

Eamon Grennan

# THE QUICK OF IT



Gallery Books

*The Quick of It*  
is first published  
simultaneously in paperback  
and in a clothbound edition  
on 25 November 2004.

The Gallery Press  
Loughcrew  
Oldcastle  
County Meath  
Ireland

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ISBN 1 85235 370 8 (*paperback*)  
1 85235 371 6 (*clothbound*)

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

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*At Half-past Seven, Element  
Nor Implement, be seen —  
And Place was where the Presence was  
Circumference between.*

— Emily Dickinson (# 1084)

*Enough  
To believe in the weather and in the things and men  
Of the weather and in one's self, as part of that  
And nothing more.*

— Wallace Stevens, 'Extracts from  
Addresses to the Academy of Fine Ideas'

You wonder what'll come through the cracks you've papered  
over  
now forsythia, magnolia, all the short-lived brightnesses  
begin  
their shining.

Voiced like mourning dove and motorbike,  
great whales  
moan underwater lullabies, love songs; and all the old-world  
words  
like *husband, wife, spouse* — gleaming like new leaves —  
mean  
a walk across patches of trespassed grass.

Beneath the  
chestnut's  
candelabra, the slow-bowling arm of the campus worker  
bends,  
broadcasting seed in a clean line.

Chill days: you sense your  
skin's  
been lifted, leaving soft raw flesh to feel these shifts in  
weather, its  
tart reminders; taste seething flux, tomorrow's foggy salt.

Off the skin of water scumbled blue a ghostly steam-mist  
rises, as the frost-  
chilled air kisses river surfaces and something changes.  
Something changes  
when two outsides touch like that, each sensing the touch of  
that sudden other,

as something changes when our wrists and fingers settle and  
slowly stroke  
each other, taking time to savour the way we feel what's  
happening here:  
the cool of skin meeting the under-heat that blood is, and  
answering

its delicate imperative with this smoulder-burn, this  
elemental shift from  
earth to air and what begins to feel like fire, as if a ghost of  
soul shimmered  
above the skin we share, the way those wavering radiant  
exhalations now

curl their incessant ghost-shapes off the skin, air-kissed, of  
river water.

From time to time, walking through the fall morning — sky  
a pale  
blue diorama streaked with cloud, the ghostly half moon  
swaddled in cloudswirls — the inkling of a dead animal will  
wrinkle air

so I'll wonder what it is and where it's lying, the mass of its  
matter  
only matter now, hardly mattering, opening the busy mouths  
of earthworm and spider, diminutive jaws of the ant, the  
beetle's teeth

ravening to bring all flesh to grass. But there's a live crow  
now —  
dark legs stalking across a gutter that glows in this light  
coppergreen:  
it dips, drinks, snaps a seed that's flown to rest. Still I can  
smell

the dead — till darkwings open wide and rise, cutting things  
off.

When my daughter begins to talk logic, murmuring over and  
over such open secrets  
as *Law of detachment, modus tollens* and *disjunctive  
inference* (the big words, it seems,

making her mouth happy) I find we're standing on another  
threshold, and see  
her recede from me into the quiver-thicket of her own life, its  
zigzags hidden

so I can't follow her to the heart of where she's going,  
leaving me in the middle  
of this dark wood, though still in earshot of each other — so  
even if she won't see me

here in a splash of accidental light, she'll hear the words I'm  
saying and the way  
I say them over, getting them by heart, sending them after  
her into the distance

she's starting to be now, learning to be her own language,  
from where  
she'll send back bulletins (reports, coded probes, quick  
proofs) to find me.

Bent over his time-polished pitchfork, my neighbour who's  
turning hay  
in the big wind blowing off the Atlantic is the moving hiero-  
glyph  
for *Man-who-belongs-here* or *Two-hundred-years-ago*,  
which is also

the sign of a local tree, the sycamore baring its pied bark and  
giving  
leafy tongue to the air's passage through it, that long run-on  
sentence  
trembling toward its final verb which can be days coming,  
during which

one invisible blackbird goes on making music, becomes an  
inky swirl  
on shadow-paper, a sounding heart in the heart of uproar,  
a brushed text  
that would say, could we see it, *High wind: morning all  
tossed about* —

his incendiary yellow-ringed eye running rings out to the  
rings of Saturn.

While you're gazing in the mirror all the names change.

It will all be all right, you've said, when push comes to shove  
and the snow's sheer mortal diamond will have left us  
its legacy of watergallop and what-have-you: it will be, then,  
a question of reflection, not this heartlessness of lightbreak,  
horrid jag-edge of shadow.

Take, for instance, this morning:  
beneath the ice-clamp of Casperkill Creek you saw clear water  
run into its own life against the odds, making (the way things  
will) a fresh start — just as a raucous, high-minded, truth-  
telling  
matter-of-fact congregation of crows comes tumbling.