

Two Poems: 'The End of Lonely Street' and 'Songsters of the Troubled Heart'

Ian C Smith

The End of Lonely Street

Lyrics memorized, he strains, *since my baby left me*,
wailing Presley covers, a quid a song, *train, train*,
band blitzing him, for he can't sing, can't play.
Week's work done, the Frankston pub crowd vibrates.
He loves the cool strut, needs money, and more.

Pay piss-poor in a chicken processing plant,
classroom quit at fourteen for a colourful life,
he avoids the line's sickly stench, toils in the freezer
trekking icy Arctic wastes in a blizzard of songs,
in out, in out, massive doors always slammed shut.

That kid, who has two of his own, works his way up,
squalid jobs, each paying ten bob more than the last
in stained brick districts, smell of cement after rain,
caravans, bungalows, a dwelling behind a shop,
thirsting for learning, sorrow waiting in ambush.

His origins cowed, he embraces language, ideas,
lectures, libraries, posters of Leos: Kottke, Sayer,
his new zeitgeist the death of old music, old marriage.
Permed women click by, skirts aswirl, caressing leather.
His papers earn credits, arrows pointing to success.

On holiday deep in forgetful years, sea view superb,
he talks with a young friend who learns the guitar,
impressed by the intricacies of this endeavour.
His old strummed prop, his past, arrives, unravels him,
a long black train coming round the bend.

Songsters of the Troubled Heart

Driving in rain, radio soft, Karen Dalton's throaty voice, a wind finding cracks, a drug's effect, a siren, invokes me. To what? Bygone chances missed in that ossuary of broken dreams, past wrongs? I have flexed my scornful wit on music's cryptic lyrics, but then, what about Wulf & Eadwacer? Now this song illuminating the shadows, that creaking fiddle evoking crossing old iron bridges slowly, sultry light flickering, starting with the plaintive drawn-out opening: *Yesterday*, cherished youth vanished. Begirded by heartache I want to rush back, save Karen from dead-set trouble, keep her off the streets, above ground, fend off danger as she pours out her wounded life.

Now the sweet redolent intro of Moby's *Mistake*, then grief as the pensive beat explores my heart's lacunae, leaves me depleted. Another song about regret. I could have died a dozen deaths, but survived. Wrenched apart by songs? C'mon. I heard the mournful cries of trams at night's edge, remember smouldering words igniting. This beat hammers my superannuated memory, a song not from my time yet relevant, playing wintry scenes I can smell again in my mind. The sky god batters me, wipers losing it. I would drive beyond this bleary gloom, re-enter remnants of the ghostly tattered past, a voice repeating my name, stanch this wretched helplessness. *Don't let me make the same mistake again.*

A troubadour's lute
heard beyond the castle wall
pricks hearts rich and small.

Author Bio

Ian C Smith writes in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria, and on Flinders Island. His work has appeared in *Antipodes*, *cordite*, *Eureka Street*, *Griffith Review*, *Journal of Working Class Studies*, *Meniscus*, *Shaping the Fractured Self* (UWAP), &, *So Fi Zine*. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra Press.