

FOUR POEMS



Bernard O'Donoghue

THE ROAD TO DOON SCHOOL
for Den Joe Murphy

Buachaill dána dob ea Seán O Riain.

Bhí dual mór aige in úlla.

How could a journey just over a mile
Take us an hour and a quarter, as we pushed,
Shouted and peered over two glaises,
Past the furzy glen, up the ceannadas
Or down past Ring's Fort, asking Julia
The time, picking lady's smock or prising out
Cold shamrock with two upright fingernails?

We planned the orchard-raids more often
Than we executed them, a theme of heroes
—*The grim Dutch gunners eyed them well*—
Of threatened capture and strategic flight
Down Glounthane hill. Mrs Galvin's eaters
Or the huge green cookers we could see
Through the blackthorn hedges where we aimed
Grey County Council chippings in an arc
To crash on the roof of Buckley's outhouse.

Once in the shock of silence that followed,
We realized, too late for getaway,
That Jerry Buckley was bearing down on us.
Without a look or headshake of rebuke,
He dispensed to us robbers a gwáil
Of the sweetest fruit his orchard had to offer.

WESTERING HOME

Though you'd be pressed to say exactly where
It first sets in, driving west through Wales
Things start to feel like Ireland. It can't be
The chapels with their clear grey windows,
Or the buzzards menacing the scooped valleys.
In April, have the blurred blackthorn hedges
Something to do with it? Or possibly
The motorway, which seems to lose its nerve
Mile by mile. The houses, up to a point,
With their masoned gables, each upper window
A raised eyebrow. More, though, than all of this,
It's the architecture of the spirit;
The old thin ache you thought that you'd forgotten—
More smoke, admittedly, than flame;
Less rain than tears. And the whole business
Neither here nor there, and therefore home.

G.

After her parents died when she was young
I nursed her to her present size,
Watching with silent pride
Her learning to smile and notice,
Admiring her limbs as they grew longer.
I let her grow, to see the turnout
Of her particular lineaments
Before I named her. Later on,
When she wanted to move out as teenagers do,
I found her a flat in the suburbs
Where occasionally I visited her
In the evenings without anyone knowing.
Now, finally, the happy day has come
When I see that she is ready to live up
To the name I gave her in honour of
A venerable family tradition
By calling her Grievance.

THE DROWNED BLACKBIRD

(from the Irish of Séamus Dall Mac Cuarta, c. 1700)

Pretty daughter of Con O'Neill,
Asleep at last from mourning your bird,
Don't let your people listening in
Know that your rest has been disturbed.

Of course you want to hear it sing
As it sang just now on your window-sill.
But heartache is only a sign of love,
So don't wring your hands. Come on! Be still!

Such wringing of hands! Give them a rest,
My little gull, and wipe your eye.
Pretty daughter of Con O'Neill,
For the blackbird's flight why should we cry?

Song

My gull that grew from the king of Ulster's kings,
Stay as you are! Surely it's more to your liking
To play back the blackbird's song on the branch's edge
Than to dwell all day long on the lime round his
lightening bones.