

Unsown Seeds
(for Carol)

While musing, this February morning
he came to mind, the frail old priest,
your friend and constant mentor,
disturbed and yet intrigued by the
variance of your thinking. Listening,
then teasingly expounding on attrition.
Those years ago, with the old mass,
it were as if incense and the raised Host,
journeys through the stations of the cross,
chanted responses and echoing Aves
unveiled for you, revelations set
beyond the reach of the altars ritual.

Other faces, voices: the man in turmoil
calmed by your love's intrusion;
past lovers still in love, accepting friendship's
limits, and the poet you briefly met,
I recall his flow of needful words
he knew may never reach you.
Outside, a gusting wind draws creaking
protests from the tired old clapboard fence
and sends flurries of frozen white specks
to whisper at the window, setting me
thinking, just now, of that biting winter night
with snow falling, and we fugitives warmed
by the pub's bluster and booze. Your new man
sitting there, absorbing only your presence
as we spoke of our long - gone father.
"A puzzle so he was, always his own man"
said old Pat, raising his glass, "here's to himself".

Our Father! and we as children, being oblivious
of the illness gnawing at his gaunt frame when,
for you, he made a necklace from acorns and
embellished it with a finely whittled cross, and then
a charm: hung together, yet at odds.
"My penance and protection in the making"
he'd said, his Irish lilt soft on the ear and his heel
still in touch with the stepping stone between old
and ancient faiths.
I helped him gather the weather-browed offerings,

choosing only those fit for threading. Then I watched
the thin nail, heated to redness, being pushed through
hard shell, causing strange-scented wisps of smoke
to curl upwards, pausing at his bent head
then rising again like absolved sins.

I am thinking, too, of that Autumn day, glowing like
the ripeness of your womanhood, when you brought
and showed me rescued amber beads and asked for
"just one" of the four keepsakes resting in my old
tin box. Those yellow orbs, not of our land, or the oak,
just years-old seeds hardened and brightened by time alone.
For me, then, much love in the giving of a memento
you took as a paternoster for your broken rosary.
A paternoster lost, perhaps, in a fervour of prayer
or, maybe, in the sweet rush of some earthly liaison?
Make of all this what you will, you are always
your 'own' Catholic, a beloved enigma.