

**An Irishman flies in from New York
to see *Krapp's Last Tape* and falls asleep
on someone's shoulder**

Up in the steep dark, body heat gathers,
the breathing comes less easily. The wait,
longer than it should be, is long enough
for a few relentless turns of the spool
into what was almost silence,
so that that stranger's lolling head tipping
yearning into wordless sleep awakens
tenderness in the shoulder that will soon
in another several grateful exhalations
receive its bowing.

The curtain's line floats
serenely up revealing time unreeling
on an empty desk, a man costive, creaking, choking –
and, while bodies high up there in the dark
begin to remember they cannot bear
themselves either, mysteriously the
stranger's head, naked and still flying over
dazzling arctic wastes, is almost taken
very tenderly in two hands and kissed.

In Praise of Salt Water

It's a torment to be close to water, to sweat
on a path above, unable to reach it.

Everything hurts

especially eyes narrowed against
this skewering light rejected by

so many surfaces.

Talk dries up and the island's sounds
depend at first on the scuff of feet and then

the distant knock

of water on rock. No trees, no birds,
undemanding plants inserted into gaps –

you'd think

there might be a lizard or something akin
but there's little life here really,

the white stone's

too good at sloughing off
water and refusing to become earth.

The only thing

is to keep walking, keep looking
for a way down until one appears

and then descend,

gingerly, slipping on loose stones,
following or perhaps conjuring a path.

There's nowhere to change

or hide. It's a paradise! Is it? It's an inferno?
Who cares! Let's take

our clothes off,

slip in by this helpful basin
offering a weedy lip – and let

the water lift.

We are not all parched
but some who are can almost feel

their thirst is slaked

by salt water, are comforted by the buoyancy
and not having to stand up

any more,

sensors flickering to a different definition
locating limbs in four dimensions

swimming out

Île Maïre

From the east, that is from land and from the shelter of the creek,
all you can see
is shadow, implacable cliff. No landing place,
no purchase.

The only feet over there are cloven hooves that pick their way
on narrow tracks round and
round the enclave, sure and always somewhere they've been before
and very recently.

The strait is narrow too, an 80-metre invitation
to conquer something
despite the signs and sober warnings – *take the currents on! come!*
un-isle the isle.

Professional divers bubble down in pairs to look among the wrecks
of unlucky ships that took
their bearings, as they had to, from this uninhabitable rock
and foundered

and this has been expressed as follows by surface navigators:
5° 20' 5.12" E, 43° 12' 39.84" N
though Julius Caesar's mariners wrote on their maps *immadras*,
that is *mère*, that is Maïre.

Object Love

Six no seven white pots of divers sizes,
not so different from each other, one dimpled
with indeterminate shapes and a little smaller,
another bigger, flared, fluted – each

exerts or expresses, what is it?
not so much a pressure as a purity of longing
for you to need it, love it, become part of it
and you do, you do. Your heart goes out to them.

And I see they will have to go with you
everywhere, even unto the claggy grave.
And here behind the cupboard door
is the too-big scarified brown pot

you have never found a use for but
now you hug it to your unmotherly dug
and weep into it O humble receptacle
for everything that matters and is holy.

I must be going

The suitcase was left by the door in such a way
as it said: I may not stay

It said: the laws of packing are few
and unnegotiable – first *you*

*trim your need to the space
available; second you can replace*

*most things; third order
ensures the flashlight at the border*

does not pause and return.
These laws you must learn.

It said: I am full of the skill or the art
of the fastened heart,

all the disciplined acts of selection,
all the folding protection.

It said: I am fear,
that much is clear

and confessable. I'm the accomplice
proving the provisional and the final analysis

are one and the same.
No one's to blame.

What is really happening

Ships shoulder the quays,
huge gantries slide
containers onto silent decks,
refrigerated trailers gently roar.
Someone knows where everything should go
but there's not a person to be seen.
I am the only soft body here,
on the margin of what is really happening.
The ships move like planets in their courses.
If they make a sound
it's too low to hear
and before I know it they have
already eased away,
their great screws turning
somewhere underneath,
and are becoming smaller,
leaving me blown about
by a salty wind, watching the horizon,
waiting by the indifferent cranes
for the next slow ship to rise.