

Onward!

With neither wealth nor connections
he is bent to his bootstraps and pulling, pulling

Ambition is a self-imposed, unfelt burden
he has no need of other creeds - pulling, pulling

Points of rest are few: he knows
the price of all pleasures - pulling, pulling

A solitary obstinacy obedient only
to the dictates of intuition - pulling, pulling

A fighter bunched over his fists,
body clenched around the effort,
his long face twisted sideways
and showing the strain - pulling, pulling

Waiting

Holding onto the open door's edge
he points his toe into his boot. She yells,
Hang on!

Night's sleeplessness is a lead weight
hanging between his ears. Cotton-mist
presses down every outside sound.

A red geranium beside the down-curved step
has one round leaf cupping last evening's rain.

She comes busily from inside
full of new-mother-importance
(she, her own self, has given life)
and, with the glow of a lover renewed,
she grips onto his arm
and pecks his cheek.

Her relaxing smile watches his slow tread
up between the creosoted dark
half-doors of the calf sheds and
the stone walls of the old barn.

She waits.

At the cough-grunt of the tractor starting
she turns.

The Prosthetics Fitting Suite

With faces of burdened perplexity
they wait,
the fathers of the crippled children.

Some children loll at odd angles
in their wheelchairs,
have more hair than brain and smell

of onion sweat, of filling incontinence pads
and the false
sweetness of cleansing lotions. The fathers,

unable to help themselves, stroke the back
of their child's
head, or shoulder, or forearm, whatever

comes to hand, the repetition as
soothing
to their own selves as the watching

of waves rolling into shore,
or
the involvement in any ritual;

like coming here to wait, be measured,
the assiduous
maintenance of an orderly existence.

Only Natural

Smooth carapace cooling his tongue
imbecilic farmboy licks and turns
a white egg,
swaps it for another from the dairy fridge,

licks and turns.

In the newly-seeded vegetable patch
a hen blackbird,
nest to build,
gobbles up grains of soil.

Imbecilic farmboy licks and turns.

The narrow lane beside the barn
has wing-flicker martins
gathering mud from wet tractor ruts.

In the square green meadow
round orange hens
wander among the legs
of brown cows, pausing
now and then
to scratch and peck,

scratch and peck.

Imbecilic farmboy licks and turns.

From an inner room
comes mother's screech.
Egg is quickly returned to tray,
fridge door bumped to a close.

Contrast

Contrast the smugness
of village adulterers
smooth with semen,

superior co-owners
of secrets, sharers
of crevassed smells

with

the cheated wife's
screwed-up features,
suspicious tamped

down, mouth
compressed, house
tidied; ordering

what she can,
hourly wiping away
her worries.

Mood

Lunar clock of her body turns the tide in her womb. No child. In foxlight doublechinned Christians drive stately home.

On a rubbish heap in a dark and green graveyard glows a pale crosshatching of naked flower stalks. On thin wobbly legs one old man, made stupid by anxiety, drops his doorkey and, suspecting bittersaid names, he seeks in improbable and gloomy places. In neglected sheds spiders' legs crackle as they run across corner webs. Earthworms too respond to changes in humidity, barometric pressure and the phases of the moon.

Thirst

Constant sough of a full-grown poplar
is an ocean in itself.

In the same dry wind a wide willow
flounces green flamenco skirts.

Between the two a thin boy climbs slowly
to the round top of a yellow grass hill.

Aware of, glad of, his loneliness
he drinks in the wind.

Letter to a Lost Love

Wanting only for my eyes to be full
of the obsessed-about, mind's

sulphur dust made halos around
the object of my infatuation.

A splinter-sharp intelligence
blinking from behind her fringe,

snobbery just about contained,
she held us all in contempt,

smiled like she was about to bite,
and walked with a starling's strut.

Heightened emotion had me see
significance in her mundane,

symbolism even
in a cast-aside tissue.

Her touch had me hold my breath.
Yours didn't.