



Three poems

The Glimmer in the Moil

It can't be what you think it is, spirituality.
If it were, the soft white glimmering
which blooms at night in the dim-lit waves
heaving through the kelp below Crag Point
would comprehend the ocean's dark immensity.

It gathers, it seethes in the always just before,
the just before you waken, blissfully at peace,
before you hear yourself say on the phone, *Sorry!*
or out of nowhere, turning on a tap in the shower,
suddenly see Christ walking along a shore.

Don't ask where it comes from, or why it's here.
The moment it's thought about, even vaguely,
it dies back into the moil and toil of the sea.
Gone again, you say as you drowse at your desk.
Gone for hours – till solitude unknaws you, or
prayer.

Cynics blacken, fanatics red-tide its bloom.
If thoughts were plankton, and caritas oxygen,
then prayer's the wave-pulse that gets it glowing.
Without it, I'd never write a line, for all the kelp
and sea-seethe in my psyche, the gloom.

Read online:



Scan this QR
code with your
smart phone or
mobile device
to read online.

Author: Chris Mann¹

Affiliation: ¹Institute for the Study of English in Africa, Rhodes University, South Africa

Email: c.mann@ru.ac.za

Postal address: PO Box 94, Grahamstown 6140, South Africa

How to cite this article: Mann, C.M., 2015, 'Three poems', *Literator* 36(1), Art. #1113, 2 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/lit.v36i1.1113>

Note: 'The Glimmer in the Moil' -not previously published or submitted elsewhere; 'Dancing in the Royal Hotel' - appeared in a local newspaper with limited circulation in Grahamstown. (*Grocott's Mail*); 'The Pool of Narcissus' - an earlier version was submitted to a small circulation literary magazine based in Cape Town that is not online (*Prufrock*).

Copyright: © 2015. The Authors. Licensee: AOSIS OpenJournals. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.



Dancing in the Royal Hotel

Was it a foxtrot or waltz?
 We weren't much good at it
 but that wasn't the point,
 you teetering in your heels,
 me awkward in a dark suit,
 two small-town newly-weds
 who'd driven miles and miles
 down lonely country roads
 to dance in the Royal Hotel
 on a misty Friday night.

There was hardly anyone there.
 Do you remember the waiters
 in black bow-ties and tuxedos
 who leaned across a balustrade
 and watched our every move?
 And how the elderly pianist
 kept on playing Summertime
 and glancing over his shoulder
 as if longing for someone
 to step onto the dance floor?

You wore your party dress,
 still my favourite, even now,
 the one as black as mascara
 with white Botticelli flowers.
 Their fragranciness was you.
 I was watching your hands,
 candle-lit, slender, supple,
 breaking open a bread-roll
 when out of nowhere came
 love's tender, amorous gasp.

Next thing the gilded mirrors,
 the dark mahogany wainscot,
 the waiters just weren't there
 as haltingly we started to step
 then glide across the floor.
 I smelt your skin's perfume
 and felt your body's touch
 lightly coming and going,
 so joyful I'll never forget
 the slow swirl of that dance.

Does music dance your shades?
 Each time that *Summertime*
 sings in my contemplations
 you in your flowered dress
 show up across the cutlery.
 You're flushed, exuberant,
 a village where the faithful
 celebrate a healing vision.
 I'm smitten with regret to think
 we didn't do this more often.

Next thing, the candelabra,
 the lonesome at their tables,
 the blaze of hot white lights
 above the pianist returns.
 For we are dancing again,
 dancing as if the energy
 that floats the earth, the stars,
 and each dead atom in its grip
 frees us to breathe and dream
 and dance love into time.

The Pool of Narcissus

He's on his hands and knees beside the pool
 staring at the face in the water.
 The din of the city below the trees,
 faint sounds of singing from the temple
 dwindle in the silence of the glade.
 The sun is hot on his back and shoulders,
 a girl is calling from a bank of flowers,
 he goes on staring, staring into the pool.

It's been like this for weeks, months even.
 Half-hidden in the trees, two figures
 are watching, wondering what to do.
 His parents, advised by his tutors,
 have both become, how shall I put it,
 discretely anxious about their boy.

Surely it wasn't like this in the past?
 Hadn't they better consult an oracle?
 Friends spoke highly of Tiresias,
 although quite elderly and blind.

Perhaps that blundering enthusiast
 Hephaestus was yet again to blame.
 The lame god's latest is in his hand,
 a marvel, a miniature bough of gold
 crafted in the sacred fire of his smithy.
 This, surely, wouldn't turn out to be
 as awful as the chariots and arrows,
 being, after all, so enlightening?

Bored, Narcissus dips it into the pool
 and twitches it, this way and that,
 above the rocks of an underworld
 until an open-air theatre emerges
 with arc on arc of crowded seats
 applauding a singer raising a lyre.

He stares for a while, swaying slightly,
 then twitches again, this way and that,
 rippling the placid sheen of the pool
 till athletes in a stadium take shape
 sprinting towards the winning post
 cheered on by throngs of spectators,
 a Heracles next, smeared with gore,
 hacking invading troops on a plain,
 then gliding below the lily-pads
 a naked nymph with long dark hair
 so desirable he drifts into a trance.

'Heavens above!' his mother exclaims,
 walking back through the dusty pines,
 'what if Narcissus grows up like this,
 more attentive to the pool than people,
 unable to love anyone but himself?'

A cloud floats silently above the glade,
 a few warm drops splash on his back
 as if the soft small voice of a girl
 was trying to get his attention.
 Narcissus stares on and on and on.