

The Eleventh Commandment

by Neil McCarthy

I never thought I'd miss the sound of church bells,
reminding me of my sudden apostasy,
faintly ringing over the rumpus where even the
birds can't get a word in edgeways.

I think of Protestant churches and the horse
chestnut trees that hide them, their gravel paths less
worn than those of their Catholic brethren.
In my memory it's always late October.

Tonight I walked through the big wind; the
unexpected gusts that blasted with pleasure
the street where the palms shed their garb.
I battled north on Sunset, watched the fire truck
barge its way through the lights on Coronado,
threw my head into a bar before happy hour
ended to find *The Quiet Man* projected onto the
back wall, just in time to see Seán Thornton's
lean-in-to-kiss; Mary Kate pure as a storm
in the graveyard's alluring loneliness.

Entranced by the projection, I watched the
grainy landscape of my past silently flow
across the wall in Technicolor, disturbed now
and again by the ripple of a passing shadow,
a head-turning siren from the street, the fancy
footwork of the wind jabbing at the door as
Seán Thornton was laid out across the floor.

I wanted him to be in my shoes, reverse the roles-
an Irishman walloped by America,
having broken every Commandment bar one.
And here, though thou shall not complain
about the weather, the sound of traffic drums as
consistently as rain carried in on a south-westerly,
as we hold a finger to our lips
to silence the misguidance of our gods.

