



Welfare Kid

B. James McCarthy

I.

A single bed overlooked
by the corpse of Jesus Christ,
shallow in a case of glass,
hung six feet high upon the wall.

INRI written across a board that pales
between the sallow glint of sun
through the windowed hall.

A boy tucked beneath
a second-hand quilt, worn and stained
with hand-me-down memories
of some far-off and forgotten poverty
that knows none like this.

Toss and turn, boy.

Boy, turn and toss.

You think of loss and
lives unknown

to you

and the shape of lives
you will never know,
only available to those
much better off.

II.

Shake it off; turnabout and break it
off and think of something else. Think
of tomorrow; tomorrow, you are four
and you know nothing of yourself;
a welfare kid turning welfare gears
on a welfare bike with skinny welfare legs
that are underfed and thankful for a hotdog
or a soda or an encouraging word gifted
in the warm affection of your best friend's mother.
Think of this, think. Turning down
your welfare lane to a welfare house
on a bright summer welfare day;
a little bipedal locomotive leaving
welfare tracks atop the welfare gravel,
sounding more and more like welfare smacks
that crack and pop beneath the shallow welfare tires.
Turn and turn and turn until you're here,
a welfare kid beneath a second-hand quilt,
overlooked by Jesus Christ. Thinking
about tomorrow and what's to come. Christ. 