

## {.....} Donegal Exile

I catch him on the steamer to Liverpool    watching Belfast sink into smoke  
I have so many questions    to begin with    names  
how much weight should we place on them    are they the compass  
that compels us to battle upstream to discovery even if it leads to a dead river?

My own name is a fiction    I learned this early on    also that blood  
has a long memory    reaches beyond the living    there were those  
who made good choices and those who were lucky    he was neither  
there was a girl    I ask if he knew her    the Tans shaved off her hair  
as a punishment    then those two boys    well dressed    sixteen  
up and coming    shot in the face    was he on their side or the other?  
I understand that neutrality is a double betrayal  
did the bomb that split the day in half crack him too?  
I once met a man who had to hunt    through beer  
and the blood-soaked rubble of a pub for his dead brother's arms

He {my grandfather} was a government man    changed our name  
to appear more English    made me doubt myself  
he must have seen ghosts on every corner because running became a habit  
was it the IRA or fatherhood that scared him?

I had to search for him    dig with bereaved persistence  
I am glad to have made the effort despite the fact that he never sent cards  
or a photo    never visited on birthdays or at Christmas    or ever  
I understand he was afraid    why he needed to be elusive  
I don't think he meant to hurt anyone  
but his absence scorched the ground between fathers and sons  
and we still live under a false identity

I ask him if he wants to confess    if he hears the angelus bell  
in reply to my barrage    places a finger to his lips    mouths something  
a chaplet perhaps or a novena    stares out to an vacant ocean  
lets the sea take his words