

Discovery

By accident discover as you close the cottage door
 and diminish drastically the light inside, discover
 in this diminishing of light, this inner dimness
 that you fret against and contemplate cures for,
 this instant twilight to the eye that's just been
 dazzled by the polished blaze outdoors—pewter
 in rain, in sunshine brass—discover how those
 who lived here over its hundred years and more
 must have known it, their eyes born native
 to how daylight almost disappeared on them
 when they closed the door and so adjusted to
 this indoor light of theirs, its own shadowy
 solids, solid shadows, the way they had to keep
 drifting to windows and standing in the gift of
 light they offered, the perfect square of it, in order
 to thread a needle, read a page, or mend again
 the head of the hatchet. Seeing this, you discover
 you've been—by accident, as happens—reconciled
 to the way the place is, and not want to change it.

Still Life with Skeleton and Shoes

Red-speckled gala apples on the windowsill. Van Gogh's
 three mirrors, each of which contains a different emptiness.

Soft invisible ticking of the cricket in the grass, companionable
 answering: two whispering like that as long as I can listen.

Gull skeleton filling with sand: ribcage a basket of air and bone
to keep a cricket in, or a green grasshopper with cinnamon legs.

Fluctuant cloud, and our blood, and the drift of a woman's thighs
crossing a corridor in the opposite direction. Too late for faces

or eyes: the rest is famine. In a darkness full of stars and children
I am learning the names, fairytales of design where none is,

although immediately we see it. Blown grass—sleek citrus greens
of its leaning shadows—smears of light, annunciations of shade.

Side of a hill half-eaten by sheep, grey rockface gleaming when
light rushes from it. Heart of cloud is limestone, rim brightness.

A whole day in front of the window: watch wind-driven birds,
the way the grass and the leaves are nodding and touching.

Today the breeze, southeast, has warm hands, hundreds of them
laying about you, surprising skin and bone. Remember how things

were *inhabited*? Learning *the word made flesh*, and meeting
Vincent's Franciscan shoes. Dazzle-amber of the shirt I wear.

At dusk a breathing field of cows. Body language of mother and child:
muzzle nuzzling neckflap; quick bright fleshflash of tongue-lick.

Prayerhouse

The almost inhuman neatness of it
would almost take your breath away,

the turfstack oratory at Gallarus
composed of Kerry stones slotted so

exact that not a breath of even this
Atlantic roarer could poke a finger into

the eye of the young man down on his
knees in there, in that dark that is

given light—like the prayer he shapes
with his whispering lips and tongue—

by the one source only, and that's
far off but firmly held to, angled after,

the clean design of the whole thing, even
from such unpromising matter, granted.

Why?

I like to create a painting round an empty space.
—Bonnard

Because space has taken the shape
of her absence; because he wants

to climb down into the mound
of dead leaves steaming and darkening
into November, letting go their ghosts
of chlorophyll, balsam, other woody spices;

because he would do it with the same
solicitude as that Roman family making
their marble farewells to the mother
on death's irreparable threshold;

because every window has a shade in it,
a scarf unravelling into shadowed air;
and because in wakefulness and grief
he has become a moral insomniac—

a crossroads where opposite instincts
keep scratching each other to bits
like blind branches and will soon
wear themselves to nearly nothing,

become a dangling absence, a given
breath, this emptied bed, an echo.