

The Delse Lad

Risen from his bog-bed,
he ascended to the decent road
at the bend beyond the national school.
That's where we'd cross him—
this Sunday morning apparition—
marking the way with a purgatorial limp.

Once he'd hear the car,
his left leg became a rigid pivot
as the right heeled out a perfect arc
to see the road behind.
I'd pray my father wouldn't stop
(our Ford Cortina loaded
and us almost too late for me
to nail *first* altar boy)
but we always did.

Levered in, I'd slant a look at him,
whitewashed clod-reek hair,
stubbled stroke face,
listing listless mouth.
His navy blue wedding suit sleeked
at the thighs, the knees, the elbows,
lapel badged with scraps of fodder

and I rejected him.
I rejected his piss-punch aura heaved
with old sweat and old tobacco
and I rejected his "God bless ye all" bellowed
for want of switching on his hearing aid.

Rain soothes the bog
with a wake-house murmur
as I descend the stone-pocked track
to his cottage, extended now
(a Polish family my father says)
and resplendent in pastel blue;
the casket preserved, while his remains
are acidic clumps of memory that,
were it possible, I'd dump in some boghole
and commit my shame to the bottomless black.

We bear each other back to the decent road.