**Elsewhere**

Beauteous thou art, the spirit knows not how;

’Tis not the serpent-way thine iris slips,

Nor confluence of the temples and the brow,

Nor marge nor parting of the trembled lips:

Beauteous thou art; but never with thy face

Dwelleth thy beauty: all its riches are

Freighting for thee in distant argosies,

While thou art poor, save for a tranquil grace.

Beauty forever with the god doth keep

Backward, a few steps off, beside the shrine:

It is thy dreaming when thou art asleep;

Waking thou dost not wear it as a sign;

Yet wheresoeer thou goest it limns thee, sweet,

As finest air a-quiver with the heat.

—Michael Field

**Sailing to Byzantium**

I

That is no country for old men. The young

In one another’s arms, birds in the trees

—Those dying generations—at their song,

The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,

Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long

Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.

Caught in that sensual music all neglect

Monuments of unageing intellect.

II

An aged man is but a paltry thing,

A tattered coat upon a stick, unless

Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing

For every tatter in its mortal dress,

Nor is there singing school but studying

Monuments of its own magnificence;

And therefore I have sailed the seas and come

To the holy city of Byzantium.

III

O sages standing in God’s holy fire

As in the gold mosaic of a wall,

Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,

And be the singing-masters of my soul.

Consume my heart away; sick with desire

And fastened to a dying animal

It knows not what it is; and gather me

Into the artifice of eternity.

IV

Once out of nature I shall never take

My bodily form from any natural thing,

But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make

Of hammered gold and gold enamelling

To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;

Or set upon a golden bough to sing

To lords and ladies of Byzantium

Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

—W. B. Yeats

**The Importance of Elsewhere**

Lonely in Ireland, since it was not home,

Strangeness made sense. The salt rebuff of speech,

Insisting so on difference, made me welcome:

Once that was recognised, we were in touch.

Their draughty streets, end-on to hills, the faint

Archaic smell of dockland, like a stable,

The herring-hawker’s cry, dwindling, went

To prove me separate, not unworkable.

Living in England has no such excuse:

These are my customs and establishments

It would be much more serious to refuse.

Here no elsewhere underwrites my existence.

—Phillip Larkin

**Night Drive**

The smells of ordinariness

Were new on the night drive through France:

Rain and hay and woods on the air

Made warm draughts in the open car.

Signposts whitened relentlessly.

Montreuil, Abbeville, Beauvais

Were promised, promised, came and went,

Each place granting its name’s fulfilment.

A combine groaning its way late

Bled seeds across its work-light.

A forest fire smouldered out.

One by one small cafés shut.

I thought of you continuously

A thousand miles south where Italy

Laid its loin to France on the darkened sphere.

Your ordinariness was renewed there.

—Seamus Heaney

**Courtyards in Delft**

—Pieter de Hooch, 1659

(*for Gordon Woods*)

Oblique light on the trite, on brick and tile—

Immaculate masonry, and everywhere that

Water tap, that broom and wooden pail

To keep it so. House-proud, the wives

Of artisans pursue their thrifty lives

Among scrubbed yards, modest but adequate.

Foliage is sparse, and clings; no breeze

Ruffles the trim composure of those trees.

No spinet-playing emblematic of

The harmonies and disharmonies of love,

No lewd fish, no fruit, no wide-eyed bird

About to fly its cage while a virgin

Listens to her seducer, mars the chaste

Perfection of the thing and the thing made.

Nothing is random, nothing goes to waste.

We miss the dirty dog, the fiery gin.

That girl with her back to us who waits

For her man to come home for his tea

Will wait till the paint disintegrates

And ruined dikes admit the esurient sea;

Yet this is life too, and the cracked

Out-house door a verifiable fact

As vividly mnemonic as the sunlit

Railings that front the houses opposite.

I lived there as a boy and know the coal

Glittering in its shed, late-afternoon

Lambency informing the deal table,

The ceiling cradled in a radiant spoon.

I must be lying low in a room there,

A strange child with a taste for verse,

While my hard-nosed companions dream of fire

And sword upon parched veldt and fields of rain-swept gorse.

—Derek Mahon