

The Local Accent

This river is pronounced by granite drag.
It is a matter of inflection, of knowing what
to emphasise, and what to let drift away,
just as a slipping aspen leaf makes barely a flicker,
one gaffe in the conversation between the current
and the flow; a stifled yawn, a darkness reimbursed.

While underneath, the thing that falls through shadow
is full of its own occasion. Weighty and dull,
it longs for water, the lacquer and slip of it,
the way it won't allow for brightness on its back,
but flips around to where its fall is a wet-wool,
sodden thing that will break at any moment, and undo.

Something is coming loose like aspen leaves, or froth.
Or maunder, letting itself down like rain into a river
immersed in getting on with what it separates:
the sulk of damp soil; the stiff articulation of the shore,
the giddy vowels sprayed over the drag and ebb
of voices leaking through the rain over the town.

Everything comes to a standstill under the bridge.
The town grips the river and all the words for elsewhere
or for being there have had their edges worn off
and their meanings powdered to a consonantal darkness
where they dissolve, like happenings, into traffic
and asphalt, or otherwise, in the river and its silt.

This river is pitched so far from the sea,
it announces itself in elision, as though everything
unsaid could still bed down in depth and unison,
underwriting words for going on and every other way
in and out of this one place. Excepting the blood-red
trickle of sky, and what it overrides, what slips beneath.

Song

Between the skiffle
of rats in the attic
and the *aon-dó-trí*
of my heartbeat

and the rest,
is something
I can't fathom.

A car rumbles
over Auburn.
A stray lets fly.

And though
it will be years
before we meet,

I know now
who prompts
that blackbird
into song.

To *Smithereens*

You'll need a tiller's hand to steer this through
the backward drift that brings you to, as always,
one fine day. August 1979. A sunlit Spiddal beach.

Children ruffle the shoreline. Their nets are full
of a marvellous haul of foam and iridescent sand
and water that laughs at them as it wriggles free.

They hardly care: they are busy spilling buckets
of gold all over the afternoon. But further back,
something spreads over the beach like scarlet dye

on the white-hot voice of the radio. The mams
and aunts pinned onto Foxford rugs put down
their scandalous magazines and vast, plaid flasks

as a swell from over the rocks showers them
with words like *rowboat*, *fishing*, *smithereens*.
You hear it too, the news that falls in slanted beats

like metal shavings sprayed from a single,
incandescent point to dispel themselves
as the future tense of what they fall upon.

Let's say you are lifted clear of the high-tide line
into another order of silence. Exchange the year.
The cinema's almost empty. She has taken you

to *Gandhi* at the Ritz. You are only a modernist
western wall away from the Shannon and the slipknot
of darkness the river ties and unties in the scenes.

Her breath is caught up in it: she's nodding off.
Her head falls back on the crimson plush and then,
her carriage bears her on and on, shunting towards

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Her head falls back on the crimson plush and then,
her carriage bears her on and on, shunting towards

the very point where all the journeys terminate
with the slump and flutter of an outboard engine
reddening the water with its freight. It's here

that every single thing casts itself off, or is brightly cast,
into a flyblown, speckled plural that scatters tracks
in the heat and dust of the locked projection-room.

The railway bridge one up from ours shakes out
each of its iron rails in readiness, and she is woken
by words that spill over the confluence of the Ganges

and the Shannon at our backs. *To smithereens?*
she says. *I'm pretty sure it's Indian. It means*
to open (like an Albertine), to flower.