

Two Poems

Eamon Grennan

Thinking in Poughkeepsie of My Son in the Hills of Humla

Impossible in the cloudless haze of this ice-blue day to imagine the perilous weather that could be shrouding those faraway hills in ice and snow, flinging such conditions at any high climbers there that the heart quails at the thought and you back off, afraid to touch the merest possibility, your eyes sealed shut and nothing in your ears but the muffled roar of a mountain wind tunneling crevasse and rock curtain, battering banks of blue ice, eclipsing everything with its pitiless breath of chill until only the rhythm of boots crunching packed snow—spondee after spondee bringing your whole hungry body to bear—is the single truth to live by, the one unclouded light-point at the horizon you have to set your heart on.

What Goes On

Was it the weird cry of the collared dove lighting out of my neighbour's barn, abandoning its safe rectangle of darkness, that brought to mind not only those driven onto the dust-ridden roads of Lebanon, their cries availing nothing, but reminded me too of what someone said on the radio this morning about a murder thirty years ago in the North: "If you do that to neighbours," murmured this soft-voiced Protestant farmer on the south side of the border, "you can do anything," and since it seems neighbours there, and in Haifa and Beirut, in Gaza and Jerusalem, might do anything, is it any wonder I measure out my life in mountainsides, bushes of furze, waterfalls and drystone walls, and am content when I see by daylight a phantom gibbous moon over Buchán, where—under the crunch of dry grass, heather and creeping juniper—I might hear the silence of the frogs and birds in hiding, see at the summit of that rock-strewn world how a small cinnabar and black butterfly and one intent honeybee make small waves, leading lives of absolute, invested attention there where the mountain, turf-cut to its stony bone, lets the big issues break like rain running downhill off it, or that, at the end of the day's climb together, after a sliding descent over shale and through the delicious cool of pine-shade, we two hear the rock wall echo our own names back to us, and then we are both safe down and the late day is hot and peaceful, the world both immediate and far-off, letting us lie there sweating, sipping tea, one more long walk ended, and in soft exhausted voices talking about it.