

Poetry

NIGHT SWEAT

Here! creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.
Hopkins, 'No worst there is none.'¹

Your body knuckling, gripped in angry sleep
As the night peers out of its sodden mattress,
Exudes its sweat like some unbridled sap,
Your sheets turned yellow, and not a witness
But what, in rising, ruffles up the bed,
Steps forth to meet some unremembered air,
Indicts the jubilant, unyielding blood
That throbs its madness in each burnt-out pore.

A shadow, stringing at your tangled brain,
Conceals its face behind explosive light
That swallows up the features of the room.
What glimpse of it you see sink in the drain
Is as a child's, who, waking to the night,
Cries out at nothing in the veering gloom.

Richard Reeve

¹ Gerald Manley Hopkins



A Reprieve

His eyes jammed in on themselves, while she claws at his side,
Shuddering, a lap-dog-wife, just in from some walk in the rain,
These two stumped cramps of flesh are now each other's guide:

Out of the hospital, his weak legs transcending the flooded drain
Which beneath them gurgles and jolts in a mockery of death,
He guides her through the brain-dead crowd, clutching his cane.

Her phrases are as sips of whisky. They supplicate his breath.
So long as she stands by her Grouch, grasping sleeve and fallow hand,
His innards can enjoy the jinks and sly drinks of his Seventieth,

Though now those months will throb like a whisky in every gland.
'God, get going, Mavis', growls he, with one satisfied shove
Stalking and staggering forward, towards an empty coffee stand

Where by his side she shelters, caught in a downpour of sad love.

Richard Reeve

RICHARD REEVE is a Dunedin poet whose parents are general practitioners. His first book of poems 'Dialectic of Mud' was recently published by Auckland University Press.

Hidden Agenda

I really do not understand my problem
I thought the tying of my tubes would put me right
He wants and takes what I don't want, the husband
Suppose his needs are greater, make no fight.

There is another child, he's not the father
She's been eight years in IHC, aged ten or so
I'm sure she's better there, they understand her
He could not have her here, she had to go.

No money worries? None, well just the usual
We all have debts and bills so what's the fuss
I lie awake at night, to hear the baby
He sleeps so sound and still in spite of us.

I've had the four alive and one miscarriage
That's one of mine and then his three so far
She's better there in IHC, you think so?
Development delayed and under par.

The doctor offers pills to make her sleep well
To lift perhaps depression or despair
But who will lie awake to hear the baby
Who'll worry for the girl who isn't there.

Campbell Murdoch