

at the Palais Royale the night he gave them
that last allegro, marking his ascent into manhood.

The reason I call this poem "Willow"
has to do with my neighbor's tree in his frontyard

though not entirely. This man is one
who brought only daughters into the world.

When he walks up the street, as infrequently he does,
I note that listing walk of his and consider

how he has walked that way all of his life
& bequeathed his walk to his daughters, charming

ungainly girls who will both of them one day & possibly
for numberless days in a row & as many afternoons

send their husbands into musical hallucinations
the way that willow does, the way the memory

of rose light fluttering above billows of Bach
in King's College Chapel has power to do—

the way her skin invariably will
when I have placed my face above her Islands of Langerhans

& her belly is covered with sweat like a melon
fresh from the fruit-drawer and the company of endive.

THE MANHOOD OF IRELAND

One afternoon at Egan's in Kilkee
I show JJ my map of Shannon Estuary.
Look JJ, I tell him, look at this map:
Here's the River Fergus like a great vas deferens

Pouring its turgid sperm into the Shannon.
Ah 'tis, he says, Ah yes, a true bloody fact,
And turns to talk about the Charolais and the Whitehead Herefords
With Jerry McDermot up the bar.
No JJ, listen to me, I tell him, Look again, look here:
This is the manhood of Ireland plunging
Into that great slut of an ocean.
'Tis that, he says, Yes indeed, I see it there,
And calls for another pint from Clare Egan for each of us
And helps himself to a Woodbine out of Jerry's pack.
Mary Carey comes over,
Dangling a half-glass between two fingers.
And what was this you were mentioning over here JJ, she says.
Mary Mary, let me explain, I say,
We were discussing the virtue of the Whitehead cattle
As compared to the Charolais . . .
Which are a dead loss, says Jerry McDermot.
Oh I see, she says, Oh yes.
Nothing of the kind, Clare tells her,
The infamous Yank is lying to you, Mary:
He and JJ were examining the River Shannon on this map
And how it pours itself into the ocean
In an act of fornication.
Ah go on, says Mary Carey.
A dead loss, says Jerry McDermot.

LITANY AGAINST THE BELLYACHE, UPON ST. BRIGID'S DAY

Then it was the fierce place in my middle
where the crazed flatus was
& with it a prayer to holy Mother Brigid
that she might heal me from her nunnery in the sky
because I suffered nightsweats & burnings at stool
because it was the tea-colored diarrhea
because I was in pain
because there was neither joy in my supper nor bliss in my bedding