

Donegal Revisited

This place is a hand-me-down wetsuit,
Squeezing you into the person you were:
One of the cousins in the car parked up
At the end of the lane where the land ends.

Selves return, the tide of the years is out,
The sound of the saint's bell, muffled, clear,
Cannot be carried off to some museum:
You will always reach Inishkeel Island.

Summers at once, hard to tell apart,
The strung-together spoils of another
Afternoon on all fours, fishing for crabs,
Time's uncoiled wire hanger in your hand

(You prod the poor creatures, until their last
Play is to cling to what pains them, as our
Belonging is intensification
Of the longing to hold on to a stretch of sand,

Or sweep of hills, or the feel underfoot
Of a day in the life of the heather
Surrounding the fort at Loughadoon,
Where a boat and its post joke like old friends.)

Received, passed on, this was your father's gift,
The chance to know you might be found somewhere,
Here, amongst the nights running from kids' pub
To adults' pub, along the shore that winds

Through Rossbeg and Portnoo, inside the knit
Weave of a jumper it takes a whole hour
To buy from Hugh, once talk of relations
And a tangle of yarns have been exchanged.

This new pilgrimage moves with the rust
Of mountains in autumn, and marsh and river
Bathed in yellow light straight from the taps
Of a cottage lost to childhood's bogland;

And it comes as the disappearing act
Of rainbows over the beach at Tramore,
And as regulars at Nancy's sensing the room
Truer for their having left and returned;

And it arrives, across an alphabet
Of dunes, as the voice of our daughter,
Strapped to my chest, she a mad accordion
Who bellows in the language of the wind,

One who is still entering the world, and yet
to know that we don't really ever
find the words (ours are the odd consonant
of kelp, and vowels pooled like ink on the strand);

But you - who were her water and her craft,
Prepared to break that night, breathing in for four
And out for eight - offer now these waves at Narin
Which seem to say what you both understand.

