

## THREE POEMS



*Michael Longley*

### THE GARDEN

When Nausicaa described to Odysseus how her mother  
Would sit at the hearth as a rule and embroider by firelight  
A delightful picture with yarn the colour of sea-purple,  
Her chair against a pillar, the maidservants seated behind  
And her father up on his throne sipping wine like a god,  
Was she proposing what he would later find out for himself  
In the spacious garden, four acres surrounded by fences,  
Where the trees grow tall and leafy, pear and pomegranate,  
Apple with its shiny crop, sweet fig and opulent olive,  
Fruit that never runs out, summer or winter, all year  
The breathy west wind germinating and ripening apple  
After apple, pear after pear, grape cluster on grape cluster,  
Fig upon fig; in a sun-trap the sun sun-drying grapes  
While others are picked for eating or the wine-press, nearby  
Green bunches casting their blossom or darkening a little,  
And the well-ordered vegetable plots, herbs, perennials,  
The whole garden irrigated by one spring, another  
Gushing under the haggard gate to supply the big house?

### THE WELL AT TULLY

*for Nicholas Harmon*

I

Looking into the well at Tully, the soul of your estate, I  
Nearly tell you that “come home” in Scots can mean “be born”,  
That the Incarnation explains itself in wet fields like these.

Lichens inhale the Mayo weather and make the branches  
Lacy on trees your mother grew from apple pips, Irish  
Peach, russets and bramleys, blushes that seep through skins.

## II

This view of the river from a window-seat attracts you  
Like a sea trout, though the Bunowen will turn housebreaker  
Lifting the rugs, lapping the tables and chairs, calling up

The lone English sergeant in charge of dykes and bridges,  
Formal in red coat and stripes, but from the navel down  
Buck-naked, immune to assassination or ridicule—

A legend, as one day the strongest man for miles around  
(And the townland's only Protestant) will be, who helps you  
Manhandle like an Inca handbarrow-loads of boulders

Onto the scraw-fence, as though you were creating the first  
Wind-break in history, where I hunker in November rain  
And eavesdrop: "I'm nineteen stone, and two of them is fat!"

## III

Reflections of all who have taken a drink of water here  
On hands and knees should linger in the well at Tully  
And be given their place indoors, out of the wind and rain.

You are right to carry to your kitchen across the fields  
Buckets of spring water, ice-cold always and good as new  
Thanks to the caretaker frog in that ferny interior.

## THE YELLOW TEAPOT

When those who had eaten at our table and drunk  
From the yellow teapot into the night, betrayed you  
And told lies about you, I cried out for a curse  
And wrote a curse, then stitched together this spell,  
A quilt of quilt names to keep you warm in the dark:

*Snake's Trail, Shoo Fly, Flying Bats, Spider Web,  
Broken Handle, Tumbling Blocks, Hole in the Barn  
Door, Dove at the Window, Doors and Windows,  
Grandmother's Flower Garden, Sun Dial, Mariner's  
Compass, Delectable Mountains, World Without End.*