

Because of all things known

by Imogen Rose Phillips

Neither sycophant nor worshipper, I present the following as it passed through me - lightly, with meaning and care.

I will refer to the artist as Richard, the name given him by his parents when they met. I will refer to the stone of his surroundings as *karst*, you will find it better than any English word beginning l and ending e. This is a story unspooled from one meeting. Neither stuck beneath paint nor on process, and not one of man but of four.

It starts before you reach the Burren. Cows are called along the train line, used to being passed unseen by travellers moving at speed, but moving mythic now. Swallows dot above them, the clouds play a game of weather. Long before you get to where you are meant to be, you will find you are being called home.

Who among us could say no to safety, to being brought into the embrace of a place. This is the longing of all men, women, whoever before us, whoever walks the *karst* path of life to understand the longing of their mind.

To live peacefully in an ancient landscape, one must make friends with the ghosts. We follow a straight road to the sea. The kind of road an English upbringing might presume to be Roman-made, but was in fact laid narrow, long and unyielding to speed the progress of his majesty's troops. We walk the horizon of Heaney's Flaggy Shore, now the shared delight of the Burren's current guardians. The morning swimmers, who make a ring of held hands in the water to pray. The farming family, some working the land, one preserving the *ceili* in search of a wife.

And of Richard, who has lived here for twelve years. Who, after child and teenagehood spent near Dublin, and some years on the sand of a Thai island, heard a call to head west. Over the years, and at a pace they could afford, Richard and his wife, Boo, have made the Burren their home.

The car stops on a narrow path. Without interruption, aside from swans moving in the corner of the water, silenced by distance, Richard reads a poem aloud. *Postscript* is Seamus Heaney's ode to this small stretch of

coastline, its particular colour and curves. A lake so close to the sea, they form two lips of an open mouth. Later, a search for the poem in its entirety brings a copy annotated with colour. A scholar's key to identify the poem's music, its fourteen lyrical strands, in the very same palette which covers the canvases in Richard's studio, and those which will hang in the gallery in London, around you today.

The monoliths, the mountains, the gape of sea beyond. All brilliant and beckoning, like the purple parsley, wild mustard, or marsh orchid which spring from the Burren stone. Called to the West, to a landscape with challenge borne into it, a place where one is encouraged to find their place through earning, not by presumption of ownership nor claim. Many people pass as we walk the shore road, all who know Richard and he them, by name.

Our talk turns to the act of carrying, to Richard's hope to one day carry a painting the 2,500 miles to his birthplace. Haliliye, Malta, Ballyvaughan and Beirut. Each separated by border and water, each lain with slabs of the same Neolithic rock. On creations, the poet Kahlil Gibran was clear: *they come through you but not of you*. To bring something into the world is to reckon with *life's longing for itself*. Only after arriving did Richard realise that Kahlil, the poet transplanted and made famous by America, had been born to Mount Lebanon, surrounded by the very same karst.

Behind their house, a meadow has been planted with herbs and trees. In front, from unrelenting stones, a garden somehow grows. Colours smile, softening gravel stones like paint in the sink at the end of the day. In 1987, six years after Richard arrived in Ireland, Derek Jarman bought a small fisherman's shack on the Dungeness marshland of England's South East coast. Kent's status as the garden of England is typically saved for its inland areas, those boggy, silty fens fortified by the minerals needed for things to grow and graze. Toward the coast, the climate is harsher, few trees grow and high sea winds blow. Prospect Cottage, a rectangular fisherman's hut, glows as brightly black against its backdrop, as Richard's studio does white, against its own.

Jarman was a child of longing, repotted many times by his father's RAF career. In the years immediately following the second world war, he lived close to the Italo-Swiss border, taking frequent trips to majestic, mysterious Rome. To look at the landscape around Lake Maggiore, is to see much of the Burren reflected; mountains and forest, alpine and desert plants, vast stretches of water on all sides. Areas protected for their beauty, where one is given a chance to leave longing behind, to just *be*.

Beside the house, his studio sits, a perfect rectangle. A child's drawing of a home, a primary shape, hugged on three sides by mountains, and on the other a stretch of Atlantic ocean, deeper than the sea. *We should probably spend some time in the studio*, Richard says, after a long lunch in the kitchen at home. To understand the process of this artist, is to be met with immediate generosity, with trust one is welcomed within. Richard is, as a man, as he is a painter. Nothing he commits to the canvas is done to confuse the viewer, but to invite them to follow his journey toward one of their own. On the windowsills of the studio are gifts left by writers, artists and academics, the many who have been here all leaving with more than when they arrived.

*When the wind and the light are working off each other...
So that the ocean on one side is wild with foam and glitter
The surface of a slate grey lake by an earthen lightning of a flock of swans*

Seamus made his peace with the city, and Derek too. Taking some part of it with him to Dungeness, so that his wild cottage maintained a metropolitan sensibility, and not just in the form of myriad actors, anarchists and artists who were its visitors. But both were disturbed, and restless, Derek finding stillness only when he was too sick to fight. Seamus' boggy parts were not so safe in the capital places, Kahlil achieved success only when he was considered sufficiently naturalised by America. Holding it all, allowing the echoes, perhaps Richard has managed it best of all.

Although artists have no choice but to acknowledge all that was made before their making, creative pursuit is an aim for something new. The misstep occurs when assuming meaning can be mimicked between maker and beholder, to a receiver who is not you.

We agree that one may only hope to briefly hold that which must be expressed. On writing, I say that I have no choice. If it doesn't come out of me, then I have not said what need be, I have left dry earth where a garden could grow. Richard smiles, encouraging, *we're doing exactly what we're here to do.*

Can it be as simple as breaking a word in two? Could it be that between the separateness, something sweet may come; a honey, a dew. How will we know when we are called? If we have never heard the sound before, days busied with *being*, obscured into nights full of longing.

We're in a liminal space here, in the Burren, says Richard by the swan's lake, the birds an *earthen lightning*, surrounded by that which is *neither here nor there*. We can only hope to be where we are, in the wondrous now. He who returns each day to the canvas, to lift the veil, steps boldly from beneath the canopy to examine the roots beneath. When he arrives there, he will find it to be no measure of distance at all.

And what of the paintings, you may wonder. Of these canvas conjurings, testament to all written here, to an artist's generosity, loose grip on assumption, gleeful engagement with what lies beyond the veil.

Well, they are left with the spirit they were made, in your ample care. To be among them is to be between echoes; monoliths, mountains, memory. Vessels here, ample with arrival. They speak exactly as you are able to hear them, catching your eyes wide and your *heart off guard*. Holding all they came from, in the spirit they have been committed, in the shape of which islands made them.

To stand amongst the composite parts of *No Ruined Stones* is to be with the eternal, to still the heart of its longing, that of all men, of always, and of Kahlil, Seamus, Derek, Richard Hearn.

Excerpt from Seamus Heaney's 'Postscript', title from W.B Yeats' 'To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing'