

The Real Reason for Going Is Not Just to Get There

Killarney's maps are for the unredeemed.

The hidden land awaits the stumblers
and the temporarily confused who find
their destinations as they go.

In Dingle there's a history
bone-final as the faith
that founded Gallarus.

All

that remains is what was there
when Gallarus began: God,
man, sheep, and stone
and stone and stone.

Dingles

ago the starvers saw their lips
turn green from chewing grass
before they famished in their beds.

Their hovels bleach like tombs
unroofed and riven by the sea.

If only all the stones were beige
or marble-white...

Their fading

grays seem unforgiving as a fate
that only wit or tears
or emigration can defeat.

Sheep graze over graves.

Loud gulls convene on garbage
dumps.

In Galway, Cashel
and Tralee, I fish the air
for what it is that makes
the Irish Irish.

Is it Seamus
speaking Sweeney's prayer
in Howth and telling me of Hopkins,
"the convert," buried in Glasnevin?
Is it how it sounds to sing
the music in a name: Skibbereen,
Balbriggan, Kilbeggan, Bunratty,
Listowel, Duncannon, Fermanagh
and Ballyconneely?

Is it Joyce's
map of metaphors that makes
all Dublin mythical as Greece?
Is it cairns of uniambic and unrhyming
rocks transformed by hand
into the perfect poem of a wall?
Is it the priest near death
who whispered, "Give my love
to Roscommon, and the horses
of Roscommon"?

Is it because
the Irish pray alike for "Pope
John Paul, our bishop Eamon, and
Ned O'Toole, late of Moycullen"?
Inside God's house or out
their sadder smiles say the world,

if given time, will break your heart.

With such a creed they should
believe in nothing but the wisdom
of suspicion.

Instead they say,
“Please God,” and fare ahead
regardless of the odds to show
that life and God deserve at least
some trust, some fearlessness, some courtesy.

For Anne Mullin Burnham