

YARROW

Little by little it dawned on us that the row
of kale would shortly be overwhelmed by these pink
and cream blooms, that all of us

would be overwhelmed, that even if my da
were to lose an arm
or a leg to the fly-wheel

of a combine and be laid out on a tarp
in a pool of blood and oil
and my ma were to make one of her increasingly rare

appeals to some higher power, some *Deo*
this or that, all would be swept away by the stream
that fanned across the land.

All would be swept away: the altar where Montezuma's
daughter severed her own aorta
with an obsidian knife; where the young Ignatius

of Loyola knelt and, raising the visor of his bucket,
pledged himself either *Ad Major*
or *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, I can't quite remember which.

For all would be swept away: the barn where the Pharaohs
had buried Tutankhamen;
where Aladdin found the magic lamp and ring;

where Ali Baba

watched the slave, Morgiana.
pour boiling oil on the thieves in their jars;

where Cicero smooth-talked the senators;
where I myself was caught up in the rush
of peers and paladins who ventured out with Charlemagne.

All would be swept away, all sold for scrap:
the hen-house improvised from a high-sided cattle-truck,
the coils of barbed wire, the coulter

of a plough, the pair of angle-iron
posts between which she'll waver, one day towards the end,
as she pins the clothes on the clothes-line.

For the moment, though, she thumbs through a seed-catalogue
she's borrowed from Tohill's of the Moy
while, quiet, almost craven,

he studies the grain in the shaft of a rake:
there are two palm-prints in blue stone
on the bib of his overalls

where he's absentmindedly put his hands
to his heart; in a den in St John's, Newfoundland, I browse
on a sprig of *Achillea millefolium*, as it's classed.

Achillea millefolium: with its bedraggled, feathery leaf
and pink (less red
than mauve) or off-white flower, its tight little knot

of a head,
it's like something keeping a secret
from *itself*, something on the tip of its own tongue.

Would that I might take comfort in the vestigial scent
of a yarrow-sprig, a yarrow-spurt
I've plucked from the somewhat unorthodox

funerary vase
that fills one grate:
from the other there's a chortle of methane-gas

(is it methane
that's so redolent of the apple-butt?)
through a snow-capped sierra of non-combustible coal.

Would that I might as readily follow
this nosegay of yarrow as Don Junipero Serra
led us all the way back

along *El Camino Real*
by the helter-skelter path
of poppies we'd sown in the sap-sweet April rain.

I zap the remote control: that same poor elk or eland
dragged down by a bobolink;
a Spanish *Lear*; the umpteenth *Broken Arrow*;

a boxing-match; Robert Hughes dismantling Dada;
a Michael Jackson video
in which our friends, the Sioux, will peel

the face off a white man whose metacarp-
al bones, with those of either talus,
they've already numbered; the atmosphere's so rare

that if Michael's moon-suit of aluminium foil
were suddenly to split at the seams
he'd not only buy, but fertilize, the farm.

Again and again I stare out across the fallow
where a herd of peccaries
(white-lipped musk-

pigs, as they're sometimes known) have beaten
a path through what was the cabbage-field
to where they wallow in whiskey and *bainne clabair*.

Again and again I find myself keeping watch from the bridge
across the Callan: a snatch of hazel-wood
gives on to the open

range in which, once Jimmy McParland would turn
them out of the byre,
his cattle would cross-fade to Elmer Kelton's

stampeding herd
from *The Day the Cowboys Quit*, or *The Oklamydia Kid*,
or, hold on, something by Jack Schaefer.

After Cavafy and Elytis and Ritsos and Seferis
and Sikelianos and Vassilis Vassilikos come R.E.S. Wyatt's
The Inns and Outs of Cricket and *Bridge*

from A to Z by George S. Coffin: an ‘insult to the heart’
was Livesey’s diagnosis to the Squire
when Trelawney flew in from the Philippines

to visit S——in Hazelden;
across the drumlins of Aughnacloy and Caledon and Keady
I myself flap like a little green heron.

Would that I might have put on hold
what must have sounded like a condemned man’s last request
for a flagon of ale

while mine host was explaining how in some final over
he himself was the short slip
who caught that fiendish Gagoogly from *King Solomon’s Mines*.

*King Solomon’s Mines; The Sign of Four; The Lost
World; Rob Roy;*

I would steady myself with Lancelot du Lac

as I grasped with both hands
my sword in the stone
(this was the rusted blade of a griffawn

embedded in a whitewashed wall);
I would grit my teeth and brace
myself against the plunge into Owl Creek.

I grit my teeth. I brace myself. It’s 1:43
by the clock
on the V.C.R.: with one bound

Peyton Farquhar and I will break free and swim across
to Librium
with a leisurely crawl and flutter-kick.

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge, The Ox-Bow Incident:

I've never been able to separate
'occurrence' from 'incident', 'owl' from 'ox';

in the first, I know, the narrative device
begins to—how shall I put it?—grate
a little, just as *un petit soupçon* of auteurism goes

a hell of a long way for myself, even,
despite my predilection for pushing out the boat,
never mind Pauline Kael.

The bridge. The barn. The all-too-familiar terrain.
I hear McParland's cattle low
as they plumb their murky bath

for a respite from their cattle-sorrow:
they're not to notice, taped to the trough, an aerial
and a battery-pack.

This looks suspiciously like a prize-fighter's arm
mounted behind glass. I drink
to Goneril's bland-

ishments and Cordelia's smart-ass '*Nada*'
from a tot of fusel oil.
My supper of cod-tongues and seal-

flipper pie repeats on me as I flipper through a Harp-
er and Row
first edition of cod-tongues and moose, medium rare,

washed down by the best beer in the U.S.,
the nonesuch 'Anchor Steam',
and remember one who did herself in *utcunque placuerit Deo*.

That must have been the year old Vladimir Vladimirovich
smoked kief all the way from *Alamein to mon Zem-*
Zemblable with *The Bride of Lammermoor*

and *Ada*, or *Ardor*:
that was the year, while Plath found solace in *The Bhagavad*
Gita, Jim Hawkins and I were putting in at Nassau.

While Jim and I were plundering the Spanish Main
from the Grenadines to Grand Cayman
she knew that even amidst fierce

flames she might yet plant centaury:
while Jim and I were sailing with Teach and Morgan
she was fixing the rubber ring

on a Mason jar;
even amidst fierce flames, the expiatory rush
of poppies in July, October poppies.

