Humanities

Poem

William Carlos Williams circumcises Ernest Hemingway’s first son

So I said, sure, and why not? The next sweet morning of Paris drunk with the warm scent of rain on gravel in Luxembourg Gardens and my head as big as a bucket a — shall we say — aftereffect of the prizefights we went to the night before the four of us roiled in the grit and sawdust and sweat — Kill him! Kill the bastard! — Flossie cried. So I picked up my leather kit and went back to Hem’s flat laid the kid on the kitchen table and lopped off his foreskin — his teeny binky, Hadley cried — which in those days was what you did. At the sight of Bumby’s blood, bloody big Hem standing at the side of the table holding the kid’s head collapsed a sack of potatoes, a tin of lard fainted ker-boom dead to the world. After the days in Paris they kept asking me how could I go back to the pale complexities of practice?

To the grime of Rutherford’s bodies? The drum of routine — I think of Hem on the floor at the first drop of his son’s blood. What a man! It isn’t anything I could explain, I tell them. Just call it making a living.

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Dr. Coulehan’s most recent collection of poems is Medicine Stone (Fithian Press; 2002).