

MARY ROSE QUOTES JAMES JOYCE
ON THE CLIFFS AT BRAY

We are chuffing along in our heavy shoes,
watching a scene on a nearby peak:
“She’s sitting on his hips, now,

running her hands up and down his chest,”
Mary Rose says, as if I couldn’t see, myself.
Martello tower’s across, and the house

of that terrible Christmas dinner
in *Portrait of the Artist*. Mary Rose quotes
the beginning: “Once upon a time, and a very

good time it was.” We recall what followed,
the tears for poor, dead Parnell,
for the abused stones of Ireland, the very same

stones that young woman braces her feet on,
now, as if to say “what of it?”
Here we are, clumping upward, across

from the pearl-pale seemingly quenchless lovers,
seaweed masses rocking below.
It all feels out of hand: Joyce’s Christmas

gone haywire, politics tangled with the mother’s
breast, the breast of turkey, the wine,
and now this ecstasy near enough to touch,

the whole universal exclamation thrown upward
out of the mind. “I could never, there,”
Mary Rose says, and I agree,

but the scene is working in us, a pebble
in the shoe. From the beginning, sure,
we had hoped to be loved without conditions

until we cried out among the seagulls.
We are quiet now, we know exactly
what we are up to, we are busily wrapping
the lovers in layers and layers of language.