

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

March 16, 2007

Friday Poem

Filed under: [poetry](#) — alecsothblog @ 1:14 am

In honor of Saint Patrick's Day, here is a fantastic poem about photography by the Irish poet Thomas McCarthy:

The Non-Aligned Storyteller

by Thomas McCarthy

Soon there would be no reason to remember Parkers

in that place. Because the Present prevails...

Patrick White: *The Tree of Man*

Everything that happened here, that could be trapped

By light, lies abandoned in my shop:

Who would bother to look, now that my lease

Is up? I have photographic plate

Of weddings as old as any villager's memory;

A perfect plate of the first Model T in town,

A file of annual Blackwater floods, action shots

From the Carnival held for the Abbey chapel –

All of them useless. I gave my only child

A box of unclaimed, unknown Communion

\Prints, perfectly justified and guillotined;

So perfect, in fact, that the subjects couldn't pay.

The first thing I photographed in this town

Was fire, a subject dangerous and ephemeral

Brought on by politics. The new Party

Had made its first great leap. That time,

The poor in celebration burned tar in barrels.

Fire made a kaleidoscope of wet streets.

I loved to stroll about in windy rain to watch

Streets training themselves to be abandoned.

By then the young had begun to disappear,

Leaving a melancholia like a dark pothole
That only the rains could fill. In the long
Afternoons of Sundays there would be a flood
Of black shawls and a brief sleet of children
As well as a drought of able-bodied men –
Factories overseas had claimed them, or a combination
Of TB and the ever-promising vagrant sea.
The villagers never trusted me, so for years
I photographed only what they could trust and see:
Corpus Christi processions, sycamore trees, local
Football teams or scullers bolting down the river.
But politics was the most awkward field. I hung
Around to collect images at the centre of its
World; dragging old men from the stifling alcoves
Of meetings. I didn't know what I was meant to see

Because I was called in at the end of event
With camera and tripod. My wife arranged
The lights above their heads. She created
An aura of strength around their tired faces,
A sort of grey metallic, a solder of wisdom.
Their chairman I remember best. He wore
A gold watch-chain to every meeting;
He had a voice as revered as a Miraculous Medal –
That gold chain sparkled in my best photographs,
Though I tried to dampen it in the negative.
His secretary owned innumerable fields.
I photographed him in one perfect moment
During a 1960 snowstorm; a starved
Figure caught against a herd of yearlings.
My wife remembers them too, under our lights,
As they held resolutely to tenancies and laws.
'If only they had strength,' she used to say, when
They were building anew, shedding bloody days.

4 Comments

1. I love this poem. Thanks for the frequent poetry. I'm a photographer whose first passion was poetry. It's too bad the marriage of these forms is usually sentimentalized by the worst pictures & the sappiest greeting card verse. Photography & poetry share a way of looking at the world. I never feel I've gone off topic when I come to your blog & find a poem here.

Comment by [Tim Connor](#) — March 16, 2007 @ [12:06 pm](#)

2. Yes, I love this poem too. Alec, thank you for posting these poems. One more reason to stop by here every Friday.
Regards,

Comment by [Metin Oner](#) — March 16, 2007 @ [10:19 pm](#)

3. CHECK THIS OUT!!!

<http://www.chadmuthard.com/photomarchmadness.html>

I had no idea how much time I was actually going to waste making it, but its great!

Hope you Enjoy.

Who would you have in the final four?

Comment by [Chad Muthard](#) — March 17, 2007 @ [1:03 pm](#)

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Comment by [MOHAPI](#) — August 8, 2007 @ [9:30 am](#)