

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Frank Paino: Three Poems

Frank Paino · Wednesday, November 4th, 2020

Where There's Smoke

(for Tony)

Smoke means the way you looked the last time I ever saw you, back pressed against the scuffed bridge rail, bare-chested above the Bay's ragged thunder, scars so bright it seemed you were already burning. Smoke means a rabbit might flee or set itself in stone, means white semaphores of deer tails, cicadas buried beneath root and soil waiting out the lightless years before their single season of song. Smoke means cinders adrift in the shifting breeze, means a far-off fountain that gabbles its wet hymn of before we were born. Smoke means the right words will always fall stillborn. Where there's smoke something is vanished. Where there's smoke I'll always see you stepping through the dew-grass that final late-October morning while our hemisphere tilted toward a longer dark. Then gasoline. Then lighter. Then you in your shirt of flames.

*

Vanished Twin

Sometimes, a twin dies in utero and the survivor may be diagnosed, later in life, with a teratoma that contains hair, teeth, or other fetal tissue from the "vanished twin."

It's true no one can disappear
into the belly of a whale and be spat back,
three days of breach and deep-blue wake
down the rocky coast but none the worse for it.

So too, a boy who is swallowed,
slow as marsh mud or a southern tongue,
by the brother who once kicked strong
beside him in a starless, thrumming sea.

To be so small is to be a vanished thing,
though sometimes a body refuses
the grace to acquiesce,

takes what little it has gathered as its own
 and coils inside the stronger half:
 sometimes a hank of auburn hair,
 a single bony plate
 that would have fringed the fontanel,
 or the red rumor of a mouth
 that might have kissed, *been* kissed,
 little more than a snarl
 of ravenous teeth, hell-bent on revenge.

*

After the First Bite

deep as her desire
 for knowing,
 Eve saw the garden
 truly,
 the flowers
 in both bloom and wither,
 the lion's teeth still bright
 but tinged with gore.

After the first bite
 she tore that soft flesh
 until the scythes
 of her teeth cut to the core
 and the quick rush
 of all she knew began to sing
 through her thick blue veins.
 Then she rose
 as any good mother,
 any good saviour
 would, to share all she had
 come to understand
 with the sullen man
 lying coiled in the tall grass
 still worrying
 the scar in his side.

After his first bite,
 which was likewise his last,
 his eyes also were opened,
 though he turned from her
 when branches broke
 beneath judgment's thunderous
 footfall, stabbed his finger
 toward the nib of her glistening chin
 as he slouched into the leaves

already tarnished
with the rumour of their falling,
embraced the awful legacy
of what he knew he'd started
when he took the gift,
then laid the blame.

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