To appease a *moon*-goddess, no? How to read that last line
in that last poem? Does it describe
the moon or the woman? I mean at the very end

of 'Edge'; 'Her blacks crackle and drag.'
Whose 'blacks'? Is it the woman on the funeral urn
or the moon? Are they both 'masturbating a glitter'?

I crouch with Jim in the apple-butt on the *Marie Celeste*
while my half-eaten pomeroy
shows me its teeth: a fine layer of talc

has bandaged my hands;
it's Mexico, 1918;
this arm belongs to the pugilist-poet, Arthur Cravan;

it's enshrined now on the wall
of the den between a plaster of Paris
cow's skull and a stuffed ortolan, or Carolina crake.

It's Mexico, 1918, and I'm leaning out over the strake
with the inconsolable Myrna Loy,
whose poet-pugilist's

yawl
has almost certainly sunk like a stone:
'*J'y avais trouvé une combinaison idéal et idyllique—*

mon Artilutteur Ecrivain';
the label on the rake reads 'Pierce';
I'm thinking of those who have died by their own hands.

The scent of new-mown hay (it may be the scent of tonka)
pervades the 1848 edition of Clough's
The Bothie of Tofer-na-Fuosich: I know that ash-girt

well where a red
bullock with a stunningly white head
will again put its shoulder to the water like hardy Canute.

In a conventional sestina, that plaster of Paris skull
would almost certainly reveal the dent
where my da took a turf-spade to poleaxe

one of McParland's poley cows
that had run amuck on our spread,
bringing it to its knees by dint of a wallop so great

it must have ruptured a major vein,
such was the spout
of, like, blood that hit him full in the face.

When John L. Sullivan did for Jake Kilrain
in the seventy-fifth round, it was with such a blow
as left them both

utterly winded (note the caesura)
though no less so than Prince Peter and Mary O'Reilly
when they made the beast with two backs.

To find a pugilist-poet who'd tap his own prostate gland
for the piss-and-vinegar ink
in which he'd dash off a couple of 'sparrow-

songs', then jump headfirst into her fine how-d'-ye-do
heedless of whether she'd used a deo-
dorant, that was S——'s ideal:

after a twelve-hour day at Skadden, Arps
she wanted me to play Catullus
to her, like, Clodia; even now I savour her *arrière-*

goût of sweat and patchouli oil
and see, as she reaches for *The Interpretation of Dreams*,
that tattoo on her upper arm.

Even as I tug at the rusted blade of Excalibur
I can hear the gallant six hundred ride into the valley
and the Assyrian come down on the fold:

beyond the cattle-crush, beyond the piggery,
I fall headfirst with Peyton
Farquhar through doeskin and denim and dimity and damask.

Even now, after eight—almost ten—years, I savour
the whiff of patchouli oil and sweat:
from Avenue A, her view of Brooklyn Bridge

inspired her to ‘kingdoms naked in the trembling heart—
Te Deum laudamus O Thou Hand of Fire’;
and, should it happen

that He’s lost his bit of Latin,
she would nevertheless have been understood by God,
to whom she appealed at every twist and turn.

‘For your body is a temple,’ my ma had said to Morholt,
‘the temple of the Holy Ghost’:

even now I see Morholt raise the visor of his pail
as he mulled this over;
the memory of an elk, or eland, struggling up a slope
must have been what darkened his dark mien.

Even now I savour her scent of jacaranda—jasmine:
even now I try to catch hold
of her as she steps from her diaphanous half-slip

with its lime-white gusset
and turns to me as if to ask, with the Lady Guinevere,
‘What is the meaning of the Holy Grail?’

While my da studies the grain in the shaft of his rake
and I tug at the rusted blade of the loy
my ma ticks off a list

of seeds: Tohill, from *tuathal*,
meaning ‘withershins’—with its regrettable overtones
of sun-worship—in our beloved Goidelic;

even as I head up a straggling caravan
of ragamuffins and rapparees
my rocking-horse’s halter fast-forwards through my hands.

To the time I hunkered with Wyatt Earp and Wild Bill Hickok
on the ramparts of Troy
as Wild Bill tried to explain to Priam

how ‘saboteur’ derives from *sabot*, a clog:

to the time we drove ten thousand head from U-Cross
to Laramie with Jimi and Eric riding point.

Even as I lean forward to slacken Roland's martingale
the moonlit road from Ghent
to Aix

goes up in smoke and mirrors and marsh-gas
and a hound-spirit
can be heard all the way from the Great

Grimpen to Fitzroy Road; not since 1947
had a winter been so bad;
it seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice.

If only Plath had been able to take up the slack
of the free rein
lent her so briefly by Ariel:

all I remember of that all-time low
of January 1963 was a reprieve from Cicero
and the weekly hair-wash and bath.

That must have been the year they shut down Armagh
College: the Moy road was a rink;
all we had to eat was a bland

concoction of bread and milk known as 'panada'.
Though her mouth was smoother than oil,
the mouth of Christine Keel-

er, her end was sharp
as a two-edged sword, as the arrow
that flieth by day. Rich and rare

were the gems Dedalus
gave the Countess Irina, despite the *tempus edax rerum*
of that bloody-nosed 'Venus' clerk, Ovide'.

That was the year I stumbled on Publius Ovidius Naso
vying with Charlie Gunn in an elegiac distich:
the year Eric and Jimi rode picket

on the Chisholm
Trail and Mike Fink declaimed from his Advanced Reader
the salascient passages from *Amores*.

That was the year my da would find the larvae, or pupae,
of cabbage-whites on the acumen
of a leaf: my rocking-horse with the horse-hair mane

stopped in its tracks, giving me such a jar
I fell off, just as Utepandragun
himself was trotting by; 'How come you Fenians are so averse

to buying plants in Comber, that's loyal to the King,
instead of smuggling them in from Rush?
Buy stalwart plants from a stalwart Prod, albeit a dissenter.'

All I remember is how my da drew himself up like Popeye
as he gave a tight-lipped 'C'mon'
and by sheer might and main

stuffed Utepandragun into a spinach-jar:
'I'll have you know, you clouricane,
that I force

my own kale every Spring';
all I remember was the sudden rush
of blood from his nose, a rush of blood and snatters.

All I remember was a reprieve from '*seachain droch-chómhluadar*'
as she last rinsed my hair: she'd sung 'Eileen Aroon'

or some such ditty and scrubbed and scrubbed
till the sink was full of dreck;
'Stay well away from those louts and layabouts at the loanin'-end.'

