

## In County Wicklow and Other Poems

### Migration

A strident squawking somewhere to the south,  
muffled at first, then suddenly stronger,  
and now here overhead, these shifting geometries,  
the ancient formations of geese,  
glimpsed through a tangle of black branches  
just budding, in the blue-white chasms of spring.

This fearless whooshing and flapping  
and their wild, raucous clatter  
revive a delicate trembling of memory,  
and our hearts are stirred to feel  
the everlasting patterns of departure and return,  
and gentle landings on field and marsh.

From a cautious distance, we admire  
these elegant ceremonies, endlessly repeated  
through the vastness of time and history,  
and as unnoticed, irrelevant observers  
of this grand spectacle, we strain to hear  
our own wounded voices, this dull, ceaseless weeping.

This Little Piggy

Was supposed to go shopping but instead  
agreed to attend a Webinar, where  
all the other piggies were instructed  
on how best to leverage their market shares,

to enhance their digital portfolios,  
and send their Everythings up to the Cloud,  
where cold, gray sleet is formed, and the wind blows  
hard and true enough to make Aeolus proud

of his work, where lunar alchemies fall  
on the mild tides of spring, and hope is found  
in dusty corners, still draped in the sprawl  
of history, even with the server down.

The pigs were confused, and started to roam  
but soon made their way, and cried all the way home.

In County Wicklow

We were married in Glendalough,  
under a wide blue sky, on a clean mountain breeze  
that I imagined might lift away suspicion  
and soothe our stubborn family controversies,  
but it only ruffled the lavender blossoms  
in Aislinn's hair, as red as the deepest, fiery sunset.

We named the baby Claire after my mother.  
She came too early, weak and yellow,  
and though we admired her proud resolve to survive,  
she lasted just six weeks. We buried her in the far hill,  
and marked the spot with a granite cross  
that we hauled down from Dublin in the hay wagon.

For a time, we contemplated the mysteries  
of human misfortune, placing ourselves,  
in thought and memory, against our more profitable neighbors,  
whose good luck or superior character, allowed them  
to gather and assemble their daily contentments,  
and to avoid calamity.

This was in 1918, when the influenza had spread  
to Ireland, creeping north from Spain, some said.  
Aislinn's skin turned suddenly gray, and she was besieged,  
spectacularly, by fever and nosebleeds and monumental fatigue.  
One October afternoon, she climbed the heavy stairs,  
and for the first time in full daylight, lay down in bed.

A more adventurous spirit would have looked ahead,  
in spite of these dreary setbacks, to rediscover hope  
and confidence, but I have found the strength only to remember,  
one starry midnight when I carried our tiny daughter  
through a field of primrose, and a cool autumn morning  
when Aislinn turned to me and whispered that she loved me.

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### Ninth Grade English

On the first day of school  
they shuffled grimly into the room,  
through thick clouds of nostalgia  
for blue beaches and empty summer days,  
dragging their cautious, despairing attitudes,  
a stolid countenance of resistance.

Something had to be done, so I asked them  
if back in July, they had heard the news,  
sounded proudly by the Audubon Society,  
that the state of Utah had been moved,  
selected because of its perfectly straight borders  
and the precise ninety-degree angles at the corners.

It was an unprecedented engineering triumph  
that took six months to complete, but finally  
Utah was relocated off the coast of Oregon,  
where raucous gatherings of sandhill cranes  
were now preparing for the long, perilous journey  
to Patagonia and the Yucatan.

A pause then, to give this time to sink in.  
Stares of resentment and disbelief, angry mutterings,  
“Who is this guy?” and “My parents told me  
I should have gone to Suffield,” but also off to my left  
the thin glimmer of a smile, and a faint hope  
that something miraculous was at hand.

And what do you think they found underneath Utah  
when it was removed? Not a vibrant, subterranean  
community of cross-humans, thriving in their vivid darknesses,  
and not a great, gilded doorway leading down to Utah’s  
global opposite, somewhere south of Madagascar.  
No, instead they found nothing, nothing, nothing at all.

I admit to leaning toward a growing bulge of momentum,  
but it was really *their* moment, as we let everything go  
and fell in together laughing, all of them ready now  
for Archibald MacLeish and Edna St. Vincent Millay,  
a collective sense of relief to embrace the notion  
that it *might* be impossible, but it *could* happen.

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### Two Geese

On the drive home, just a brief glimpse  
off to my left at the side of the road,  
the one, standing erect and alert, firmly balanced  
on webbed feet, the other, sprawled carelessly against  
the curb, one wing fanned, the bill half open,  
both of them motionless.

I had read somewhere that geese mate for life,  
like wolves and swans and otters, so it's likely  
that these two were paired, before some predatory  
or mechanical piece of violence had occurred,  
the only sign now a roundish mound of feathers,  
and a particular, perfect stillness.

It was just a goose, one among millions,  
lacking our treasured human sensibilities,  
a brutish creature without emotion,  
in its abundant, anonymous wildness,  
and surely, I thought, they do not feel hope,  
or love or loss. Still, I felt like crying.