of Things</u>, The Figures Press, 2001]
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Terence Winch

Social Security

No one is safe. The streets are unsafe.
even in the safety zones, it's not safe.
Even safe sex is not safe.
Even things you lock in a safe
are not safe. Never deposit anything
in a safety deposit box, because it
won't be safe there. Nobody is safe
at home during baseball games anymore.

At night I go around in the dark
locking everything, returning
a few minutes later
to make sure I locked
everything. It's not safe here.
It's not safe and they know it.
People get hurt using safety pins.

It was not always this way.
Long ago, everyone felt safe. Aristotle
never felt danger. Herodotus felt danger
only when Xerxes was around. Young women
were afraid of wingéd dragons, but felt
relaxed otherwise. Timotheus, however,
was terrified of storms until he played
one on the flute. After that, everyone
was more afraid of him than of the violent
west wind, which was fine with Timotheus.
Euclid, full of music himself, believed only
that there was safety in numbers.

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The Irish Riviera

I wish I could remember the names
of these two old guys I used to see
when I was a kid and spent my summers
in Rockaway which was known as The Irish Riviera
one of them played the fiddle the other played
the accordion and I think one of them wore
a top hat they just wandered in and out of bars
playing for drinks they were like bums
but I still remember how fine they sounded

[from <u>Irish Musicians/American Friends</u>, Coffee House Press, 1985]
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