

SOMEWHERE THE WAVE



Derek Mahon

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THE WAVE**

*Drawings and watercolours by  
Bernadette Kiely*



Gallery Books

## *The Seagull*

*(Trigorin, Act 4)*

The towns where the train pauses manufacture  
chimneys and fences, boredom, mud and birches.  
A cool breeze flaps decrepit architecture  
and blows a white blaze on the country roads,  
vegetable gardens, grimy local churches.  
Folk-tale heroines nap in the autumn woods;  
at Tver', only a few hundred versts from Moscow,  
a wandering gull foreshadows the first snow.

The clouds are grand pianos; he makes a note.  
Gogolian porters blink in smoky shadows,  
a scent of heliotrope and a buzz of flies.  
Girl in a blouse, man in a linen suit;  
the wind goes running in remembered meadows  
under the vast light of these northern skies:  
'Out here I feel a quickening of the senses  
far from reviewers and hostile audiences.'

Nina, he's come this time for a last look  
at the great forest and your native lake,  
the clear freshwater ripples you deserted  
to join the theatre for his sake and yours.  
He let you down of course, and himself too:  
his work fell off when he lost sight of you.  
Your soul migrated from his ice art;  
a stuffed gull listens from a chest of drawers.

Watch out, he's working on a new novel,  
his best yet; when it sees the light of day  
critics, as usual, will find it slight,  
adroitly done though not a patch on Tolstoy.

(So too the friends gathered around his grave:  
'Oh, a great gift, if not quite Turgenev . . .')  
A dead seagull, what a terrific story;  
amazing if you too were there tonight —

and there you are now, tapping the windowpane  
like a tense revenant or a familiar ghost.  
Waves on the water, wind loud in the wood  
with the raw October evenings drawing in,  
but nobody loves each other as they should.  
All come and go, to the hotel, the train,  
the gun room and the veranda; all begin  
to die, it will be twenty years at most.

## *Goa*

Even now I think of you with a kind of awe.  
Do you laze at evening on an azure shore,  
you whom I last saw twenty years ago,  
or contemplate from a beach house in Goa  
the Indian Ocean breaking on a coast  
where my love, gratitude and grief lie waste?  
If only we'd fought off the final row;  
but, poets both, we saw the drama through.  
Decades divide us from the life we lost  
and only in spirit can I be with you now.