Was it not now time, they urged, to levy the weregild, the *éiric*,
on the seed and breed of that scum-bag, Mountjoy,
that semioticonoclast

who took it upon himself to smash Shane O'Neill's
coronation-stone
on the chalky slopes of Tullahogue?

Was it not now time for the Irish to break the graven
image of a Queen whose very blotting-paper
was black, black with so much blood on her hands?

Like a little green heron, or 'fly-up-the-creek',
I flap above Carrickmore and Pomeroy
with volume one of Burton's translation of *The Lusiads*:

‘One for all,’
I hear a cry go up, ‘and all for one,’
followed by ‘*S’é tuar oilc*

an t-éan sin, agus leabhar in a chroibhín’;
that was the year I did battle with Sir Bors
for Iseult the Fair (not Iseult of the White Hands).

That was the year Deirdre watched Jimi cut the tongue
from a Hereford calf
while a raven drank its blood: she pulled on her cigarette;

‘Is there no man with snow-white skin and cheeks red
as blood and a crow-black head
in all of Ulster and Munster and Leinster and Connaught?’

That was the year my ma gave me a copy of Eleanor Knott’s
Irish Classical Poetry and I first got my tongue
around *An Craoihhín Aoibhinn* (Douglas Hyde):

I was much less interested in a yellowed copy of *An Claidheamh
Soluis* than *Tschiffley’s Ride* or *The Red
Rover* or *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*.

That was the year of such frost and snow and burning ice
I was kept home from school
for almost two weeks:

the year the stork or some such great
bird was blown off course and loitered with intent

on the west spire of the twin-spired

Armagh cathedral; my ragamuffins
and rapparees, meanwhile, were champing at the bit
for the slightest *belli casus*.

Surely the time had come for the Irish to strike back
at the *Defensor Fidei*, the peerless Oriana,
by whose command Patrick Pearse and The O’Rahilly

were put up against a wall? Was that not a *casus belli*?
Put up against a wall, like this ortolan, or sora,
and shot at the whim of Elizabloodybeth.

The day S—— came back with the arrow
through a heart tattooed on her upper arm, it made me think
of the fleur-de-lys

on Milady’s shoulder (not Milady Clark, who helped the U.D.A.
run a shipment of Aramis
into Kilkeel

but Milady *Clarik*, whose great-great-grandfather led the I.R.B.
invasion of Canada, the one who helped foil
the plot in which the courier

was none other than herself, her): she shrugs off her taffeta
wither-band and begs me to, like, rim
her for Land’s sakes; instead of ‘Lord’, she says ‘Land’.

Throughout all this she wears some kind of ski-hood or -mask

(what she terms her ‘clobber-clobber’):
as the peyote-button

begins to take effect, she shrugs off her *feileadh*
beag and turns up Jean Michel Jarre’s loathsome hocus-pokery;
Jean Michel Jarre or the loathsome Mike Oldfield.

‘Wither’ as in ‘widdersinnes’, meaning to turn
against the sun: she ticks off ‘carrots’, ‘parsnips’, ‘swedes’
while I suffer

the tortures of the damned, imagining myself a Shackleton
frozen by fire;
‘parsnips’, ‘swedes’; for, unless I manage to purge

myself of concupiscent thoughts and keep a weather-eye open
for the least occasion of sin, the Gates
of Glory will be barred to me, not being pure of heart.

While I skellied up and down the ward in the South Tyrone
Hospital she toyed with her cream of wheat
with its scallop-shell of Chivers:

of all the peers and Paladins
who’d been entangled in a coil of barbed wire
at the battle of Bearosche,

Gawain mourned none more than his war-dobbins
Mancho and Gato
and Ingliart ‘With the Short Ears’, his dear Ingliart.

Mother o'mine. Mother o'mine. That silver-haired mother o'mine.
With what conviction did she hold
that a single lapse—from *lapsus*, a slip

or stumble—would have a body cast
into the outer dark. Dost thou know Dover?
The foul fiend haunts poor Tom in the voice of a nightingale.

Since every woman was at heart a rake
and the purest heart itself marred by some base alloy
and whosoever looketh on a woman to lust

after her would go the way of Charles Stewart Parnell,
'*Ná bac,*' she would intone,
'*ná bac leis an duilleog*

rua ar an craoibhín
aoibhinn álainn óg, 'and, rummaging in her purse,
'For Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands.'

'May your word be as good as or better than your bond,'
my ma was saying to Queequeg
as she made a sign of the Cross

over the tray:
when would we Irish find our *lán glaise*
of nutmeg to sweeten our barium?

That was the year there blew such an almighty gale
it not only bent

our poplars out of shape but downed one of the few oaks

left standing after Cill Cais.

We heated a saucepan of milk on a spirit-
stove and dreamed of the day when we Irish might grate

a little nutmeg over our oatmeal. The reek of paraffin.

When might we sweeten our stirabout
with *un petit soupçon* of nutmeg or some such spice?

'Non,' I heard from the depths of the barn, '*Je ne regrette rieri*':

Edith Piaf, I thought, but lo

and behold, if it wasn't Sir Reginald Front-de-Boeuf

and Ben Gunn, fresh from the battle of Zara;

Ben had armed himself with a hurley

and both *Wisden's Cricketer's* and *Old Moore's* almanacs.

Now that the whole country, Ben volunteered, was going to rack,

faraoir, to rack and ruin,

now that the bird had perched for a week on the west oriel,

was it not now time to take down the hogweed blow-

gun that had stood me in such good stead against Assyria?

(Hogweed was perfect, having no pith.)

It might have been hogweed, or horehound, perhaps even arum,

that would inundate this rinky-dink

bit of land

on which a mushroom-mogul has since built a hacienda:

our own *Defensor Fidei* is somewhat reminiscent of Olyve Oyl
as she continues to reel

off in her own loopy version of R.P.
'parsnips', 'swedes', and, I guess, 'vegetable marrow';
hers is a sensibility so rare

that I'll first know Apuleius
as the author of *The Golden Beam*;
'It should be *Fidei Defensor*, by the way, not *Defensor Fidei*.'

That must have been the year I stood by the wheel-barrow
with Davy Crockett and Mike Fink
to recite the Angelus:

we followed that with a rousing medley of 'Me and Me Da',
'Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms',
'Do Ye Ken John Peel?'

and, to round it off, 'An Arab's
Farewell to His Steed'; Mike opened a packet wrapped in foil
and shook out on to a piece of Carrara

a kilo of black powder he then divvied
up into charges of exactly eleven drachms,
admirable for medium-sized game—sable antelope or eland.

