



Tom Dilworth

Tom Dilworth teaches English literature at the University of Windsor, where he is a University (distinguished) Professor. He is a Killam Fellow and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. His recent poetry has appeared in *The Common Sky*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Rampike*, *Salmagundi*, *Ontario Review*, *Poetry* (Chicago), and, *Windsor Poets*, and *Windsor Review*. He has published widely on Modern literature and Romantic poetry and is the author of *David Jones in the Great War* (2012), *Reading David Jones* (2008) and *The Shape of Meaning in the Poetry of David Jones* (1988), which won the British Council Prize in the Humanities. He edited Jones's illustrated *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (2005), Jones's *Wedding Poems* (2002), and *Inner Necessities: the Letters of David Jones to Desmond Chute* (1984). He is publishing critical introductions and afterwords for bilingual (English/French) editions of *The Anathemata*, *The Sleeping Lord*,

and *The Ancient Mariner* and is currently writing Jones's biography. He co-edited *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson: Composition as Conversation* (2009).

His two poems in *NDR* are '11:15' (Summer/Fall 2008) and 'Words' (Summer/Fall 2012). The first of these concerns numbers and their imagined relation to time and quality of human experience or achievement. The poem plays on the conceit that the initial hour-designating numbers must be greater than the following minute-designating number or time and what happens in it is somehow wrong. In the second of these poems, words are personified, having characteristics related to their meanings. Some of these seem adequate, even lovely, some not, and this is a double measure of the difference between aesthetics and existential experience. The two readings by the author are of the short poem 'Satin' (the first of those included below) and 'Words'.

Satin

With thanks to the author of a student essay who wrote that Young Goodman Brown is a man "tempted by Satin."

How could Eve be tempted by Satin?
A fine cloth but not as light
or smooth as air.
Did she want to astonish Adam?
make him stare or
wonder what's under?
though
he already knew.

Maybe paradisaal nights grew cool.

Or she fell
for the fashion of all in Eden
that shone like satin,
pelts of otters and big cats,
skins of fruits and snakes,
eyes,
wet stones,
wet anything.

Then did Adam fall again for her?
It happens.

(forthcoming in *Windsor Poets*, 2012)

From Araby

In an exam answer, the Irish boy in Joyce's 'Araby' gives up city life for the Lady of Shalott.

Already exhausted from penetrating 412 pages of tough, onion-skin anthology paper,
I swim through water lilies,
fight through thick willows,
scale a steep tower.
'Here' gasp, gasp, 'I am, darling,' gasp. 'I've had enough of bazaars,' gasp. 'My gift is me.'
Regarding me in a dark mirror, she casually asks in a toff accent, 'Wheu
are you?'
'I'm anonymous.'
'Not a knight, I notice.'
'No, but I'd like to stay the night.'
Sigh. 'If you wish, but I dislike the direct approach.'
A few evenings later, I manage to kiss her, but she refuses further intimacies, murmuring,
if I hear right, about 'having the curse.'
She weaves at her loom.
I look on or out the window,
stroll round the room,
look out the window some more,
play with the yarn
('Please put that down.')
put it down.
Still she won't look at me straight, so, after a few days,
I say goodbye. She sneezes.¹
Eventually, I come to a garden.
A bird takes off just overhead—flap, flap—gives me quite a start.
But a nice place, this, with lovely language all round,
till, out of the blue, somebody calls me a 'sod' and a, get this, 'deceiving elf'.
Declining further abuse, I slip away.
On my left I pass a nice-looking couple, she moaning and speaking language strange—
Gaelic, I think—to him, obviously smitten with her. He's in armour,
a knight. Don't they have all the luck.
Maybe he's the one the lady in the tower is saving herself for,
though I'd say this one's taken.
Too much like watching couples spooning in Phoenix Park, so time to go.
I'd like to get knighted, though.
It's a real leg up, romantically.

¹ 'Adieu'

I break into a long ballad,
not far from the end of it,
and manage to get a job rowing,
something I've never done before,
but you learn fast.

The harbour pilot and I
are ferrying a too-jolly priest—
you know the type,
one who doesn't get out much.

As we draw near a ship,
it sinks, just like that,
leaving a solitary sailor floating.
We help him into our boat,
and the pilot faints.
Dripping and scraggy,
the man takes the oars.
You're welcome to them, I think.

He looks like the devil himself,
as I'm compelled to announce,
which surprises me.
Not that I'm so polite,
but I've seen as bad in the streets of Dublin.
Then, get this, I find myself obliged to go crazy
for the rest of my life.
Wanting no part of that,
I move again through paper.

Quite near is a walled park with a river. It's really lovely. I especially like the sinuous
rills and a dome, very cool inside and echoey.

'Hello hellohellohellohello'

There's nobody but me, so I slip into a simile and attempt to strike up a conversation with a
wailing woman jilted by a demon lover—I think I know who. Of course, she's better off without
him, but you can't tell her that. I ask, 'Does he enjoy rowing?'

Bulls eye!—the volume goes way up. And I thought I felt bad about Mangan's sister! You don't
like leaving a woman in such a state, but I can't get a word in edgewise and my being here is not,
you know, consoling. So, maintaining a sympathetic expression, I back away, right into the
memory of a vision.

A nice girl is playing a ukulele on her lap and singing. I'm about to ask her if she knows a place
we can go for tea—I still have some of my uncle's money—when I'm suddenly swallowed by a
hypothesis and someone is reciting a recipe involving honey, dew, and milk while a very odd lad
is going right off his head, his eyes flashing and his hair floating in the windless air. I get the hell
out of there.

Close by, I come to a bunch of poems with lots of kids in them, mostly younger than me,
and I make friends with some: a chimney sweeper, a black boy, and a simple lad, very religious,
with a pet lamb. There are lovely pictures, too. And I enjoy standing in the groups. It's like
having your photo taken, but goes on, you know, too long. There are complainers in the vicinity,
among them some nut raving on and on about a 't-y-g-e-r', which I believe is misspelled.

After saying goodbye to the lads, I make a very big push through a thousand or so pages—it nearly kills me—but I come to a place I like and stop here. It's a room rented by a fellow named Kit who tells me he's smart, though he's not otherwise snooty. He's had mental trouble and prays a lot. We play with his cat. You're welcome to visit, he says to say. If you do, you won't notice me. I yammer on here, I know, but in someone else's poem I'm quiet—as I am too, come to think of it, in my own story, when I was there. I say 'was' because, of course, it's written in the past tense.

Note: A reader having difficulty tracing the boy's journey may (re)read, in addition to Joyce's 'Araby' and Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott,' Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' and 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci,' Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan,' Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, and Christopher Smart's 'For I will consider my Cat Jeoffry' in his long poem, *Jubilate Agno*. All of these are on the internet, where he could have travelled much more easily.

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Slighting

Apertures, nooks, nuances, innuendoes
tease eyes and feelings as loose clothing
palpitates skin in breezes and held hats
warm fingers.

Let us praise them,
the things that slightly affect us,
background tunes
to confabulation and obsessing.
The slightly affecting do not yell,
"Hey, it's not just you. We're here too."
They wait
like articles or prepositions or
(not the biblical but the real) god.
All others Call, Demand, Command,
Countermand, Reprimand,
Attack the liberty
whisperings
allow.

So here's to the unobtrusive,
Heaps of appreciation.
Forgive our neglect, our
preoccupations.

This has become one,
so instead of applauding,
I will be quiet now,
just for you.

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