

### Inchcailleach

If you half-shut your eyes  
you can almost see the small  
dug-out boat, the colour  
of peat beneath a pewter moon.  
Not even the wind speaks  
as the feathers of their oars  
glide them, mute black swan,  
to the silver edge of shore.

Kentigerna mutters a prayer,  
touches one creased foot  
to tawny earth. The women  
dip the cowled beads of their  
heads and follow. No easy path  
up — steep past the ancient  
furrows of barley and oats,  
till their bodies drift to mist  
and bright new cloaks of wooded oak.

Only a burial ground remains,  
centuries of dead packed between  
rock and turf. And ruined walls,  
the church in whose cool vaults  
nuns washed the corpses' waxy skin,  
closed their gaping eyes,  
administered the rites and wooden  
cross. Now only beetles attend,  
and accidents of pilgrim tourists.

Yet something of what drew  
these saints still lives. To  
straddle the chasm of the earth,  
archway between the Highlands  
and Lowlands, passage from  
this place to the next. So  
Kentigerna stood — one palm to the  
weary world, one to heaven,  
welcoming the battle-bloodied chieftains,  
toil-worn peasants, faithful victims,  
singing to sanctify their souls.

Listen, the secluded trees  
hang out their bowers, cloister  
the pathways. Their roots are  
her oak bones, their leaves her  
whorled tongue and in the  
green sap of their hearts,  
they maintain her peace.