



On Ballycastle Beach

for my father

If I found you wandering round the edge
of a French-born sea, when children
should be taken in by their parents,
I would read these words to you,
like a ship coming in to harbour,
as meaningless and full of meaning
as the homeless flow of life
from room to homesick room.

The words and you would fall asleep,
sheltering just beyond my reach
in a city that has vanished to regain
its language. My words are traps
through which you pick your way
from a damp March to an April date,
or a mid-August misstep; until enough winter
makes you throw your watch, the heartbeat
of everyone present, out into the snow.

My forbidden squares and your small circles
were a book that formed within you
in some pocket, so permanently distended,
that what does not face north faces east.

Your hand, dark as a cedar lane by nature,
grows more and more tired of the skidding light,
the hunched-up waves, and all the wet clothing,
toys and treasures of a late summer house.

Even the Atlantic has begun its breakdown
like a heavy mask thinned out scene after scene
in a more protected time — like one who has

gradually, unnoticed, lengthened her pre-wedding
dress. But, staring at the old escape and release
of the water's speech, faithless to the end,
your voice was the longest I heard in my mind,
although I had forgotten there could be such light.