

P A T R I C K M C G U I N N E S S

Father and Son

in memory of my father, and in welcome to my son

In the wings there is one who waits to go on,
and another, his scene run, who waits to go.

I would like to think they met; if not here
then like crossed letters touching in the dark;

the blank page and the turned page,
the first and the last, shadows folding

over and across me, in whom they're bound.

A Border Town

This isn't where you'd start by looking:
where big things have tapered down
to feel their way into small lives being led
far away from where you'd think to look,

but where your looking leads. It's where
events have come to hide away, to break,
like light, into those particles of dust that spin
and settle back in layers on what they lit.

A View of Pasadena from the Road

Hell too has its circles. Rounding coils of freeway,
we pass sponsored walls and billboards,
their majestic slogans sliding off the eye.
Hyperbole, free-market capitalese,

a landscape of six-foot letters rewinds
in the tinted glass. As the car scans
the barcode of the road, the ground
evaporates beneath our feet; pavements

roll by unwalked, the traffic tightens
in our throat. So much to see, so little
that holds attention. It is noon

all day, and the shadowless earth
is as thirsty as Mars. In the distance,
the soft porch light of the good life.

Belgitude

I spent autumn learning about autumn,
that its unmistakable confusion about what it was
was what made it what it was. So with Belgium.



It was the first post-national state; wars
came there to be fought, got tired and moved on.
Surveys showed that most Belgians questioned

would have preferred to be from somewhere else:
truly this was home, I thought, all the more
so as home had been a drain on my awareness,
took a little more of me away from me each year.
I came to it side-on, as one climbs into a moving bus;
discovered the world was a small town, or

at any rate vice versa. Soon I learned
to keep my mouth shut in two languages;
I called home on lobster telephones
in a hail of bowler hats. Trains ran on time,
travelling micro-distances in decades.
After a while I fitted in, by looking out of place,

swept into a street-long tidal wave of curtain lace.

Vague Terrain

This was always nether-country: a border-
land of empty paint cans, burned-out cars,
dumped fridges cooling in the shade.
A stonehenge of yellowing white goods,
its mysterious circles were understood
only by fly-tippers and their drive-by gods:
Currys, Homebase, Argos.

Their acts of worship were secretive.
They were persecuted but undeterred.
The soil was slow to claim their offerings:
their libations stained the ground,
their breath took breath from the earth around.
They left skeletal metal, statueless plinths,
and beyond them, city walls that gleamed like teeth.

Ultrasound

I
Noiseless swirls of dark.
Then a flash, a white zodiac.

He is like morning:
flesh, a body dawning;

his skeleton a silver filament,
his body a bulb in a roomful of night.

2
The Plough stalls on black acres, furrows
tilled and seeded; the earth broken
where the star baby turns and grows.

A first page dropping anchor in the ink.

Walls

Lleyn

stone lodged on stone noun on noun
for mortar live air dry breath
and on the other side
sky sheep sea sun sinking and rising

the day in pieces irregular
half stone half hole
half view half blocked from view

unwatched they brace the wind divide
the onslaught

bind what harms them into
sustaining patterns of
mute resistance

Surfers in a Wing Mirror

Closing on Rest Bay, we see the surfers,
 half-boy, half board, sea-centaurs
scaling rolling waterwalls. They live for waves,
 for rumours of waves,
cresting the water's rise and fall, ridging
 hills of spume, water-
-mountaineers borne up by what consumes them:
 fall;

driving past we watch them disappear,
 distorted in the wing-mirror's
mannered version of themselves; arms
 at right angles to their torsos,
a marine rodeo of elongated limbs
 whose foam and water horses
run themselves into the sand. Matter
 clothing energy,

half bodies now, half forms of thought,
 a revolution of the waves:

insurgents storming barricades of air