Mike was holding forth to Virgil Earp on how Dido and Aeneas
sometimes got so close you couldn't tell which
was which and that was how they 'begat'

in olden days, though things had changed some,
mostly for the worse: Mike fancied himself as an orator;

‘*O temporal!*’ he would extemporise, ‘*O mores!*’

‘*Sé mo mhíle brón*’ Ben wept, ‘*tu bheith sínte fuar i mease na dtom*’ as Rashleigh and Caleb, er, Balderstone gave his brother, Charlie, a sup of poteen:

that was the year Armagh would lose to Offaly
and my band of buccaneers and buckaroos
would weep openly over the corpse of poor, poor, poor Foulata.

That must have been the year S—— and the mighty Umbopa
were playing mah-jong or backgammon
with Allan Quatermain

and myself when a fey curled out of the jar
and spoke to her: this, of course, was the Fata Morgana,
the Great Queen of the Fairies,

who recognized Umbopa as her once and future king;
it looked as if S—— was still having a cocaine-rush
after almost a month in the rehab centre.

That was the year Mike Fink—‘half-horse, half-alligator’—
appealed to *The First Oration against Catiline*
as he mused on the times that were in it when a Grey Heron

or a Great Crested Grebe
or, more likely than not, a White Stork
could have the country debating what evil it might portend.

The blow-gun was still sleek with Wright's Coal Tar:
there was a hair-line
crack from the fall I took when an Assyrian

ran me through; we'd held the bridge against Sennacherib,
of course, despite his trick
of torching the barn, which was where Aladdin met his end.

That was the year, after the Caliph of Baghdad, Haroun,
had forced him to eat his own weight
in emeralds and sapphires,

the doughty Aladdin
had a Michelin-man spare tyre:
it was Aladdin who gave Prince Peter the salamander brooch

Prince Peter gave the Countess Irina, whereupon
Popeye exclaimed to Quatermain and Curtis and Captain Good,
'Somebody here is gonna get hurt.'

The bridge. The barn. The all-too-familiar seal-flipper terrine
with the hint of seaweed
(carrageen? samphire?)

that lent it the texture of gelatin.
Again and again S—— turns up 'The Unforgettable Fire'
and shrugs off her halter of buckram or barege

and holds herself open;
my ma hands me the carbon-slip; 'But to the girdle do the gods,'
she repeats, 'but to the girdle do the gods inherit.'

That night I dreamed—*Te Deum laudamus, In Nomine Domini*—
that the hornless doe, *an eilit*
mhaol, came to me as a slip

of a girl and laid her exquisite
flank beside me under the covers
and offered me her breast, her breast *chomh bán le haol*.

‘How much longer,’ she cajoled, ‘must we rant and rail
against the ermine
yoke of the House of Hanover?’

When might the roots of Freedom take hold?
For how much longer must we cosset
Freedom’s green shoot and Freedom’s little green slip?’

The following morning I got up at the scrake
of dawn and struggled into my corduroy
breeks and packed the blow-gun and the cobbler’s last

and awl
into the trunk of the two-tone
(pink and cream) ’62 Cadillac

with a gryphon
rampant on its hood, switched on the windshield wipers
and sped away, look, no hands.

Little did I know, as I began to rake
across the snowy yard, how short-lived would be my joy:
for I had unwittingly entered the lists

against John Ridd and Jack McCall
and Rashleigh Osbaldistone
and other villains of that ilk;

this is not to speak of Agravain
and his little platoon of pirries
and djinns; I mean the dastardly ‘Agravain of the Hard Hand’.

Little did I know that Agravain was weighing his knobkerrieknout:
not even the tongue
of fire that will-o’-the-wisped above my head

would save me; ‘I’d as lief,’
Agravain was muttering, ‘I’d as lief you’d stay and help me redd
up after the bluestone barrels are scoured.’

Little did I think that S—— would turn to me one night:
‘The only Saracen I know’s a Saracen tank
with a lion rampant on its hood;

from Aghalane to Artigarvan to Articlave
the Erne and the Foyle and the Bann must run red’;
that must have been the year Twala’s troops were massacred.

Now I took the little awl I’d used with such consummate skill
to scuttle *The Golden Vanitee*
and picked the locks

on the old suitcase
in which was hidden the two-page spread
from *The News of the World*: after stopping by the cattle-grid

to pick up Laudine and Yvain
I smiled as I thought of the awl (was it a brace and bit?)
wrapped in a photo of Mandy Rice Davies.

The two-tone Cadillac's engine-block was a vice
lapped in a coil
of barbed wire and wedged between an apple-box

and a packing-crate:
as I crossed the bridge, I was so intent
on Freedom's green slip and Freedom's green sprout

her '*Ná bac leis an craoibhín aoibhinn*'
and 'Stay clear of those louts and layabouts'
were quite lost on me; I promptly stepped on the gas.

'O come ye back,' I heard her sing, 'O come ye back
to Erin':
I was somewhat more exercised by the fact that my yourali
supply was running so low
I might well have to spend my last cruzeiro
on an ounce of civet, or resort to my precious *Bufo bufo*.

The magical toad entrusted to me by Francisco Pizarro
might still be good against this bird that continued to prink
itself, alas,

even as we left Sitanda's
kraal and struck out, God between us and all harm,
for the deep north: that was the year Jack McCall would deal

the dead man's hand to Earp,
the year Captain Good was obliged to shave in inco-oil
and S—— got hooked on 'curare';

the year Scragga and Infadoos
joined Quatermain in reciting 'The Jackdaw of Rheims'
as we plunged deeper into Kukuanaland.

Only yesterday, as I shlepped out to Newark on the PATH
whom should I spot but two Japanese guys wearing fanny-packs:
I recognized them as 'Basho' and 'Sora'

from Avenue A; I knew by the tags on their mule-train
that they were just getting back from the Lowlands Low;
'Tooralooraloor,' Basho gave me a stupid grin, 'tooralooralay.'

'Tirra lirra,' S—— sang when we were stopped by the 'fuzz'
as she drove back to school:
she was reading, it seemed, as deeply into Maalox

as Malebranche, Rennies as René Descartes:
I helped her move into a 'pad', as she styled her apartment,
in which Herrick's *Hesperides* and a can of Sprite

and Duchamp's 'The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even'
all said one thing—'I masturbate';
she was writing now on *Ulster: From C. S. Lewis to C. S. Gas*.

