

Derek Mahon

AN
AUTUMN
WIND



Gallery Books

An Autumn Wind
is first published
simultaneously in paperback
and in a clothbound edition
on 26 March 2010.

The Gallery Press
Loughcrew
Oldcastle
County Meath
Ireland

www.gallerypress.com

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ISBN 978 1 85235 486 2 *paperback*
978 1 85235 487 9 *clothbound*

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



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*for Rosie FitzGerald Cargin
and family*

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An Aspiring Spirit

after Quevedo

The final dark can take away my eyesight,
obliterating the white blaze of day;
it can release my soul and maybe gratify
the anxious hope of an eternal light —

but even on the farther shore it won't deter
the thought of where my earthly being burned:
blithely ignoring the strict rules, my fond
desire will swim back through the icy water.

The life that held such an aspiring spirit,
the arteries that fed so much impatience,
the marrow once so glisteningly bright

may wither, but their ardour will survive.
There will be ashes, yes, but smouldering ashes;
there will be dust, but dust glowing with love.

Antrim Road

after Baudelaire

I can still see that first suburban house,
whitewashed and tiny, tiny but at peace,
a 'Dresden' figurine next to the clock
holding her skirt out as she reads a book.
A fiery evening sun, intensely hot,
burns at the window from a garden hut,
a curious red eye between two clouds
silently watching mushy peas and spuds,
and throws out long, imposing shadow-shapes
on the white homework and the bottled ships.

Romance

after Rimbaud

I

Nothing is serious when you're seventeen.
One evening, sick of the beer and the lemonade,
the noise and bright lights of the café scene,
you sit out under trees on the promenade.

A scent of lime there in the hot June nights.
The air engulfs you with its summery glow;
not far away the wine fumes and the shouts
float up on a soft breeze from down below.

2

You try to fix your gaze on a patch of blue
framed like a picture in the branchy night
pierced by a star, sharp but dissolving now,
quivering slightly, tiny, perfectly white.

A June night! Seventeen! You're getting drunk.
You sip champagne, the stuff goes to your head;
you wander off, imagining some punk
groupie clinging to you or in your bed.

3

The daft heart drifts to popular romance —
when, suddenly, that nice Charmaine goes by,
delightful in the pale glare of the lamps
under her stuffy father's furious eye.

Since you look interesting, if a little weird,
she throws you an alert and lively glance,

two shoes tickety-boo in the boulevard,
and a soppy song dies on your lips at once.

4

Now you're in love (she giggles at your poem) —
in love, until the holidays are through.
Your pals avoid you, love being 'bad form',
and the next day she grants a rendezvous . . . !

That evening, back to the rowdy café scene,
ordering up the beer and the lemonade.
Nothing is serious when you're seventeen
and lime trees are in leaf on the promenade.