

Backyard Roses

And still the roses bloom beside the rusty drum
Crammed with half-burnt magazines, and bills;
A symbol of our fallen state, this sum
Of beauty lingering like modern ills,
Romance and dull reality? A rose?—
How has it not been used to signify
The burdens of humanity? What man
When everything about him starts to die,
When autumn heaps the bins with summer's clothes,
Has never been associate with those
I see still thriving by an iron can?

I think of wives whose husbands overuse
The bodies they aspired to; the love
Familiarity will soon abuse.
Must phoenix then incinerate the dove,
A minor fusion of that holocaust
Whose ashes cake the starving rose?
Cold rain and fog, fog and rain,
The summer must have found a brief repose
In these, all her other features lost,
Though weather has conspired to exhaust
Her failing charms, these roses still remain.

And will remain, long after we are dust,
Our woes consolidated by a spade,
And all the lavishings of human lust
Mean nothing more than bills we haven't paid.
Generations deepen in that stain,
Altars of a troubled heart, their hue
A dark druidic smearing sacred stones.
I never could stop loving them, or you;
I will stand before you both again
In other guises, other terms of pain,
And hope somehow the sacrifice atones.

Patrick White