

Tom McCarthy · *Ireland*

THE POET OF THE MOUNTAINS

Every Sunday she prepared the brown oak table
For breakfast and listened to new writers
On the wooden wireless, while she ladled
Fresh milk from the yellow stone pitchers
By the wall. The English words that broke
Across her small kitchen were seldom spoken

When she was young. Then, it was all Irish:
Those brown words had curled about her childhood
Like colliers home from a long cattle-crush
Or an alphabet of trees in the Abbey wood
Where she picked bluebells with her uncle
And caught words off the air as they fell.

She had spent all her days in the company
Of women. They had churned milk in the dairy
With her, taken weak lambs across the hills,
Or spoken in black shawls as far as chapel:
All their days were taken up in a great swell
Of work. They had to wash, sew, milk and kneel.

But at night, I imagine, she would lie awake
And listen to the mountains for her own sake.
She would listen to the linen wind at night
As it flapped the wet clothes. She would steal
Into the children's room to dream and write;
To be a whole person, a picker of bluebells.