

Oh Tell Me What Is There That's True

A Federation of Writers Scotland Patchwork Poem for National Poetry Day 2019

Why don't we wonder about
the exactness of science?
Entrails, tea leaves, coffee grounds,
ranting and raving on YouTube,
fake news, media airtime.
Deceit so intricate
can never leave a fingerprint.
Knowledge does not come unbidden,
lies slip easy from foam-frothed lips,
men must never tell the truth.
Words slice through my heart,
compass needles point wide of true north,
nothing you can do.

Left in the madhouse,
we stand firm in a circle.
Drunkards down desperate drams,
nicht, mornin, efternoon,
from Liverpool to Lisbon, in vino veritas.
Grapes turn to raisins,
their essence turns to sleet or snow,
white in all its brilliance.
Truth is what you want it to be,
mine now, to embellish if I wish:
an image, transparent as gossamer,
the scent of jasmine loaned to the air,
a wild rose, fine as light,
the catch of candlelight, singed hair,
the last of the night,
a presence that's not really there.

We are on a cliff edge now.
Put your ear to the ground,
hear screams reach like imploring hands.
Listen hard: you can hear my voice
with its own agenda of shadows,
trustworthy as an adder's tongue.
When all the music is gone
we've lost things in a hundred ways.

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