

The Etymology of Isolation

No man is an Iland, intire of itself.

John Donne

I

Outside our window, above the wind-flecked
Bay between its two enclosing headlands,

A dozen gannets circle, now and then plunging
And struggling up to wheel and plunge again.

I am contemplating *isolation*, its meanings
In the here and now and then and again,

Contemplating that *isolate* shares its Latin
Island roots with *insulate*, that each one is also

A peece of the Continent, a part of the maine.
Isolation warms itself towards insulation.

II

I think of our son, whose house on the small
Peninsula across the bay I can just make out,

And who drops food and news and comfort
To our insulated door, like a boatman judging

A quick now or never surge to a storm-isolated
Island slipway, quickly heaving up supplies

One-handed, the other on the tiller steering
A curve astern. He smiles, waves. Half-joking,

Wholly grateful in this semi-isolation, I offer
A coinage: *peninsulated*. And we'll live with that.

Paddy Bushe

29th March, 2020