'Tirra lirra lirra,' was what she sang to Umslopogaas
and myself to, like, break the ice
when we first went to see her in detox:

an albino ginko, or some such sport;
she was now deeply into Lloyd Cole
and Julio Cortázar and, *Dios me libre*, Fuentes;

Lloyd ‘King’ Cole, she’d dubbed him; Warren Zevon;
as for U2’s Edge, his ‘Bad’
put him up there with Jimi and Eric, a ‘Guitar Great’.

Five days north of Sitanda’s kraal we were joined by Sigurd,
his twin cousins, Hrut and Knut,
and Lieutenant Henry Ark, also known as Eric the Red:

it was Eric who cut us each a strip of biltong
from the shield carried by his son, Leif;
Leif Ericson’s shield was covered with chlordiazepoxide.

‘How dare you,’ began Milady Clarik, ‘how dare you desecrate
the memory of Connolly and Clarke and Ceannt’:
she brandished *The Little Red*

Book of Mao Tse-tung;
‘How dare you blather on about the Caliph
of Baghdad when you should strike while the iron’s hot.’

‘Surely,’ S—— chimed in, ‘surely the time is at hand
for the Hatfields and McCoys
to recognize their common bond?’ (It was Milady *Clark*

who’d given her a copy of Ian Adamson’s *The Cruthin*,
of which she’d bought a thousand tonnes

for ‘intellectual ballast’.)

Together they’d entered into dialogue
with the first mate of a ship registered in Valparaiso
who had ‘connections’ in the Transvaal.

Ben Gunn would now gladly have red-hewed his right hand
for a piece of mouse-trap cheese, when the fairy Terdelaschoye
rustled up some *Caprice des Dieux*: so it was that Erec

and Enid and I hoisted the main-sail (complete with raven)
and hung the lodestone
by an elast-

ic band; *Caprice*, for Land’s sake, from the ‘goat-like’
caprioles and capers
of those Athenian galleys with their tu-whit-tutelary owls.

Only moments later, I was bending over to tie a slip-
knot when I looked up suddenly and the rough tree rail
had been superseded by the coast

of Africa; it struck me then that the limpet-mine
in the *Hispaniola*’s hold
had been planted there by the pesky Pedro Navarro.

That must have been from our last trip up the Guadalquivir:
we’d given the Athenian galleys the slip
and put in at Seville rather than try to hold

our course for Dover, its cliffs *chomh bán le haol*,

with our cargo of calomel (or calamine);
the Guadalquivir had been our Rubicon; the die was cast.

To make matters worse, Ben reported that he'd just heard
the unmistakable tu-whit
tu-whoo of the *gubernaculum* in the stern

of a Roman galley. We were getting ready to open
fire
on anything that moved when '*Vamos, muchachos, vamos a ver*'

came out of nowhere, followed by a barge
with a triangular sail—a jib, to be precise—cut
from a single piece of lateen.

From the cut of their jib we took the crew for a horde
of Cruthin dyed with woad:
it hadn't occurred to us that we ourselves might turn

blue after a month in an open
boat; it transpired
these legionnaires had been set adrift by Septimius Severus

in 211 A.D.; we shared what was left of our porridge,
then joined them in a game of quoits
on the deck of the *Caledonia*.

Who should hove into view, with a boy-troop from St Enda's,
but Pearse himself: together with the gallioteers,
we went ashore and began the long trek

north from St Enda's kraal; when the tree-line
gave way to unfamiliar scrub

we knew we'd rounded not the Cape of Good Hope but Cape Horn.

That was the year Mike Fink was a bouncer at 'The Bitter End'
on Bleecker Street: 'The times are out of kilter,'
he remarked to S——, eyeing the needle-tracks

on her arms; that was the year she would mainline
so much 'curare' they ran up two flags over her wing at Scripps.
(By 'curare', or 'yourali', she meant heroin.)

In view of these square red flags with square black centres
we turned back and fell to right away to gammon
the bow-sprit with baobab-

ropes and secure the cat's-head and the catharping
against the impending hurricane:
we'd already stowed the sails (fore-, mizzen- and main-)

and breamed the hull with burning furze
and touched up the figurehead—an angel carved by William Rush
from the sturdiest of mahoganies, the Australian jarrah.

All I remember is a thunder-cloud of dust across the veldt
(much like the rattle of Twala's Massagais
on shields) and Ben's 'Bejasus' and 'Begorrah'

as the dust-cloud engulfed the rigging of our clipper;
the courage, then, with which he and one or two other fellows
crawled from hatch to hatch to check the battens.

For a whole week we survived on pages torn from *Old Moore*
or *Wisden* and flavoured with star anise:
this was a trick Israel had picked up from a short-order

cook who'd sailed with Flint: Israel used a switch-
blade to peel and portion our last satsuma;
that year MacNeice and Frost and Plath all kicked the bucket.

The storm blew over, of course, and with the help of Arrow,
the first mate, and Nemo and Livesey, her shrinks,
we bundled S—— into the *Nautilus*

and set off for Grenada:
many's the old salt would swing from the yard-arm,
many's the sea-dog be keel-

hauled for failing to keep a sharp
lookout for Carthaginian hydrofoils;
after a month, she was transferred to the *Fighting Téméraire*

despite objections from the 'perfidious'
Trelawney having to do with her 'low self-esteem'
and her 'unhealthy interest' in Henri de Montherlant.

The next thing I knew, we were with Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo,
discombobulated by the clink
of mutinous men-at-arms,

upon a peak in Da-
rien: we'd been watching *The Irish in Us*
when the projector must have broken down during the third reel
and thrown me into a time-warp;

not only was S—— the dead spit of Olivia de Havilland
playing Liadan to my, like, Cuirithir

but (this chilled me to the marrow)
her face in the freeze-frame
was not unlike Maud Gonne's, swathed in a butterfly-net voile.

As we hunkered there in the projection-booth
the projector had gone, like, totally out of whack:
the freeze-frame of Maud Gonne from *Mise Eire*

had S—— strike up her all-too-familiar refrain;
'The women that I picked spoke sweet and low
and yet they all gave tongue, gave tongue right royally.'

Maud Gonne was explaining how 'San Graal' was a pun on '*Sang real*'
to 'Diana Vernon' and Constance Gore-Booth
when 'Blow me,' Popeye roared, 'blow

me down if I can't put my hand on the knapsack-
sprayer': Constance Gore-Booth was back from a trip to the Ukraine
with Milady Clarik, the aforementioned 'emissary'.

