

Excerpts from
Celtic Light

Poems

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CALL TO ORDER

State your name:

My character and my disease
have intertwined so thoroughly
I can no longer tell the parasite from the host—
yet it's not possible for a man
to be indifferent to his mission

State your mission:

I wake up in summer fog
I awaken inside of a pearl
I awaken inside a white shell tinged rose
with threads of mimosa and oleander
I awaken to the distant sound
of crows mobbing a hawk
I awaken to rustling in a nearby hedge
where a wasp is being placed
into the mouths of baby bluebirds
who are as large to him as dinosaurs

State your name and mission:

There are so many places I haven't yet
had the resolve to dwell, but in dreams
I have been climbing the foothills
that lead to the Three Peaks
and I've stood drooling among rock forms
like an infant at the breasts of the mother.

FALL ARRIVES

Fall arrives, time's most favored season—
at last the heart, the mind loosens its fist
so that I no longer need to know who I am

I return to the hills and the great presences—
light, heat, clouds, the bull pines—
to recover for myself the purity of the falling world
to enfold it like a pearl in the mind's silence

I read the calligraphy of the oaks against
the fading skies, the grass bending in the meadow,
the last robins— I'm a circle reaching
the first place for the first time

for in youth among fall leaves I refused
to acknowledge the ancient writing—
that the basket of summer empties, that
the hours of men are as wind-driven clouds—
and yet among fall leaves
I was overjoyed with the beauty of loss

now I stand on autumn's wooded knoll
that my life too may vanish,
that night may fall into the earth's arms

time is calling her trout
from their playgrounds in the sea
to river mouth, and redemption, and fury

it is by means of the long delay
that we come to the righteousness of passion.

THE LIGHT ARRESTED

When we have passed the Day of the Dead
and have seen the light drawn out thin
on the horizon like vague ships,
and Night and Cold are two kings on the land

and a third enters, the Pacific Ocean
raising itself in colossal waves silently
over the western slopes, flooding the earth
and falling on the interior plains

then our hearts are fish in a trackless ocean
and we find with fin and pulsing mouth
that this is heaven, this cold motionless place
and the light arrested

for everything we see— the fields and fences
and the trees and the surging fog—
is filled with that luminous presentness
here from before the start of time.

ANGELS,

You can hear them singing
from any point around Desolation Valley—
all night, if you want

go without meat long enough
and birds come up to you on the ground
and animals in the field
and you're able to talk with anyone

you don't know how this whole thing
will come out, whether with a joke,
or in great pain, or what—
think of the gods alive in all those trees

you wake at the hour of the wolf
and you're no wolf— all around
souls, called on to change,
flicker faintly in their cages
nauseated with the thought of flight—
at that hour let your mind dwell
on the cereal grasses
of the great North American plain.