The Ohio State University Press/The Journal Award in Poetry
Shadeland
Andrew Grace
In memory of Gary Eugene Grace
June 7, 1951–March 4, 2004

For Tory and Lily
Contents

Acknowledgments ix

I.

At Chain of Rocks Canal 3
Invitation 4
Achilles in the Heartland 5
Pilgrim Sonnet 7
Pilgrim Sonnet Redux 8
Prelude to X 9
Dinner for Threshers 10
Without You, The Meadow 16
The 28th Year 17
Curse 18
Descent 19

II.

X 23
Y 25
Z 27
Silo 28
Of Shade and Body Interwound 29
At the Outermost Shrine of the Narrowmost Road 30
Vantage 31
Confession 32
Of Love and Wild Dogs 33
The Imperfect Knowledge of Paolo 34
Is to Say 35
Them Men 36
III.

Ex Log 41
Divisible 47
Letter Sent in a Fish 49
Letter Sent Back on a Crane’s Heel 50
At the Shade House 51
For Tityrus 52
Shadeland 54

Notes 56
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At Chain of Rocks Canal

Sky’s first rung spreads morning’s zero draft—
they say a journey is an inch of Hell, maybe two.

Let them find me far from here.
Let them find me in Black Water Lobby, face up, or down.
Let them find me praying in the whining pipes of straw.
Let them find me dumb and thirsting.

I see the road descend.
I see distant silos lit brilliant as Hundred Blossom Tower.
I see the X and O: the unknown and our grief.
I see, and then I do not see, your star.
For Tityrus

who had to, as we do now, watch the neighbors leave,
   us from our porch facing Route 45, pollen drifting

like smithereens from some erupted star over the truck
   of a family whose few hundred acres were taken

not grandly by droves of Octavian’s godless soldiers
   fresh from civil war, but by simple hard luck, rootworm

and corn borer, too few loans to afford an acrid cascade
   of insecticide dropped from those planes whose tracers

make the mock-girding which fails each night to prop up the sky.
   Tityrus, who purchased in Rome from Octavian himself

the right to continue to graze his flock in the dropped-apple reek of fall
   between the stunted row of tamarisks and the rock outcrop

that marked his land—if he were here I could ask what advice
   to give as they come up the drive to return the twenty yards

of electric fence borrowed to keep raccoons from their pumpkins,
   what to say to this family whose three fields we will soon try to buy

at the lowest negotiable price, so that it won’t be our furniture
   someday sticking out the back of a flatbed. Tityrus,

who offered his neighbor one last night in arcadia, clover
   for his sheep, chestnuts and cheese for his journey, did more

than we are willing to. It would take more than generosity
   or condolence to stop this father’s belief he’s been cheated

by those humid nights spent awake urging on the mass of bats
   constellating above their corn, feeding on that which fled

from our well sprayed land onto theirs, wrecking the yield.
   If Tityrus were standing here with us, watching their exhaust rise,
I would ask him if I should take it as a sign that our farm
is the last one in the county with its original name, Shadeland,
as night falls and my mind latches on only to that
which is giving itself over to bare and continuous forces—
the unbeautiful pears fallen at tree’s roots, evening wind’s
far off baying, the chipped and gap-bricked mouth of a well
that with each freeze and thaw feeds on itself, increments of stone
humming beyond earshot into nothing, which is quick, and final.
Shadeland

Beginning with a line from Hopkins

Down roughcast, down dazzling whitewash, wherever an elm arches—wherever June wind barnstorms the dry stations of barley, clouds like an old tattoo dragging in rain over the West, you can almost see how the body moves after life,

fish-tailing across the water hemp, suddenly keen, gunning for any heaven. Standing in the white pines, their chalk-mail and tin music, what does this mean to me, starting to fade, even now, hours, days reshuffling and losing sense in the cipher—

we must work fast: in a pond, somewhere, like a black pearl, death is spinning itself; memory is the moth turning our anthology of dead ends to dust above the world of our bodies, whose skins, in the hoarlight, are frail clay.