

Going Back (by Eithne McKiernan)

Here: it must be where you stood,
One hand raised to shade your eyes
Against the harsh Atlantic
Grinding shoulders with the rocks below.

How your skirt cut the wind in half!
And how you waited, brooding
For the boats that stitched their slow way in
With ribboned wakes a deeper green,
And each new ship
A promise that you couldn't keep.

I see the girl you were
Walk back alone to her father's house,
Caught between two hungers.
Some absent strain of music kept you restless,
And I know how the longing worked on you,
For even at night
The boats sent out a siren tongue –
Foreign to your ear, perhaps, but song.

One day you finally left,
Sailing your boat straight into the cave
Of America's open arms;
Feeling the wind no monster
There, after such lean dreams
As you had culled from Irish soil.

Mama Mór, I stand here now
Where you once stood,
the unchanged land beneath my feet,
Certain that my bones were formed
From the same air
That made your bones first stir,

But the old heritage
Breeds a different pain in me:
A stranger to both countries,
I cannot make my roots take hold;
Can only stand and hear the sea
Return the poems that you'd willed it
As a child, while the wind
Raises ghosts behind me.