

Herron's Dream Diary

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Karl O'Hanlon

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*Nay sayeth the thynde: he is wysest that leste dothe meddle,
and can sytte quietly at home and tourne a crabbe, and
looke onely vnto his owne busynesse.*

Thomas Elyot, *Of the Knowledg Which Maketh a Man*

*Viens voir les comédiens
voir les musiciens
voir les magiciens
qui arrivent...*

Charles Aznavour, *Les Comédiens*

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Herron kept a dream diary in a gilt-edged blue notebook.
Touching it, a spark frisked his blood cells. Sleep
devoured waking in its pages; wildcat static crept
up the spine, a trout's rainbow unravelling on a hook.

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La Paix

(1931–1939)

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The cobbles on rue Rollin wince like goosebumps
in a snivel of rain. In the bleary autumn sun, shop signs
equivocate: TENTURES, or TORTURES? The sun's
flare dissipates, shrugs itself into a few misty humps

and hollows. At 6 rue Rollin, Herron lodged with Ben
Fondane—tall, crow-chested, in forest green beret, green
scarf, their street of booksellers and hard-up *mâtres-de-ballet*
couched in the pit of a foggy never-ending Sunday.

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In the beginning was Exodus, or, how to become a hooligan.
Go back before that to Ben's childhood, the blue grasses
of Moldavia, little white town where cow bladders
blanched the fields, town of Jews hanging in the air. Again

begin with a still hand, lover's, draughtsman's, paraded by ants.
Start over, tear the diary page: commit to the overpowering
smell of salt-herring and cow-dung; quickly, lightly glance
at the blazing wood, the ceremonies of blood and iron.

Retrace the abandoned lecture halls where, once, malaise
stretched like an old cat amidst talcum and starched collars,
numerus nullus, the curl of tortured flies, odd hollers
of desire: 'I'd like to feel an enemy in myself to be erased'.

Among the ruins of Sarmizegetusa, King Decebal's ashes
stir and flake onto the laconic tongues of men bred
for days of violence, who pray to die as Decebal died,
believing whoso dies rises in flaking tongues among the ashes.

Recur nightmares with adolescent voices, baptisms of death.
In the suburb of Auteuil where stiff Catholic widows
wear Scottish tweed and walk Pekinese, relive the snows
of your childhood, windows festive with opal-frosted breath.

In Herron's dream diary, the church of Saint Étienne-du-Mont
a stone throw from rue Rollin was made from shadow,
vexed threads of argument, excluded middles, angel font,
gargoyle-addled clouds, snail-slime and candle tallow.

In the church vaults was a secret trapdoor
which shot you out in the 8th of June fountain,
Bucharest, sodden and jetlagged, verklemt
and kersplunked at Capşa's café, the coffee thick as lead.

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Herron connived his youth away dreaming of escape,
tracing pint-glass stains in his father's Dublin pub.
He spied the glint of guns that March the army caper
backfired, tiles vexed with spirits fleeing over the rooftops.

Odd child, Nordie, a magpie versed in Greek grammar,
he lined his nest with poetry. Later, he stammered
into taste, held that taste was discrimination,
beloved of the thug and the Epicurean.

In Edinburgh, love fell on him like heather rain,
his lips combing her scalp on Princes Street. Among stout
Morningside matrons in Jenner's they were betrothed,
and the North Sea gulls sang their epithalamion.

Aisling of Frank and Rachel O'Brien, granddaughter
of Lithuanian Jews, Catholics from Stanhope Street,
bright as phosphorus in the crotty dovecotes of Edinburgh,
brown eyes dark, sharp as the juniper tree.

Lost. Recurring dreams of her, waking to the door
that led to the fountain's geyser, Bucharest,
groping for her shade in a cold dawn, same as before,
his soul incapable of roost or rest.

Bucharest-on-the-Seine's posters and playbills are cut up,
rearranged in abrupt semblances; Brâncuși's
Leda masters vortices of brute air, shut up
in the cool white rushes, the swansong of herself.

Riot lights the Maldoror café; in the fracas, surrealist pope Breton
brandishes a Freudian *Baedeker*. Emil Cioran beckons
his obsessions, tongues a loose tooth, cultivating nirvana
by violence. The word's out: even infants mouth 'Dada'.

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Herron attended seminars at a diplomatic academy
under the rigid lines of the Port-Royal.

The manual was Irish-Jansenist: *We do not wish to engage in any
controversy.*

Exceptions included joining in a rowdy Horst-Wessel-

Lied in the Gresham Hotel at Herr Hempel's Weihnachtsfeier,
the spiced cakes and wax evergreen that brought a thousand-year
tear to Frau Mahr's eyes. But look, all that was ~~way~~ before
Aisling took Herron's hand to light the menorah

in her attic window, dwarfed by candled gorse on Arthur's Seat.
Her tongue on his was slow, fricative; a seal on an ice floe.
She smelled of mown-hay, which Herron later realised
was coumarin; hepatotoxic, damaging to the liver.

Follow thy fair sun, unhappy shadow.

Herron committed to the air,
her presence all but air,

Yet follow thy fair sun, unhappy shadow.

One winter, Ben filled a lukewarm bath, dropped sheaves
of his unfinished poems in it. In the dampness
of the apartment, the steam made them rise like loaves
and take on the appearance of brilliant swans.

Dalí in a diving suit, lecturing in flamboyant Catalan,
grasping two borzois and a billiard cue; a bloom
of fog orchid on the glass sent someone to fetch a spanner,
loosen the bolts and let the orchids into the room.

Someone, Herron said to himself, is practicing Brahms.
Lamps light the rue de Verneuil. The piano's revelation:
the difference between *mine* and *me*, the Seine
incandescent with woven theme and variation.

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