

Eamon Grennan

# BUT THE BODY



Gallery Books

*But the Body*  
is first published  
simultaneously in paperback  
and in a clothbound edition  
on 31 March 2012.

The Gallery Press  
Loughcrew  
Oldcastle  
County Meath  
Ireland

[www.gallerypress.com](http://www.gallerypress.com)

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ISBN 978 1 85235 526 5 *paperback*  
978 1 85235 527 2 *clothbound*

A CIP catalogue record for this book  
is available from the British Library.

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*Like the scarred moon,  
half in light, half in mourning . . .*  
— Tomas  
Tranströmer

## *Black Rain*

When *the one true thing* is *black rain*  
on the roof of *Fukakusa Temple*  
what is the sound of wind  
making its presence felt among the bushes  
of fuchsia, on sycamore leaves,  
along the knife-bright lake surface  
or among the reeds at its shoreline?

And how do you hear the blatter of magpies  
baffled by the bird feeder, or the long  
unbroken breath of the *sean-nós* singer  
steering the girl's bare feet  
on the flags of the kitchen floor?

Build your house, one says, where birds  
can be shadows flashing past windows,  
their small voices surfing turbulent air,  
and where you may hear the cock pheasant's  
throaty shout when it sees the mountain.

Tonight, though, the one true thing  
in this small house  
we've roofed against the weather  
will be the sound of black rain  
off the Atlantic, rapping at the skylight.

## *Renvyle, Midday*

Gleam of two mute swans at ease, raising a lake-family  
among the rushes. Through the pathos of their weak cheeping,  
robins resist the rain that clings, a wet dishcloth,  
to rose hips and hedges. No wrong in the throng of sand fleas  
leaping around a sea-green bone. Sea a sleepy tide  
lap-slapping at the brief three-pointed feet  
of plovers, hysterical oystercatchers, indifferent gulls.  
Wind whispers idiot mantras in the chimney; cat  
contemplates a blackout grate; hills give up  
their ghost to a cloud of rain. Small birds  
huddle on branches, untempted by breadcrumbs  
among the stones. Caught in this matter-dance, your eyes  
impale themselves where a hawthorn  
bristles into the invisible. But no *jade-gold world*  
hereabouts, only blue-anointed sky  
and bone-white sand; this ink-and-avocado sea.

## *Hill Walk with Daughter*

All small things on the hill we three are climbing —  
heather, ground-hugging juniper, dwarf cinquefoil —  
make space for themselves on turf and rock  
where ferns shelter in holes so the wind won't matter.

It's their fierce attachment to the place they've tenanted  
and are at last at home in that I notice, their silent  
presences defying wind and weather, drawing  
life from the day by day, and sparsely shining.

Now you step and I stumble behind our daughter  
who goes lightly between heather roots, bracken  
and chunked limestone — hurdling boggy patches  
like a kid goat, surefooted as her nineteen years

can make her. She turns, waves at us, then on  
to where, when we achieve the windy summit,  
we'll find her seated, calmly beholding  
how the big cloud-world raises its towered mansions

and tumbled otherworldly shapes to lord it over  
all us small creatures feeling the clear mountain air  
move about us: in it, and breathing it in together.

## *Breakthrough*

In the unforgiving mud and rocks and rushes,  
in the slow ooze of blue clay,  
in the slurp and slosh of grass roots  
that leave the field after days of rain  
a viscous mash, thick black,

my neighbour, quick to any call,  
drives spade and crowbar deep, shifts  
rocks, drags grass tufts, bundles rushes  
and digs out the muck  
to make a channelling run-off

till the broken pipe  
comes to light, its gap and fracture gaping  
where the cows had found it  
with their clumped hooves, had placed  
the placid weight of their great shunting selves  
through it

so everything got blocked  
and all the house-sinks gurgled, loudly shuddering  
whenever a tap ran. Found,  
he slaps his filthy hands together, tells me  
where I stand knee-deep in muck  
*Mind, you'll get dirty, then bends again*

over the crowbar, all concentration, immersed  
in the heavy matter to hand, this  
offering of himself, neighbour-like,  
to the task

of cleansing, opening up, getting things  
patched, back to how they should be —

*Tasty, he'll say, and right as rain,  
the water fine now, running clear,*

and letting me see  
patience is charity, charity patience,  
the one *running clear* as it must  
into the other

while our work-day wavers  
for a minute into  
its own intricate, thick infinity.