

Ian C. Smith – Three Poems

Artifice

He photographs her on the Cobb at Lyme Regis,
a shadowy shot to be published in a journal
unimagined then like other scenarios
destiny stores between expectation and realisation.

They had read *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.
Wave-smash sprays her op-shop cape
as if a film is being enacted in a surf-hiss of grief,
a heartsore woman staring seaward from the revetment.

Absorbed, they learn of a town, its yeomanry, transformed,
chaos caused by the adaptation of a romance.
Karel Reisz repeatedly directed a scene set in 1867,
sheep driven over muddied cobbles past this teashop.

They lean in, picturing soldiers in scarlet tunics,
the cinema dormant in destiny's plot development.
His staged photograph forms part of memory's mirage,
a film location he would revisit if possible.

For many seasons he travels only in his thoughts,
acknowledges novels are devices, artificial,
as John Fowles didactically reminded readers,
so too, films with towns disguised as the past.

Another book, about tramping England's eroding coast
below Lyme's fossilized cliffs, carries him sweetly back.
He recalls her cape, touch, dark green velvet,
wonders what became of it, of the characters they were.

Echoes from half a life ago

Perhaps it's like the time I arrived in that port
known for an explorer who died a broken man,
paid for a room, paint strip-teasing, down an alley,
figures slouched in shadow on the landing, staring.
Ill, I felt far from home, already far from love,
heart chilled, as if I'd parachuted at nightfall
to strangers where war had obliterated joy.

Perhaps days echo. All my wrongs' wretched reviews
slam me into harsh terrain, these hard-scrabble straits,
into loneliness, its bleak henchmen, drink, distrust.
Feverish, afraid, I hid money, read, moved on,
truth, the worth of words, glowing, deeper than despair,
roads winding to the sacred edges of shelter.
I break out in sweats, slip cash between scarred pages.

Marigolds

That winter I arrived, the scruffy tiny garden sagged
in bleak recession, though signs of better times
begged me, desiccated hanging baskets of succulents,
gasping tree-ferns, fronds a gaunt toasted filigree
the front doormat's Wipe Your Paws, reminder of pets
in the rainbow-rambunctious past.

My neighbour's garden, nature-strip, shaved
within an inch of life, encroached on my side,
unsubtle protest at slippage of strict standards.
This, bedraggled chaos, broken clothes-line,
pegs wind-strewn, paths an archaeological dig,
terminus for a juggler bereft of balls, was my refuge.

A rusty wheelbarrow, not a red wheelbarrow,
shallow, unpainted, slouched out front housing
starved soil, symbol of abandonment.
On my knees collecting my tossed newspaper,
often rolled under my parked car as if ashamed,
I turned from a gyre of despond to atonement.

Scraping soil from my back lane, starting point
for solitary walks of meditative lamentation,
I built up my inherited wheelbarrow's bed,
set seedlings to jolly my leaf-denuded neighbour,
following the sun sucking water from a found green can,
brassy, pungent, taking each day at a time.

Ian C Smith's work has appeared in, *Antipodes*, *Australian Book Review*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Cream City Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, & *Two-Thirds North*. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra (Port Adelaide). He lives in the Gippsland Lakes area of Victoria, Australia.