

In Epitaph

Mark Royden Winchell, *i.m.*

Leaning through silence to a dead man's mind

—Dick Davis

Rev. 21:23

1. Biographer: A Life

He sits amid the facts he's gathered in
From interviews, books, archives,
 scattered prose
Mastered at last so recollection's pen
Can resurrect the dead by what he knows.

He minds the many pitfalls of his art,
Wary of biographers who err
In idolizing, tearing men apart,
Iconoclast or hagiographer.

He must engage, yet shuns the quick
 surmise
With passion for those cool exactitudes
He isolates from hearsay, myths, and lies,
Tactful and tentative as he intrudes.

And when the work of long hard years is
 done
As chapters of his life in holograph,
He'll rest with each dead man whose race
 he's run,
Their hours enshrined in timeless epitaph.

—David Middleton

2. After the Day's Work—ca. 1863

after the painting by Jean-François Millet

A high full moon now dominates the scene,
White with reflected sunlight whose pale
 rays
Silhouette figures looming as they move,
Gone down a path back home through
 Chailly Plain.

The man sits sideways on the old lead mare,
Her blindered eyes following gorse-
 spotched ground,
A rope he holds pulling the younger horse,
A plough-team blurred in nightfall's yellow-
 browns.

Across the flat expanse of rock and shrub,
Walking by a rickety cottage fence,
A widow brings late gleanings to her sons
Whose father's, like this worker's, day is
 done.

The peasant, grave and ancient, simply
 stares
In telling resignation far away
Not toward the dwelling-place his tired
 beasts seek
But one beyond this realm of moon and
 sun.

—David Middleton

[Author's Note: These verses remember Mark Royden Winchell both as a biographer and as a reviewer of my book *The Habitual Peacefulness of Gruchy: Poems After Pictures by Jean-François Millet* (LSU Press, 2005).]