



2017 Bruce Dawe Poetry Winners

Winner

Stage Whispers

by Tim Collins

I'd read about his death on the stage
in front of the red velvet curtain, it was
always a dark theatre even with the lights
swallowing matinee and nightly expectation.

One night alone behind that curtain we spoke
closely of things that had been cut from our lives.

That night he ran his hand across the curtain back
over small carbuncles of caked on dust, accumulated
from years of human humidity, dust that listened.

Now I pick at the memory, little dried dust hillocks
stuck long hard to the canvas backed curtain, I pick.



Often on a Sunday after a rehearsal the young lads
would broom the red velvet curtain, the front side
billowing, buffeting with the air conditioning's breath.

But that backside was torpored in hesitation, heaved in
memory, long days, nights without searching stage lights.

As we spoke closely that night I scratched at a hillock,
not completely listening to his words for his voice was
so soft and pleasing like a gentle breeze that just ups over
a sun baked ridge and briefly fans you then loses itself.

There was this feathering of fine silt drifting below
my fingers as he talked to me about things, I was divorced
from everything, except the curtain's slight swayed movement.

There was an art deco-ness to his hands as he spoke, they
offered up his words in encased gestures, feelings, often
sensations I felt through my whole body and always there



was this brown robed backstage glow and a silly silence
like it did not know what to do with what it was seeing.

Most men I'd known had stiff walking stick arms full
of sinew and urgent release, his hands and arms worked
with his words, played with his voice like someone trying
slowly to place silver silk over gently rippling waters.

As he talked a yellowed moth above his right shoulder
walked backwards up a curtain fold, and for a funny
tiny second I thought of the manufactured air in this
his theatre, and as air has no memory I thought about how
the moth would live here, alone, in this place, his place.