

Inventory

That I am white must be understood
in context of west Euro ancestry, rather
than east or north Euro, regardless
how much I've admired
nordic expressions of maleness,
brutal and hopeless at once;
and further in context of west Euro
celtic, of Ireland's farthest west coast
parishes nearby Dingle Bay; it must be
understood my people were Catholic,
raised South, and came from men
of resistance, unlike other backboneless
bastards who'd turn off and give up, or so
goes that history, sketched out for me in America,
first generation born here, 9th first son
in a line of first sons that goes back
so far as we track to the 1780's –
and even if that's true and important,
it's now what's American makes me a man, not
like those in this line were men; I'm less
absolute in aspects of Warrior I'd guess,
given that standing for hearth and home demands
foreign ways to engage and counter-
attack – not that I'm saying I'm less
a man, or that this northeast geography's
mule-dragged winters and sharp, short summers
buffered by weeks of clear twilights and dawns
is not an equivalent test of what it means

to be resolute, sometimes just brutal
making a life of work, of rest, of help to those
people not able, for reasons, to hack out
a heritage from what they can find -- help
which sometimes I think feels a little too easily
given -- it's hard everywhere for us all;
I can't help but think they cannot be trying
enough, that maybe I or we should really
get in there and teach them about fighting a way out
a way up -- not that I think
goddamned rich bastards, spending
days making up ways to twist tighter,
watering their lilies and lawns with
what they squeeze out of us -- not that I think
anything they know is anything I'd want to count --
But I've worked to level these playing fields
until it settled in me, one day taking stock,
that such fertile fields never existed, that what's
level may not be what's best, what's fair
struck me suddenly as being no good
contribution to how things evolve since
how could we all of us possibly win, or what if,
in fairness, in pulling up this or that group of lives
some others emerging are crushed -- how can I or we
know which are the right ones to count? -- and that sends me
back to my walls, my four walls, the four walls
each of us gets, and each of us frets over
whether they're just thick enough to hold back
all that we've listed to fear, but yet just
thin enough to let some sort of reason seep in,
reason that wouldn't demand I let go
such middling things as I have --

lightly missed though they would be -- my walls
behind which I count, within which I weigh,
measure these things that surround me against
those of my own kind, and then against those not
my kind -- and in so taking stock of my life
I hear a vague call again, seeking response,
makes me pull everything close that I have,
lock it all down, and know in my white bones
that I and we all must come clean, answer this call:
we are racist, sexist, classist – repeat:
homophobic, geocentric, fanatic – repeat: until
every last one of us drawing breath now
gets that we cannot be part of the fix
that tears off the plates of this armor
we never think anyone sees, until
we give up that we wear it,
and count it, once and for all.

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From Inventories, 2012