Poetry: To Happy Harold, My Used Car Dealer

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To Happy Harold
My Used Car Dealer

By Joseph DeRocco
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Your lot must be a happy lot, Harold.
Your floodlights blaze at night with a candlepower
that hurts the eyes and throws a glory
on the turning maples out on Bedford Road.

All those brilliant spinning plastic discs
and looping lines of wind-blown pennants
warped in the dark and marvelous mirrors
of your well-waxed Fords and Pontiacs
make me happy, Harold, and make me wish you well.

All those shining cars, so happy in their home,
lying in the benediction of your gleaming billboard grin,
lap up your loving light and rest in smug repose,
beaming from their chrome the placid bliss
of the absolutely safe. They know their happy lot,
Harold, under your Miracle Warranty,
promising service and repairs for all eternity.

How safe you make us feel, Hap (you won't mind
if I call you Hap), and God knows
how much we need a Miracle Warranty
on Bedford Road where the leaves are falling
and the nights are getting longer
and there is no light except where you are.

The cars thank you, Hap, and Bedford Road
and the turning maples thank you
and I too, in my own darkness,
thank you.

Book Reviews Continued
certainly, Yale, Wolfe's alma mater, should
be unsulliable. He describes the Fallen
Artist as one with "... an eye cocked to see if
anyone in le monde was watching. Have
they noticed me yet?" He describes in
equally caustic tones Yale's capitulation to
the Bauhaus architectural juggernaut in
allowing an architect whose only
qualification was canonical loyalty to design
a library edition that "could scarcely have
been distinguished from a Woolco discount
store in a shopping center."

L
ike most great wits, Wolfe is at his best
when he is on the attack. His petes
noire are so deserving of his ridicule and so
effectively done up that in remembering all
his books one has read over the years there
is a temptation to dismiss him as a rather
peevish sort. But, for all his personal style,
what some would call his dandyism, and the
razzle-dazzle of his journalistic style, there is
much in The Purple Decades that reveals
Wolfe to be a good deal more than a mean
nay-sayer. His admiration for the courage of
the astronauts and fighter pilots (and their
wives) is unalloyed, a courage made all the
more remarkable because it is never talked
about. There's the respect for a Junior
Johnson, who doesn't forget his roots, who
builds his palatial new house in the same
hollow he was born in, and who still takes
the whiskey run for his father. And even a
healthy American respect for those who can
out-smart the government, certainly for the
moonshiners outwitting the revenuers, but
even for the mau-mauers beating down the
bureaucrats. There's the faith in Yankee
ingenuity, in gadgetry and technology, and
always in genuine skill and hard work. (The
descriptions of Yeager and the carrier-
based fighter pilots are unexcelled.) He
admires Frank Lloyd Wright for his "totally
American architecture, arising from the
American terrain and the spirit of the Middle
West," and for his bold refusal to capitulate
to the Le Corbusier coup. He obviously
likes people to act their age, but he admires
independence more, as we see in his
description of the senior citizen caravans of
silver Airstreams striking out on their own.
And he likes deunkers and ego-deflaters,
like himself, even when they come in the
unlikely form of the raucous inmates in a
women's prison who call out names and
seductive compliments to the pedestrian
dudes and macho bikers on the busy street
below - on the chance that they will hit a
name right and cause a head to turn, a
sucker, and scream with riotous and
contemptuous laughter. All this, The Purple
Decades reminds us of and sets our
memories right, both about Wolfe and those
two tempestuous decades.

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