That was the year Yeats said to Plath, '*Mi casa es su casa*':
all the way from Drumcliff old 'Hound Voice'
could be heard; 'How much longer will the House of Saxe-

Coburg-Gotha try to break the spirit
of the Gael?
How much longer must we Irish vent

our spleen against their cold, their rook-delighting heaven?
When will we have at last put paid
to Milady's great-grandfather's foes?' (He meant 'great-great'.)

So it was that every year for thirty years I'd bream
its clinkered hull, lest horehound or cuckoo-pint
or dandelion-clocks

should swamp my frail caique:
for thirty years we ran before the wind from Monterey
to San Diego by way of Santa Cruz.

For thirty years I would serve on *The Golden Hind*:
thirty years, man and boy,
I sailed with Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Drake;

thirty years that led to the, like, raven-
stone
where Mary Queen of Scots herself lost

her head because she, too, was a 'Catlick';
thirty years before I understood what Lady Percy
and Hotspur meant by Milady's 'howl'.

It was thirty years till I reached back for the quiver
in which I'd hidden the carbon-slip
from Tohill's of the Moy: my hand found the hilt

of the dirk I confiscated from Israel;
the carbon-slip was gone; what with those 'persimmons'
and 'swedes', I'd been diverted from my quest.

In addition to missing the carbon-slip I was getting hard:
not since our family outing to White
and Boa Islands on Lower Lough Erne

(where a *Síle na gcíoch* held herself wide open)
had I been so mortified; it was then I noticed the command-wire
running all the way from behind a silver

birch
to the drinking-trough; that trough was my Skagerrak, my Kattegat,
its water a brilliant celadon.

As we neared Armagh, the Convent of the Sacred Heart
was awash in light: nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit
than when S—— ran

those five red lights in downtown New Haven: ‘George Oppen,’
she announced, ‘there’s a poet with fire
in his belly’; this was to the arresting ‘officiffer’

who had her try to walk a straight line back to the Porsche;
after calling him ‘the unvoiced “c” in Connecticut’,
she gave our names as Cuirithir and Liadan.

Even now a larva was gnawing at her ‘most secret and inviolate’
rose of Damascus:
as we neared Armagh, I could still hear her pecky, pecky, peckery

though it was drowned out by Mike’s ‘Cruise of the Calabar’;
little did we know, as we galloped along the Folly,
that S—— had broken the seal on the little box marked *Verboten*.

As we neared Armagh, she'd dipped the tip of each little arrow
in the blood of an albino skink
or some such *lusus*

naturae: that must have been the year we ran cattle from Nevada
to Wyoming; the year, as we rode into Laramie
with Jimi and Eric and Shane (*the* Shane, not Shane O'Neill)

we heard from behind us, '*Manos arriba*';
'Parsnips,' I kept saying, 'parsnips and parzleval';
little did we know that a whole raree-

show led by Agravain and the Agraviados
had been on our case since S—— had dallied with Wolfram,
much to the chagrin—remember?—of Roland.

I seem to recall that she was even more into Barthes
than Wolfram von Eschenbach:
largely because of *Writing Degree Zero*

she now ran with a flock of post-Saussureans
who leapt about from 'high' to 'low'
like so many dyed-in-the-wool serows or oorials.

'Dyed-in-the-wool'; 'serow'; 'oorial': in the midst of chaos,
she would say, the word is a suspect device,
a Pandora's—that's it— *box*;

and she leaned over me the way a bow-sprit
(bow-sprit? martingale?)

leans over the water in search of a ‘referent’;

this last time I saw her, in New Haven,
she leaned over, so, and whispered, ‘This darling bud,
this bud’s for you,’ then settled back on the packing-crate.

As we neared the Convent of the Sacred ... of the Sacred
Heart, our way was blocked by a Knight
of the Red

Branch astride a skewbald mustn’tang:
I noticed, as he threw down his glove,
something familiar about his ski-mask, or his ski-hood.

‘How dare you suggest that his “far-off, most secret,
and inviolate rose” is a cunt:
how dare you misread

his line about how they “all gave tongue”;
how dare you suggest that *Il Duce* of Drumcliff
meant that “Diana Vernon” and Maud Gonne gave good head.’

It was now too late for Erec to pull out of Enid
while she masturbated her clitoris
and S—— and I, like, outparamoured the Turk

in the next room: the scent of Vaseline;
her fondness for the crop:
the *arrière-goût* of patchouli oil and urine.

There was nothing for it, after Ben had dispatched the sentry
with a tap of his trusty *camán*,
but to load the breech of the drain-pipe

with Richardson's Two-Sword: just then I heard the Lorelei sing
to an American
bomber sweeping the Rhine and the Main;

even now I smell the phosphorus
when I lit the fuse—the terminal spike of a bulrush
I'd kept tinder-dry in a sealed jam-jar.

For the time was now ripe, S—— had vowed, to 'make a *Sendero*
Luminoso of our *Camino*
Real': along with the tattoo, she'd taken to wearing a labiaba-

ring
featuring a salamander, a salamander being the paragon
of constancy; it was twenty years to the month the water-main

froze
on Fitzroy Road and the *T.L.S.* had given the bum's rush
to *The Bell Jar*.

It was now too late, as I crouched with Cuchulainn and Emer,
to feel anything much but nausea
as again and again S—— cast about for an artery:

I'd not be surprised if this were some kind of time-switch
taped to the trough, that the click of a zoom;
such nausea (from *navis*, a ship) as I'd not felt since the *Pequod*.

For I'd not be surprised if this were a video
camera giving me a nod and a wink
from the blue corner, if it were hooked up not to an alarm

but the TV, that I myself am laid out on a da-
venport in this 'supremely Joycean object, a nautilus
of memory jammed next to memory', that I'll shortly reel

with Schwitters and Arp
through our *Kathedrale des erotischen Elends*
while the bobolink, rare

bird that she is, feeds on the corpse from *Run of the Arrow*,
leaving off only fitfully to scream
in Gaelakota, '*Ná bac leis Ná bac leis, a Phóil.*'

This is some goddess of battle, Macha or Badhbh,
whose '*Ná bac*
leis, a Phóil' translates as 'Take heed, sirrah:

you must refrain
from peeking down my dress, though it's cut so low
you may see my areolae.'

This is Badhbh, or Macha, or Morrigan—the greatest of great
queens—whose cackle-caws
translate as *tempus rerum edax*:

'Where on earth,' she croaks, 'where on earth have you spent
the past half-hour?' 'I've just lit the fuse
on a cannon,' I begin, sticking the glowing coal

in my pocket. 'What in under heaven

did we do to deserve you, taking off like that, in a U-boat,
when you knew rightly the spuds needed sprayed?’

