

CATHERINE AND THE SPIDER

(At the Catherine McAuley Statue in The Sacred Garden of Mercy International Centre, Dublin)



It's just a statue, but has a power.

Unmoving though it is, it moves *us* to pause,
to spend time in the spirit, quiet in this quiet corner.
Her hand invites with gentle, insistent authority to join her,
her shoulders glistening with drops after the inevitable rain,
her torso turned from the bustle of the house to attend the one who sits.

It holds surprises, the bronze figure.

I greet the tiniest of spiders on the woman's neck
as it climbs back up the fine filament it had spun for its descent.
Startled at my arrival and shy of my photos, it seeks cover.
The little creature hastens and disappears, of all places,
into the cave of Catherine's right ear,
the fluted bronze that replicates the auditory shell
once flesh with which she heard the world and the Word.
The spider, sure footed with its eight legs,

clearly quite familiar, returns to its haven, an enviable shelter.

And I, full of enchanted delight,
find myself smiling at an Irish spider,
curious as to what converse takes place between them,
of what the spider whispers, tickling, in Catherine's ear,
and what it hears so close to her pulse, which signals yet
in the deep silence of this inner space
within the inner space that the house wraps itself around,
at once a green cradle for many ancestral bones
and a flourishing where the roses today are full golden.

And she, designated *Spinster* on the original building plans still kept inside the
house,

what does she share with this little spinster, the archaic term for spinner?

Spinster: one whose skill and livelihood is to spin,
a description in her time of social fact not slur; a mark of gift not failure,
of one adept at crafting cohesion from the elemental gifts of silk and wool,
honed and refined to their irreducible essence.

The silk of a spider, toiled from its own body, is astoundingly tough,
and in times past prized to staunch and heal wounds.

To be a spinster is to be a spinner
to be a spinner is to be a maker
to be a maker is to be a healer
to be a healer is to be a changer
to be a changer is to be an agent of mercy
a patterner of love.

And in the spinning and the making
and the healing and the changing and the patterning
is the reciprocity of grace, always.

Let us be spinners.

Let us be weavers at the loom of mercy.

It's just a statue, but has a power.

And always now for me it will be known as home

to a needy and busy creature, an arachnid abode.

Such a privileged place - to have the ear of such a one as Catherine,

and be part of a society of spinning friends.

The bronze figure blesses me, the Irish spider blesses me,

as they ask what it is we are spinning and weaving today from the silk

that is the irreducible mercy of God,

the strongest of filaments and finest of threads?

As we spin and as we weave,

let us pattern love in its told and untold designs, its many-coloured cloths.

** The fine, evocative sculpture of Catherine McAuley seated on a garden bench is by Gael O'Leary, and versions of it are found in a variety of Mercy contexts throughout the world.*