

some lines from the Russian school for Raymond Boyce

Raymond sits at a slight distance
across the table, with a glass of whiskey.
He asks my mother to fill it up.
“Ianthe,” he says, where Gerry,
I don’t know when it started, would always call her
“Little i” - Gerry, whom Raymond always addressed
as “Geraldine.” My father is here,
and they gossip.

The pipe has gone. Raymond tapped it twice, then
used a matchstick to loosen the last ash.
Dad still smokes cigarettes from a silver packet.

On the cabinet—it has dark wooden sliding doors,
circular fingerholes; when Gerry was alive,
G and T’s were produced; served in green
glasses cut from bottles, wine with dinner—Gerry’s
borshcht—on the cabinet, which, like most of the fittings
in the Mount Street house, Raymond built, or made:
the glasses, the banquette under the window, where
a dog called Tip liked to sit—the bookcases lining
to the ceiling an internal room, divided from the rest
by dark wood paper sliding doors from Japan, that let in
light in the morning—there is a model. Raymond
has moved his studio inside.

Can you tell, meaning, can you be bothered or bear to,
“Tell us about this, Raymundo, what it is you’re working on?”
Several others are incomplete. This one is framed, white,

with an iceberg in the centre of the miniature theatre, and linedrawn figures on ivoryboard sliders.

Well, Raymond answers my father's question, now, you see, since I'm not asked, anymore, I can do what I want.

*I've come finally to the operas
I've always been meaning to do.
This is Act II.*

For Act I, the iceberg slides off. All the pieces and parts are there, the figures in costumes for each act. It might be performed like this, in its very austere style, like we saw *Candide* done, on a Sunday night, with actors against linedrawn cartoon sets, before it was at Downstage, where

I trailed seagulls, above the heads of Dr Pangloss, Cunegonde, from the grid, a trapdoor in the stage gave entrance from below, and a bridge across the entire auditorium set the best of all possible worlds above, below and around its audience; circus music piped onto the street; the ambulatories with fairground stalls sold chicken and chips and candyfloss; Thea Muldoon, after too many gins, slid under a table.

I hope you're keeping these, Dad says. Raymond makes some gesture that it is impossible with the profusion of these works, the studio full, upstairs in somebody's ceiling. They're wonderful, says Mum.

Raymond laughs. It is a laughter of the impossible,
the impossibility of doing the work and works
we are not asked to do.

If I could speak about Raymond Boyce, who was
my father's friend, I would say that that
artistic partnership with Dad summed up for me
all of theatre.

I would say that in it met the illusionist theatre
and the interpretive theatre;
the baroque and modern lines,
in what we may call the Russian line,
came together.

In the living dining room—My one rule, said Gerry,
is that if you are staying here,
We have dinner all together—on the cabinet,
I see now these models to be late style,

Everything extraneous left out,
as if we can finally say what it is we have been doing
all our lives.

Theatre has never been classical.
When Bernhardt came to Russia,
they hooted with laughter.

The magic of appearance, of spectres
behind the gauze, of depth in what is flat,
a spectral landscape, figures approaching,

and of disappearance, Raymond's painted scenes
in *East Lynne* flew in the tower
he designed the Hannah to have, lit so,
from the front, they are solid,
light the scene behind, they waver and dissolve—
the dead appear—melt away.

Raymond was the master of classical
theatrical illusion: the bolt shot
from the bow in *Deathtrap*, the shock
it pierced the throat; the set,
researched and rendered
in realist detail for *Sherlock Holmes*
unfolding Baker Street
like origami
into a boat and night fog
on the Thames.

Because of its illusions—
not due to later disillusion—
theatre has never been classical,
but follows the baroque line;

Mozart ascends to heaven;
a heaven set in the mind of Salieri was
the simultaneous inspiration
of Raymond and Dad to solve
the problem of Shaffer's *Amadeus*.

In its theatricality,
it is a heaven we can believe in
and it, not the shame of their

relevance or irrelevance,
is what makes the fearless
reinterpretation of the classics
necessary.

The police leapt several lines
to beat down known communists
in 1981. There was the *Merchant*
set in the fascist racist decadence
of Venice. Raymond and Gerry were
known to have Russian contacts,
the art books in the paper-screened room
were, and Gerry spoke it, Russian.

Raymond maintained Elizabeth I
ruled a police state,
with spies and secret police,
long after Muldoon echoed Hitler's
accusations, made of every
cultural and intellectual institution,
of having been infiltrated by the commies—
work that continues under a different star.

Unity Theatre was a communist cell.
Downstage was socialist, and became
much worse—egalitarian.

What explains the Russian school
of these lines for Raymond Boyce
is a philosophy,
of design,
of theatre,

of reserve, when it comes to public statement,
but no less of political resolve, for being
of design,
of theatre,
and no less intellectual for being
artistic and cultural.

Raymond always had beside the bed
a stack of detective novels,
the most philosophical of literary forms.

Before you put pen to paper,
before you make any mark,
do your research.

The Russian school would take
six weeks in self-study
before assaying the human form.

There is this legacy in the bones
of this building. It is a masterpiece
of theatre design.

Raymond's laughter and Raymond's gossip
included everyone.

It includes all of us,

and here, above all, the gossip
and the laughter
must never cease.

*[written by Simon Taylor
for the tribute
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