

22. XII - 2000

Dear John,

I finally got to the perfectly titled Tráithní a couple weeks ago. As often happens, it found its moment; abandoning the addiction of the newspaper one morning, I was instantly engrossed. It's exceptionally rare to hit upon a genuinely novel form, but it seems you've done so (unless you're aware of some forerunner). Indeed, like a major scientific experiment, I'm surprised the severely pruned sonnet-scheme is not already in the repertoire, given the centrality and permutations of the standard form. Equally impressive is the way the overall classically Biblical metaphor is inflected and extended on each poem with

further particularized image, thus mirroring, in the most supple way, the interplay of the immanent and transcendent that is the very substance (or so it seems to me) of the sequence, and of life itself. Since I am of the opinion that all true originality has echoes in others, I found myself thinking (not debts, but parallels) of a certain Middle English line, of Samuel Menache and, curiously, Eugene Watten / Eoghan O'Toairne (eg, nos. 12, 14). Here, what impresses me exceedingly is the way it plunges us into some ground-level perspective where we really are, where our lives play out and nowhere else — Yeats's "desolation of reality"; and of course visually, and so thematically, there is such a good fit between each

moment and each poem, life's leaver-of-grass
and art's truthiness, that you feel that
the sequence perfectly reflects that exit-less
place, that desolation and joy ---

Has it come out? I've been that busy
this year (with the enclosed, with the Butler
celebration) that I failed to notice if it
did. If not, do let me know if and
when there's a launch.

I hope to manage a trip to
Kilkenny, Waterford and Wicklow sometime in
2001, with Jacob — one of our term-break
rambles (we usually go to Dongol). And
if we do, I'll certainly be in touch before we
set out. All best for the festive season.
Chris