

Grevel Lindop – three poems

The Hands

Busy and blindfold, taught their trade by trial
and touch, they are naturals, eager exponents
of every half-formed thought, or of no thought.
Getting bored, they twiddle their thumbs or tap,
thinking that you are thinking nothing,
waiting to run an errand to pen or pocket.

The devil, we say, finds work for idle hands.
Idle heads will dream their own contraptions
but wreak no havoc till hands are called to service:
hands in hatred of hands hammered iron
nails into the palms, twisted a crown,
offered the dice their chance to make decision.

The pride of heads denies them understanding
then reaches out a hand to prove the world,

explain its music and articulate
precise intelligence of love. The dark,
the silent, all comply to the hand's order,
make their confession to the fingertips

as honest as those bluntly-put enquiries.
No artists, they'll create by mere assuming
as they assume you now, love, substance you
out of the night's negations. Magic of touch,
you're there again. I feel you reach towards me.
The darkness round us sings the praise of hands.

Green Man: Winchester Cathedral

Eyes do not notice
the hand's acknowledgement,
burnish of caressed oak
or whose face you touch
as you step down from the choir stalls.

You walk between his two masks:
brow moulded back into leaves,
eyelet-holes between the fronds,
foliate lip and beard –
a savage concentration

stares out of the wood
towards the high altar.
Barely noticed
between choir and nave
he guards our comings and goings –

a part of the mystery.
Did man fall and rise by a tree?
Over all our world
the forests are burning.
This church is founded on brushwood.

Russet Apples

Lie back against the pillows:
and again, as if for the first time,
I give you a russet apple.

In our country the custom
is love first, and then apples:
a ritual celebration
of our un hoped-for return
after aeons of wandering where
there was nobody, or the next best thing –

some lover who didn't care
enough to let it be right;
some man who wouldn't trust,
some woman who didn't dare;
where always she was hiding a hate,
or he had to fondle an image
to help him get it on.

Now we've passed the gate,
the land is ours again
and the apple's into the secret;
feel how it loves us as you bite
and the juice comes, cider-sweet,
leaf-sour, and the rusty bronze skin
gleams wet in candle light,

and feel when I kiss you how
within the mouth's dark space
there is no I or you
but only a fragrance of endless
orchards that waited here, always
ripening, longing to welcome us
back into paradise.

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