

Day of the Paddy

Late 1950s, social revolution
building a dream, houses for all.

Earning a living pushing barrows,
digging trenches in that haphazard
way of the Welsh navvy.

Proud of my young strength,
my staying power.

Spring morning, twelve men
swagger onto the site
the dipped shoulder, the gimp,
announcing Kilkenny, Connemara,
and Cork.

Contracted for mains trenches
needed quickly.

Why use them? We could do it.

Bastards, taking our work.
Aloof, they ignore our mutterings,
no need for words:
twelve men, one great arm,
unfaltering rhythm.

Sweating backs, sinuous muscle
tearing it out four feet deep,
five hours without pause,
almost at walking pace.

One o'clock break, great hunks of meat
fried on shovels
over a spitting fire,
a loaf per man torn apart.

We watching now, inadequate,
as we open our small
neat packs of sandwiches.