

## *Going Home to Mayo, Winter, 1949*

Paul Durcan

Leaving behind us the alien, foreign city of Dublin  
My father drove us through the night in an old Ford Anglia,  
His five-year-old son in the seat beside him,  
The rexine seat of red leatherette,  
And a yellow moon peered in through the windscreen.  
'Daddy, Daddy,' I cried, 'Pass out the moon,'  
But no matter how hard he drove he could not pass out the moon.  
Each town we passed through was another milestone  
And their names were magic passwords into eternity:  
Kilcock, Kinnegad, Strokestown, Elphin,  
Tarmonbarry, Tulsk, Ballaghedereen, Ballyvarry;  
Now we were in Mayo and the next stop was Turlough,

The village of Turlough in the heartland of Mayo,  
And my father's mother's house, all oil-lamps and women,  
And my bedroom over the public bar below,  
And in the morning cattle-cries and cock-crows:  
Life's seemingly seamless garment gorgeously rent  
By their screeches and bellowings. And in the evenings  
I walked with my father in the high grass down by the river  
Talking with him – an unheard-of thing in the city.

But home was not home and the moon could be no more outflanked  
Than the daylight nightmare of Dublin city:  
Back down along the canal we chugged into the city  
And each lock-gate tolled our mutual doom;  
And railings and palings and asphalt and traffic lights,  
And blocks after blocks of so-called "new" tenements –  
Thousands of crosses of loneliness planted  
In the narrowing grave of the life of the father;  
In the wide, wide cemetery of the boy's childhood.

## *Ag Dul Abhaile go Maigh Eo, Geimhreadh, 1949*

Thugamar cúl ar chathair choimhthíoch Bhaile Átha Cliath.  
Thiomáin m'athair a shean Ford Anglia trí dhubh na hoíche,  
A mhac, cúig bliana d'aois, sa suíochán in aice leis,  
Suíochán dearg leathairéid  
Agus gealach bhuí ag lonrú tríd an ngaothscáth.  
A Dhaid a Dhaid, a scairt mé, 'Tiomáin chun tosaigh ar an ngealach,  
Ach ba chuma cé comh gasta is a thiomáin sé  
D'fhan an ghealach romhainn amach.  
Ba chloch-mhíle gach baile a chuir muid tharainn,  
A nainmneacha, pasfhocail dhraíochta sa tsíoraíocht –  
Cill Chóca, Cionn Átha Gad, Béal na mBuillí, Áil Fin,  
Tearmann Bearaigh, Tuilsce, Bealach an Doirín, Béal Átha Bhearaigh,  
Anois bhí muid i Maigh Eo, an chéad stad eile ná Turlach,

Sráidbhaile Thurlaigh i gcroí is i gceartlár Mhaigh Eo,  
Agus teach mathair m'athar, lán lampái ola is mná,  
Agus mo sheomra leapa díreach os cionn an teach tábhairne,  
Agus ar maidín glaoch eallaigh is glaoch coilligh:  
A screadaí is a mbuirthí mar stróic ghalánta  
Ar éadach mín na beatha. Agus, um thráthnóna,  
Tríd an fhéar ard cois abhann, shiúlfhainn le m'athair,  
Sinn ag comhrá, rud do-chreidthe sa chathair.

Ach níorbh é an baile é i ndáiríre,  
Is ba dheacra ná dul chun tosaigh ar an ngealach,  
Éalu ó thromluí laethúil chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath :  
Ar ais linn, ag tiomáint go mall, stadach, cois canála,  
Gach geata loic canála, buile cloig ár ngruaimne is ár gcreiche,  
Agus ráilí agus fáilí agus asfalt agus soilse tráchtá,  
Agus bloc i ndiadh bloic d'árasáin bhochta nua –  
Croiseanna an uaignis, na mílte acu, curtha  
San uaigh chúng, fáiscithe de bheatha an athar  
Sa reilig fhairsing, fairsing óige a mhic.

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