

HILL END SONNETS

NUNS' PICNIC

[after the painting of the same name by Jeffrey Smart, 1957]

Two wimpled, aeroplane nuns squat
on the barren dirt dividing their spoils,
a sandwich for you, a sandwich for me.

There is the church behind its little
picket fence which may explain something,
but not the question of why the sky
is ink black without a star and yet the nuns
cast shadows on the ground. A midnight
picnic might be the only down-time
they get. Their features are indistinct
as are the lunar rocks strewn about.

There's not even a picnic blanket.
If there was once a blade of grass
they have eaten it.

Mark O'Flynn

HILL END SONNETS

MAN READING A NEWSPAPER

[after the painting of the same name by Russell Drysdale, 1941]

He seems pretty casual about the whole apocalypse
sitting there in his singlet reading the funnies
while all around him the world is a smoking
ruin. His house in particular, nothing left
but some bits of old iron and a windmill.
He's hung his coat on the branch of a burnt
tree and the black stump he's sitting on
could be the archetypal black stump
of anywhere. The conflagration has laid
waste to all between here and the horizon.
But look, what's that at his feet? Is that not
a jerry can of two-stroke? Ah, I see, it's not his house,
he doesn't care, he's the one who's torched the lot,
kicking back with the paper, job well done.

Mark O'Flynn

STILL LIFE

[after the painting *Still Life* by Jean Bellette, 1955]

Like any other its ingredients tell us all.
Take two empty bowls.
A milk jug. Four oranges,
or are they potatoes?
Red peppers. Leeks.
A blue biscuit jar.
A crumpled yellow tea-towel.
Planes of light and shade that might be walls.
And in the foreground a chair pushed back.
Someone has left the scene in a hurry, throwing
down the tea-towel. Be still! she might have said.
It was going to be a portrait of him
but he's stormed off in a huff.
Slim pickings for tea tonight.

Mark O'Flynn