

Kerry Hardie

ONLY THIS ROOM



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for my mother
who taught me to read and then fed me with books

for Seán
without whom there'd be no books of my own

*'I' and 'you' are but the lattices,
In the niches of a lamp,
Through which One Light shines.*

*'I' and 'you' are the veil
Between heaven and earth;
Lift this veil and you will see
No longer the bond of sects and creeds.*

*When 'I' and 'you' do not exist,
What is Mosque, what is Synagogue?
What is the Temple of Fire?*

— Mahmud Shabistari (died c.1339)

Gulls in the Morning

The herring gulls on the rail
threaten and swagger and strut.
They rise and alight, they lift up strong beaks,
they ululate into the sky.

I love their cold eyes
and their harsh, headstrong ways.
They call out to something inside me
that is empty and fearless and fierce.

Earthen

for Andrew and Tina Kavanagh

Sometimes when the sky clears
to a thin astonishing blue
the heart turns, looks over its shoulder
at shadows of the tall perennials
cross-hatching an old brick path.
Wind rises.
Dry seed-heads rattle and bow
like old thoughts.
The rivets on a wooden bench
are rusting. Weeds thrive
in cracked and broken bricks
set far below
the clean high sky.
Yet there is beauty
in such fecklessness, such disrepair.
It is our body's native language.

Unrest

Oh, heart,
why not content yourself
with this beautiful life here on earth?

Why not move through our rooms
like a woman at dusk
and spread a white cloth on our table?

Old

The flung cries of the choughs,
rags on the windy mountain,
the rattling flight of the magpie,
the heron's flop-winged lift.

And the lambs clamouring the morning,
and the tide rushing the harbour,
and the glamour of hunting kestrel
quartering boggy ground.

Life is Sweet

Bus Éireann Expressway

A man in his middle years walks up the street
holding a wreath in each hand.

The blonde who follows two paces behind
has that worked-over look on her face.

There's a dress shop, Caproni's, offering glitz
for 'All Sizes and All Occasions'.

The bus slows. The boy who stands by the door
stops watching the man with the flowers;
he climbs down and hauls his bag from the hold
while the driver is counting the fare in his hand
and a girl in a narrow coat waits.

Now the driver has started the engine again,
he swings on the wheel and pulls out,
and the girl who's still hanging around in the aisle
staggers and grabs at the back of a seat,
then a youth moves his coat and she sits.

Later, the man with the wreath in each hand
gets drunk and weeps for the uncle who died
and says to the one who's still walking and talking
the things he has worked out alone in the dark
and promised himself that he'll say.

The woman extracts him, drives back through the twilight
and, wearing the dark dress she bought in Caproni's,
lays slices of ham onto bread.

The boy with the bag is mucking out horses,
the driver, long since pulled into the depot,
has phoned home to say he'll be home when he won't,
while the girl who sat by the youth in the bus
has got off in Ennis, his name in her phone,
then waited an hour for her lift.

Her mother, watching the back roads unwind,
thinks she's in better form, but says nothing.