

Medbh McGuckian

**THE HIGH
CAUL CAP**



Gallery Books

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*in memory of Siobhán
and Mary*

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These Latinized Snows

This room should be read as a preface
to an experience which occurred
many miles before: light-of-day
simplicity in the administered space,
accepting the pre-set view,
though belts of country miles in width
have been swept away.
The electric fluid has taken to carrying
the mail, like a blood-opening heart buried under
a sundial, or the undiluted Nile.

By quietly slipping in the word 'eva' ('only'),
those who delicately thread the needles
lay a motionless finger on a forearm
to show through this so-called non-blue
otherwise sheltering the dance the woman
is about to break into, wearing her belatedness
like a far grander blanket.

Long after other fireplaces have subsided
two savage arcs are flaming like weeds
in snow from end to end of your lovely,
symbolic city where one day
marketgoers would again arrive by train . . .

As when a younger-sister-haunted older
daughter finds in the messy street debris
stretch marks on the trunk of an aspen,
etchings of beetles on the tree bark:
or when I photographed the births of my three
children, each in their turn, I saw
that with their first intake of breath
their whole bodies were suffused
with off-hour rainbowing, from head to toe.

Research into Haloes

I don't make good use of winter days
for the needy dead, their hands as I had
arranged them.

Why did he call himself Stone, or House,
or Garment, or Cluster of Henna?
He possessed the will without a why,
before the soul was made a lady by it.

In the meantime (and it is always
in the meantime) your guess is as good as mine,
whether you will hear from your daughter
when she is in her grave

with an ear grown tender to such pleasing minstrels
as that first swallow through the little
Jesus window.

I had to search for a safe place
on the red-hot rim
after two brightly lighted trains
passed one after the other:

I have sent you the betrothal gifts —
a duchesse pear, clocked stockings,
a skirt made from soldier's cloth
by my Farnearness.

In prayer she floats to the tops of trees,
or spires, she stabs her hand with paperclips,
her breasts give forth an oil from which
she is able to feed herself
when arrested, outside the town.

Woman Examining Her Breasts in a Mirror

Why do I always return to the sunken road
through corroded hills where the moon entered
the double-shuttered windows? Who would forbid
light being taken from neighbouring light?

Keep far away, you slender headboards
and you long borders who cover half the feet.
He is reading with his right finger a stretched breast
the new muse has unwoven.

Overflow of flowers in the wilder bit of the garden.
He teaches by what juices kisses disappear
from the holy land of the body
where swallows now are seldom seen singly.

Around the foreshore a straggling absence
of banners trembling on church steeples:
the sea is splashed by stars and rented
nailspaces along alleyways.

The war-scalloped square is attacked
by brightness. The rain-gathering
uplands breathe uninterrupted
views of Government House.

The Nth of Marchember

The way she was standing told me
it wasn't worth going to the trouble
of turning on any more lights.

She guards her blouse, momentarily
holding her heart as if caressing a character
in someone else's family romance.

Within her inner theatre, and seemingly borderless
surround, she quivers across the porcelain
of evening — the bed is certainly more

than it needed to be. When sleep undresses
her mind to even make peace with the city of 'I will',
her blood forewarns her

she is out, out of town, I understand, thumb
on the doorbell, outside, overflying a snowy
border, angel and puppet coming together

in an Old Believer Cemetery whose miracles
take place around boats and water.
For something, read a large half,

a whole self too much — light of my life,
the lanugo of her own splendid body
hobbling my life with its bloody repast.

Those flayed surfaces of her hand are washed
four or five times a day, till the accent
of our parents is fully purged

through our father's cast-off Royal Underwood.
Her undeadness, her petrified unrest
is the ending of time within her,

the alleged redemption's
copy of a grievous gift, flinging her
in and out of the downtown.