

1975

Factory at Nightfall

John Cassidy

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Recommended Citation

Cassidy, John. "Factory at Nightfall." *The Iowa Review* 6.3 (1975): 187-188. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.1941>

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Winter sunlight defines us,
momentary hill figures,
in negative on lit slopes:

we are a footstep's shadow;
we are the echo of light.

As you turn to me, and in
turning take my arm,
the sun travels through our coats
and forms unwoven matter
on fibres of light

and here
this slight and linear dark
where your shadow and mine cross.

Winter heat in the pavement.
A pigeon suns on a roof.

And for half or a minute
we are as old as the light.

I have brought the line back to a strict seven-syllable measure, and, I hope,
to a more lyrical behaviour.

Factory at Nightfall / John Cassidy

You head north, from the way the smoke
moves off your stack, lying back as if
slipstreamed, a ship steaming
full into the wind's teeth.

Steady though, brick steady, foursquare
planted on the rolling land, trees
splurging at the bow, grass whistling
way out behind in a great wake.

All your windows, hundreds, blazing ports
challenging the dull dusk, the cluttered
ocean that you sit on. Travellers
miles away absorb you, awestruck.

Even at a distance the unvarying growl
of your bowels has a rare solidity.
Something is under way, a drive
with a known purpose, a kind of trust.

Small city with your ordered population
busy beneath those lights, sail
north into the darkness, humming.
I salute your assurance.

Elsewhere the single-handed amateurs
plunge under the wind, maintaining
tiny lights and radio silence.
Engineless, they confront their compass.

The Dancing Man / John Cassidy

The Dancing Man of my grandfather's day
Went his rounds of the villages
And the distant farms, in a routine
Like the pedlar, the knife-grinder, and those
Sad seekers after a bed in the straw, men
Hailed or hounded away as the case was.

Nobody drove off the Dancing Man.
He carried a concertina that he whirled
Around his head once under way, clacking
Across the cobbles in a complicated
Rattling symmetry. But he began slowly,
Repetitively positioning his long feet
To a cautious, almost exploratory whine
On the instrument. That was the summons.

They gathered then, through doors, round buildings,
Even out of the fields and schoolyards, to root
Themselves round the Dancing Man.
Who began in them a sympathetic, loose
Swaying, a release of feet, a slackening
Of shoulders and a crowd of smiles.

Or frowns. Mothers of daughters moved
Uneasily, farmers lamented the deserted
Fields, cattle moaned at the late milking.
It took days, they said, before order
Could settle again after such
Disturbance. But nothing is ever the same
After the visit of a Dancing Man.
Meet him if you can.