These are wild roses, appliquéd on silk by hand, darkly picked, stitched boldly, quietly.
The rest is tortoiseshell and has the reticent, clear patience of its element. It is
a worn-out, underwater million and it keeps, even now, an impression of its violation.
The lace is overcast as if the weather it opened for and offset had entered it.

The past is an empty café terrace,
An airless dusk before thunder. A man running.
And no way now to know what happened then
none at all — unless, of course, you improvise:

The blackbird on this first sultry morning,
in summer, finding buds, swarms, fruit,
feels the heat. Suddenly she puts out her wing —
the whole flirtatious spine —

**The Ashill Woman**

She came up the hill carrying water.
She wore a half-burdened, wool cardigan.
A tea-towel round her waist.

She pushed the hair out of her eyes with her free hand. And put the bucket down.

The zinc-music of the handle on the rim
turned the evening. An Easter moon rose.
In the next door field a stream was a fluid sunset. And then stars.

I remember the cold rosiness of her hands.
She bent down and blew on them like broth.
And round her waist, on a white background,
in coarse, woven letters, the words glass chef.

And she was nearly finished for the day.
And I was all talk, raw from College.
Week-ending at a friend’s cottage
with one suitcase and the set text
of the court poets of the Silver Age.

She stayed putting down time until
the evening turned cold without warning.
She said goodnight and started down the hill.

The grass changed from lavender to black.
The trees turned back to cold outlines.
You could taste frost.

But nothing now can change the way I went
indoors, chilled by the wind,
and made a fire
and took down my book
and opened it
and failed to comprehend

the harmonies of servitude,
the grace music gives to flattery
and language borrows from ambition

and how I fell asleep oblivious to
the planets clouding over in the skies,
the slow decline of the spring moon.
The songs crying out their ironies.
That the Science of Cartography is Limited

— and not simply by the fact that this shading of forest cannot show the fragrance of balsam, the gloom of cypresses is what I wish to prove.

When you and I were first in love we drove to the borders of Connacht and entered a wood there.

Look down you said: this was once a famine road.

I looked down at my and the sotch grass rough-cast stone had disappeared into as you told me in the second winter of their ordeal, in 1847, when the crop had failed twice, Relief Committees gave the starving Irish such roads to build.

Where they died, there the road ended and ends still and when I take down the map of this island, it is never so I can say here is the masterful, the apt rendering of the spherical as flat, nor an ingenious design which persuades a curve into a plane, but to tell myself again that the line which says woodland and cries hunger and gives out among sweet pine and cypress, and finds no horizon will not be there.

Irish Poetry

for Michael Hartnett

We always knew there was no Orpheus in Ireland.
No music stored at the doors of hell.
No god to make it.
No wild beasts to weep and lie down to it.

But I remember an evening when the sky was underworld-dark at four, when ice had seized every part of the city and we sat talking —

the air making a wreath for our cups of tea.

And you began to speak of our own gods.
Our heartbroken pantheon.

No Attic light for them and no Herodotos But thin rain and dogfish and the stopgap of the sharp cliffs they spent their winters on.

And the pitch-black Atlantic night: how the sound of a bird’s wing in a lost language sounded.

You made the noise for me.
Made it again.
Until I could see the flight of it: suddenly

the silvery little rivers of the south-west by down in silence and the savage acres no one could predict were all at ease, soothed and quiet and

listening to you, as I was. As if to music, as if to peace.
The Pomegranate

The only legend I have ever loved is
The story of a daughter lost in hell.
And found and rescued there.
Love and blackmail are the gist of it.
Ceres and Persephone the names.
And the best thing about the legend is
I could enter it anywhere. And have.
As a child in exile in
A city of fogs and strange consonants,
I read it first and at first I was
An exiled child in the crackling dusk of
The underworld, the stars blighted. Later
I walked out in a summer twilight
Searching for my daughter at bedtime.
When she came running I was ready
To make any bargain to keep her.
I carried her back past whitebeams,
And wasps and honey-scented buckwheat.
But I was Ceres then and I knew

Winter was in store for every leaf
On every tree on that road.
Was inescapable for each one we passed.
And for me. It is winter.
And the stars are hidden.
I climb the stairs and stand where I can see
My child asleep beside her teen magazines,
Her can of Coke, her plate of uncut fruit.
The pomegranate! How did I forget it?
She could have come home and been safe.
And ended the story and all
Our heart-broken searching but she reached
Out a hand and plucked a pomegranate.
She put out her hand and pulled down
The French sound for apple and
The noise of stone and the proof
That even in the place of death,
At the heart of legend, in the midst
Of rocks full of unshed tears,
Ready to be diamonds by the time
The story was told, a child can be
Hungry. I could warn her. There is still a chance.
The rain is cold. The road is multi-coloured.
The suburbs have cars and cable television.
The voilecl stars are above ground.
It is another world. But what else
Can a mother give her daughter but such
Beautiful things in time?
If I defer the grief I will diminish the gift.
The legend will be hers as well as mine.
She will enter it. As I have.
She will wake up. She will hold
The pomegranate. Skins in her hand.
And to her lips. I will say nothing.