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The Iowa Review

Volume 2
Issue 2 *Spring*

Article 26

1971

Preoccupation's Gift

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Recommended Citation

Davie, Donald. "Preoccupation's Gift." *The Iowa Review* 2.2 (1971): 88-88. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.1199>

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and still leaner faith, "Woodpigeons at Rahenny" gives us, marvelously, both the poet Davie might have been and the poet he feels he has to be.

As we have seen, Davie was not always to feel—what in the course of this early and perfect poem he comes to feel—a sort of Capuchin out of tune with the natural world. But whether enmeshed with or at odds with life, he was always to sing as one who finds it fitting that a contemporary song be lean. This leanness, this commitment to the pure style and to pure art, may prompt us to feel that, when Davie does come to praise life, his song is stunted, the "given phrase" too thin and pale. And yet there is an integrity in Davie's leanness that, the more one reads him, the more one admires. If his work cannot overwhelm us through a powerful excess, neither can it spoil. And how remarkable it is that, for all his leanness, Davie, like a long-distance runner, has covered so much of life, paused at the equator as well as at the Pole. The combination of his lean style and his rich, elastic nature has produced a body of work rare in character: pure art with a broad range.

Donald Davie

PREOCCUPATION'S GIFT

When all my hours are mine,
I husband them with care;
Pre-empted hours are those
 I have to spare.
Step by step, one
Calculated stage
After another, writing
 A laboured page —
Give me my freedom back
And this is how I live,
Frugally, for lack of
 Anything to give
Short of my freedom. Thrift
Gives nothing it gives up;
But absent-minded pourings
 Brim every cup.
The provocations so
Prodigal, and the response
Parsimony? No,
 No vigilance!