
Poetry

Tolstoy in South Jersey

No matter where Tolstoy was placed he'd bolt,
one day from New Gretna, next from Blue Anchor
many miles west. The man couldn't be contained.
There he'd be in blueberry fields talking to workers,
then at the cranberry bogs deep in the Barrens.

The sex shops that dotted Route 30 repelled, lured,
finally bored him. Epitaphs on headstones
interested him more, imagining the Colonial past,
lovers and loved ones, the battles, successes,
suicides. He canoed the Mullica, took in the odors

of lilac and lily, noted the shreds of light
coming through the branches of leafy oaks.

South Jersey, he discovered, was a realm
of the yet-to-be-created, a panorama of nameless
names, its people asprawl, their kindness, malice,

beauty, sweat of industry, drowsiness of ambition,
awaiting their approximate, never-final nouns.

All he needed, he said, was a year, maybe two,
and he'd deliver it, clock it, make it as real as Moscow
in flames, the harsh countryside covered with snow.

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