

Daniel Tobin

Load Bearing Wall

That morning when he lifted the faucet arm
In the bright kitchen with its view of a house,
Its not distant turret vaulting like a wish
Above the cross-hatched lines of winter trees,
And the un-thought, familiar rush of water
Choked in the pipe's throat, he felt the ice
Of his anger welling up from its source
In years of slow attainment and making do.

He half-expected as much, seeing his life
As pitfalls and obstacles, a turbulent course.
And could have predicted this latest travail
When his neighbors began the renovation
With a floor-shuddering hammer stroke
Days before that inaugurated the plan
For more living space, more room, more light—
Their dream of betterment: more of what he had.

Where they came from downstairs he pictured huts,
Hoards of homeless in dirt lanes, their escape
One of an endless stream; though no excuse,
He brooded, for this thoughtlessness, this cheap job
He'd believed he'd find and did—pipes routed
And boxed against the shared, frozen shingles,
The new wall that would have to come down,
The wall that had and should have remained.

As he stood with them in the dumbfounded room
Talking reason through his teeth, he foresaw
Tense visits of inspectors, contractors,
Raw exchanges in the common hall, lawyers,
The unkind cut of himself as polite victim.
That's when he longed for insulation,
For the lone house with its protected lot,
For the turret with its singular prospect

From which he could survey his world, apart
And safe, though entirely magnanimous.
He saw himself there, but inside his thought
Felt a wall come down and a view open
Of vanished sufficiency, whole cities
Of mold and spore, whole civilizations
On a leaf's underside, and each thing alive
On its shaking stem, its flawed resilient fuse.

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Financial Statements Eaten by Rats

Big numbers, small appraising hands...

Debits, credits, spread-sheets consumed,
the deft, anonymous sleights consumed.

No numbers, no fraud, no future
for the defrauded, since one needs
evidence to pinch
even the pettiest crook.

Nothing left but this black bullion,
these dots of blithe shit trailing
across the floor like decimals...

New Millenium Blues

I've been waiting for the sun all day
That's not so much behind a cloud
As the old blues men say, but the cloud
Itself: the gray, dead body of the sky.

The new earth's a ruin with sheen of gold,
And soul's what's left in the brass spittoon.
The soul's what's left in a brass spittoon
And the new earth bleeds as red as the old.

I'll have to wait like ore inside the stone.
I'll have to make my way like a seam through rock,
Make my way like a trickle through rock
Without a notion of the world to come

Till I find that ocean unimaginably wide,
Till I find that ocean but it won't be soon.

Daniel Tobin is the author of three books of poems, *Where the World is Made*, *Double Life*, and *The Narrows*, as well as the critical study *Passage to the Center: Imagination and the Sacred in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney*. Among his awards are "The Discovery/The Nation Award," The Robert Penn Warren Award, The Robert Frost Fellowship, the Katherine Bakeless Nason Prize, and a creative writing fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Widely published in journals, his work also has been anthologized in *The Bread Loaf Anthology of New American Poets*, *The Norton Introduction to Poetry*, and elsewhere. He is Chair of the Department of Writing, Literature, and Publishing at Emerson College.