

The Limerick Train

by Brendan Kennelly

*Hurling between hedges now, I see
Green desolation stretch on either hand
While sunlight blesses all magnanimously.*

*The gods and heroes are gone for good and
Men evacuate each Munster valley
And midland plain, gravelly Connaught land*

*And Leinster town. Who, I wonder, fully
Understands the imminent predicament,
Sprung from rooted suffering and folly?*

*Broken castles tower, lost order's monument,
Splendour crumbling in sun and rain,
Witnesses to all we've squandered and spent,*

*But no Phoenix rises from that ruin
Although the wild furze in yellow pride
Explodes in bloom above each weed and stone,*

*Promise ablaze on every mountainside
After the centuries' game of pitch-and-toss
Separates what must live from what has died.*

*A church whips past, proclaiming heavy loss
Amounting to some forty thousand pounds;
A marble Christ unpaid for on His Cross*

*Accepts the Limerick train's irreverent sound,
Relinquishes great power to little men -
A river flowing still, but underground.*

*Wheels clip the quiet counties. Now and then
I see a field where, like an effigy
In rushy earth, there stands a man alone*

*Lifting his hand in salutation. He
Disappears almost as soon as he is seen,
Drowned in distant anonymity.*

*We have travelled far, the journey has been
Costly, tormented odyssey through night;
And now, noting the unmistakable green,*

*The pools and trees that spring into the sight,
The sheep that scatter madly, wheel and run,
Quickly transformed to terrified leaping white,*

*I think of what the land has undergone
And find the luminous events of history
Intolerable as staring at the sun.*

*Only twenty miles to go and I'll be
Home. Seeing two crows low over the land,
I recognize the land's uncertainty,*

*The unsensational surrender and
Genuflection to the busy stranger
Whose power in pocket brings him power in hand.*

*Realizing now how dead is anger
Such as sustained us at the very start
With possibility in time of danger,*

*I know why we have turned away, apart
(I'm moving still but so much time has sped)
From the dark realities of the heart.*

*From my window now, I try to look ahead
And know, remembering what's been done and said
That we must always cherish, and reject, the dead.*