At first it seemed that the louts and layabouts at the cross
might have stolen the prime
from my touch-hole and sold it to, like, Henry of Ballantrae

and the acumen, or point,
of the bulrush had been lost on the powder-keg;
the deelaug was not so much an earwig, I suspect, as a clock.

‘Take Neruda,’ S—— volunteered, ‘a poet who dirtied his hands
like a *bona fide* minstrel boy
gone to the wars in Tacna-Arica:

if he’s not to refine
himself out of existence, if he’s not to end up on methadone,
the poet who wants to last

must immerse himself in Tacna-Arica and Talca’;
the larva, meanwhile, of *Pieris*
brassicae was working through kale and cauliflower *et al.*

I crouch with Schwitters and Arp in the house in Hanover
that stands like a ship on the slips
when, lo and behold,

the sky opens and it begins to hail
codeine and amyl nitrate and sulphides and amphetamines
and Mike Oldfield and Jean Michel Jarre cassettes.

‘Vengeance is mine,’ proclaimed my armchair anarchist
to the pesky Ramon Navarro,
‘mine and mine

alone’; even now the hounds were straining at their slips
as the hornless doe, *an eilit mhaol*,
stumbles out of *A Witness Tree*; New York, 1942; Henry Holt.

Again and again I flap through Aughnacloy and Caledon:
Tray, Blanche and Sweet-
heart

are dogs that must to kennel while Milady’s brach
doth stand by the fire
with the red-eyed towhee, turn, turn, turn;

Don Junipero, meanwhile, weighed down with silver,
finds his way back from codeine to *kodeia*,
the ‘poppy-head’ much loved by the towhee, or marsh robin.

Again and again the maudlin towhee flaps over Bonn or Baden-Baden
like an American bomber on a night-flight
along the Rhine valley

as Salah-ed-din holds the larva (from *larva*, a ghost or mask)
in forceps, maybe, or caticallipillers;
he holds it close to his chest like Hickok’s last hand in baccarat.

S—— would detect the mating-call of Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil
in that red-eyed chewink’s
‘*Fadó, fadó*’

'*Ní fiú liom sin,*' she would say, '*Ní fiú sin dada*';
now her tattoo of a heart and arrow
was all but crowded out by those cochineal

sores not unlike those of herp-
es or chlamydia; I should have known this was no boxer's arm,
faraoir, faraoir,

about to land
a haymaker, but a prize carp, or a prize bream,
or the dreaded *Dracunculus*.

That last time I stood by her side, like some latterday Uriel,
she sang the praises of 'The Shining Path'
while she cut a line of coke with a line of Sweet 'n Low:

then she lay down by the tracks
and waited for the train
that would carry Deirdre and Naoise back to Assaroe.

All I remember is a lonesome tu-whit tu-whoo from the crate
and her bitter 'What have *you* done for the cause?
You're just another Sir Pertinax

MacSycophant,
brown-nosing some Brit who's sitting on your face
and thinking it's, like, really cool.'

She brandished a bottle of Evian;
'Thing is, a *Phóil*, your head's so far up your own fat butt
you've pretty much disappeared.'

Ten years after Plath set the napkin under her head
I got out from under S——'s cheese-cloth skirt
where what I'd taken for a nutmeg-clove

tasted now of monk's-hood, or aconite:
'*No tengo*,' the salamander fumed, '*no tengo
mas que darte*'; and I saw red, red, red, red, red.

'Nevermore,' my ma chipped in, 'will the soul clap its hands
for sheer joy
as it did for Yeats and William Blake:

the legacy of Arthur Griffin'
(she meant Griffith) 'and Emmet and Wolfe Tone
is lost, completely lost

on our loanin'-end ideologues,
while the legacy of Connolly and, God help us, Pearse
is the latest pell-mell in Pall Mall.'

Again and again I'm about to touch down by the pebble-dashed wall
(by way of Keady and Aughnacloy)
when it hits me that the house has changed hands:

the original of that salamander dalk
such as might have graced the lime-white throat of Etain
was recovered near Dunluce or Dunseverick

or wherever the *Girona* was Dunsevericked or Dunluced;
in the 1931 *Connecticut Yankee* Myrna Loy appears
as Morgan the Fay; my ma is now in the arms of Sister Morphine.

‘For every Neruda,’ mused the bloody-nosed Countess Irina,
‘must have his, like, Allende’:
with that she handed back to Prince Peter the scarab

for which he’d paid a thousand guilders
and went back to cutting the line of coke with the line
of dalk, from the Anglo-Saxon *dale* or *dole*, a brooch or torc.

In due course Prince Peter sent a tape of Jean Michel Jarre’s
Equinoxe to the commune
in Portland and, though it was returned to sender,

he realized from the thuriferous
scent that S—— must have gone off to Portland, Oregon,
with Yogi Bear and Boo-Boo

rather than Portland, like, Maine;
he realized, moreover, that she’d scrawled ‘RUSH’
on the packet, which now contained a carbon-slip and a ring.

A carbon-slip? A ring? As he slipped it back in the packet
the salamander’s double-edged ‘nothing more’
cut him in two like a scim-

itar and he crouched with Naoise
after the limestone slab had crushed both Deirdre and the witch,
that being it, as they say, for the old Gagoolic order.

The ring? The carbon-slip? It’s 1:49 and the video’s
now so wildly out of synch
there’s no telling *Some Experiences of an Irish R.M.*

from *The Shaggy D.A.*:
in Frosts great poem, 'The Most of It', the 'talus'
refers not to a heel,

of course, but the cliff-face or scarp
up which his moose or eland
will so memorably rear—'rare',

my da would have said—while the Cathedral of Ero-
tic Misery, like that of Rheims,
will soon be awash in blood, in blood and sacred oil.

For that bobolink was no more your common oriole
than was Barton Booth
your common bletherskite: his 'Blow,

winds, and crack
your cheeks! Spit, fire! Spout, rain!'
would cut through the cackle like the mark of Zorro.

I crouch with Jim and Ben and our black-cloaked desperado
in a high-sided, two-wheeled *carreta*
full of hides and tallow and what must be retted flax.

Chlamydia: from *chlamys*, a cloak or cowl;
the filthy mantle on the gas;
again she renews her vows

to the moon-goddess; again she turns on the oven;
again the Agraviados begin to lay about
them while their Captain cries, 'Avaunt ye curs, avaunt.'

