

Classic Poetry Series

Thomas MacGreevy

- poems -

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Homage to Hieronymus Bosch

A woman with no face walked into the light;
A boy, in a brown-tree norfolk suit,
Holding on
Without hands
To her seeming skirt.

She stopped,
And he stopped,
And I, in terror, stopped, staring.

Then I saw a group of shadowy figures behind her.

It was a wild wet morning
But the little world was spinning on.

Liplessly, somehow, she addressed it:
<i>The book must be opened
And the park too.</i>

I might have tittered
But my teeth chattered
And I saw that the words, as they fell,
Lay, wriggling, on the ground.

There was a stir of wet wind
And the shadowy figures began to stir
When one I had thought dead
Filmed slowly out of his great effigy on a tomb near by
And they all shuddered
He bent as if to speak to the woman
But the nursery governor flew up out of the well of Saint Patrick,
Confiscated by his mistress,

And, his head bent,
Staring out over his spectacles,
And scratching the gravel furiously, Hissed -
 The words went pingg! like bullets,
 Upwards, past his spectacles
<i>Say nothing, I say, say nothing, say nothing!</i>
And he who had seemed to be coming to life
Gasped,
Began hysterically, to laugh and cry,
And, with a gesture of impotent and half-petulant despair,
Filmed back into his effigy again.

High above the Bank of Ireland
Unearthly music sounded,
Passing westwards.

Then, from the drains,
Small sewage rats slid out.
They numbered hundreds of hundreds, tens, thousands.

Each bowed obsequiously to the shadowy figures
Then turned and joined in a stomach dance with his brothers and sisters.
Being a multitude, they danced irregularly.
There was rat laughter, Deeper here and there,
And occasionally she-rats grew hysterical.
The shadowy figures looked on, agonized.
The woman with no face gave a cry and collapsed.
The rats danced on her
And on the wriggling words
Smirking.
The nursery governor flew back into the well
With the little figure without hands in the brown-tree clothes.

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