

John Montague

**DRUNKEN
SAILOR**



Gallery Books

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*In memory of
Seán Lucy, poet and teacher,
who brought me to Cork,
and Turlough Montague, my brother,
with whom I played, long ago,
in a Brooklyn park . . .*

Clabber: The Poet at Three Years

after the Irish of Cathal Ó Searcaigh

'That's clabber! Clutching clabber
sucks caddies down,' said my father harshly
while I was stomping happily
in the ditch on the side of the road.
'Climb out of that clabber pit
before you catch your death of it!'

But I went on splattering and splashing,
and scattering whoops of joy:
'Clabber! Clabber! I belong to it,'
although the word meant nothing to me
until I heard a squelch in my wellies
and felt through every fibre of my duds
the cold tremors of awakening knowledge.

O elected clabber, you chilled me to the bone.

Heart Land

after the Irish

Would you like to

hide in	the thicket of gold?
halt on	the hill of the foxes?
quarrel in	the fortress of shouting?
tumble into	the place of curses?
stride upon	the moor of the hawk?
listen on	the ridge of the seagull?

The Listeners: Elizabeth's Dream

A deep golden light
on our secret copse:
a flow of honey.

Frost sheathes
each stalk of grass:
a brittle pelt.

Two slender metal
sickle shapes
incline together.

In a gilded mist
of winter sun
they sway and tilt

while the wind whispers,
as in a dance,
as in a trance.

Born from their inter-
secting arcs, a frail
spirit child of steel.

Last of the House

The mountains drowse
around us, each evening.
We almost understand them,

their gorse-tough slopes,
where more has happened
than we can grasp.

In this valley, no one
lifts a fiddle, and no
one speaks Irish.

Though once we heard
Mount Gabriel singing
for an O'Driscoll dying,

the last of his house.
Even the sheep, still
as boulders on the slopes,

lifted their heads
to attend this numinous sound.
Interweaving voices, male

and female, echoing
from the mountain side;
a spectral opera

of loving sorrow;
fierce calamity,
stubborn continuity.

Slievemore

1

When this landscape has been
absorbed into the mind
taken up into the dream

a single image may flake
away, flint or obsidian,
to reveal a whole civilization.

2

Called up
by thunder clap
by draughts of rain

the bronze doors
of the evening sky open
and I shiver to discern

massively
glinting in the watery sun:
Slievemore's guardian forms.

3

Jagged head
of warrior, bird
of prey, surveying space

side by side
they squat, the stern
deities of this place,

giant arms
slant to the calm
of lap, kneebone;

blunt fingers
splay to caress
a rain-hollowed stone

towards which
the landscape of five parishes
tends, band after band

of final,
peewit haunted,
cropless bogland.