Now Father McEntaggart flings off his black, black cloak:
'This, Brigid, is a cross
you must bear with fortitude': as he gives her a cake

from the pyx (the mini-ciborium)
the dogs, for some reason, stand at point;
she calls to them in turn, to Sweetheart, Blanche and Tray.

Through Caledon and Aughnacloy the little dogs and all
are hard on my heels: they're led by that no good hobbledehoy
by the name of Israel Hands

who again clambers out of an Edmund Dulac
half-tone
to launch his Blitzkrieg

on Jim and myself; again the *Hispaniola* will take a sudden list
and Israel's dirk-blade pierce
my shoulder-muscle and its tendons be rent and riven.

The bridge. The barn. Again and again I stand aghast
as I contemplate what never
again will be mine:

'Look on her. Look, her lips.
Listen to her *rôle*
where ovarian cancer takes her in its strangle-hold.'

Sharp was her end as the scimitar of Salah-ed-din
with which he cut through ... what?
A cushion? A pillow? That was the year Richard the Lionheart

floated barrage-
balloons all along the coast between Jaffa and Tyre;
the year Lionheart smote an iron

bar with such force as so far,
so good, while Salah-ed-din, ever the more delicate,
sliced through the right Fallopian.

And there lay the mare—after they sliced her open—
there lay the mare with her nostril all wide
while Badhbh, daughter of Cailidin,

cried out on her behalf, ‘Whosoever
looketh upon a woman with carnal desire
as after the water brooks panteth the hart...’

‘Ovarian,’ did I write? Uterine.
Salah-ed-din would slice through in his De Havilland Mosquito.
‘American,’ did I write? British.

All I remember was the linen cloth, at once primped and puckery,
where her chin rested on the patten:
‘I’m living in Drumlister,’ she says, ‘in clabber

to the knee’; that was the year Salah-ed-din took the field
at Acre and with the fine edge of his damask
blade lopped off the right arm of Caius Mucius Scaevola.

Salah-ed-din would now seem poised to run a foil
through the weakest link
in the moon-suit wrought by some vidua

or whidah

bird while the scald crow,
Badhbh, latches on to the wheals

on the broken body of Tarp-
eia on whom, alas, the Sabines dumped their arms
as decisively as a bomber sweeping the Ruhr

would dump on Childe Roland:
an ampoule of Lustau's port, another of Bristol Cream,
are jittery in their tantalus.

I crouch with Schwitters and Arp, with Tristan Tzara,
as the Lorelei
lillibullabies from the Rhine,

thus affording the bomber a clear flight-path
through the ack-ack, or flak,
by which a dozen Spitfires have already been laid low.

Only yesterday I heard the cry go up, '*Vene sancti Spiritu,*'
as our old crate
overshot the runway at Halifax,

Nova Scotia: again I heard Oglalagalagool's
cackackle-Kiowas
as blood gushed from every orifice;

an ampoule of Lustau's port; a photograph of Godfrey Evans
who used to keep wicket—perhaps even went to bat—
for the noble and true-hearted Kent.

And here lies the mare with her nostril all wide and red
as I sit with her head
‘twixt my knees: still appealing to Wakantanka,

our friends the Sioux, as they excoriate
Michael Jackson; all that’s left of him is his top note;
‘Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life?’

There’s not even an arm, not an arm left of Arthur Cravan,
for whom the disconsolate Mina Loy
would howl, howl, howl

when he upped and went; after the bomb-blast
has rained down clay and stones
and arms and legs and feet and hands,

I should, I guess, help Mina rake
over these misrememberings for some sign of Ambrose Bierce,
maybe, if not her own Quetzalcoatl.

Again and again, I hover in Bierce’s ‘good, kind dark’
while a young R.N.
hooks an I.V. into her arm: it must have been ‘The Bottom Line’
rather than ‘The Bitter End’:
that must have been the year S—— wrote ‘Helter-skelter’
in her own blood on the wall; she’d hidden a razor in her scrubs.

All would be swept away: the T’ang chamber-pot and the Ming;
again and again I wedge my trusty Camoëns
in the barn-door to keep it ajar

lest Agravyn à la Dure Mayn
mistake me for Ladon or some apple-butt dragon
and come after me; even now I hear his shuffle-saunter

through the yard, his slapping the bib
of his overalls; even now he stops by the cattle-crush
from which the peers and paladins would set out on their forays.

Again and again I look out over the bridge where Deirdre
dashed her head against the 'Begad,
I'll teach him not to mitch

when the spuds need spraying'; again and again the cruel Emir
stops with the High King, Connor MacNessa,
at the barn-door; again and again they cry out, 'Open, Sesame.'

The bridge, the barn: the tongue of a boot once lus-
trous with mink-
oil;

a rocking-horse's hoof; the family tree from *Ada*;
all swept away in the bob and
wheel

of the sonata for flute and harp,
the wild harp hanged on a willow by Wolfgang Amadeo;
again and again Lear enters with a rare

and radiant maiden in his arms
who might at any moment fret and fream,
'I am the arrow that flieth by day. I am the arrow.'

In a conventional tornada, the strains of her '*Che sera, sera*'

or 'The Harp That Once' would transport me back
to a bath resplendent with yarrow

(it's really a sink set on breeze-or cinder-blocks):
then I might be delivered
from the rail's monotonous 'alack, alack';

in a conventional envoy, her voice would be ever
soft, gentle and low
and the chrism of milfoil might over-

flow
as the great wheel
came full circle; here a bittern's bibulous '*Orinochone O*'

is counterpointed only by that corncrake, by the gulder-gowl
of a nightjar, I guess, above the open-cast mines,
by a quail's

indecipherable code; of the great cog-wheel, all that remains
is a rush of air—a wing-beat,
more like—past my head; even as I try to regain

my equilibrium, there's no more relief, no more respite
than when I scurried, click, down McParland's lane
with my arms crossed, click, under my armpits;

I can no more read between the lines
of the quail's 'Wet-my-lips' or his 'Quick, quick'
than get to grips with Friedrich Hölderlin

or that phrase in Vallejo having to do with the 'ache'
in his forearms; on the freshly-laid asphalt
a freshly-peeled willow-switch, or baton, shows a vivid mosaic

of gold on a black field, while over the fields
of buckwheat it's harder and harder to pin down a gowk's
poopookarian *ignis fatuus*;

though it slips, the great cog,
there's something about the quail's 'Wet-my-foot'
and the sink full of hart's-tongue, borage and common kedlock

that I've either forgotten or disavowed;
it has to do with a trireme, laden with ravensara,
that was lost with all hands between Ireland and Montevideo.