

FRANK KELLAWAY

LETTER TO BILL KEOGH

This is a letter to you Bill, though not for you,
now you no longer read or hear or speak,
but since we often write to salve ourselves,
pretend, for comfort, one who's not, is here,
I write to say that I still see you often,
your clever Celtic head with its curved nose,
grey tufts at ears and nostrils, subtle eyes.
I see you with a grandchild in the street,
you who were fond of children but had none.
I see you pulling beer behind the bar
or counting sheep. Perhaps you did those things.
I know that once you helped your father farm.
Suddenly, riding a bike, a bus, I see
flesh that brings back your now diffracted flesh.
I look back through the prism; the white light blinds,
shows me the chilling radiance of death.
So from these moments of mistaken vision
I dive into the dream of memory.

Parting the kelpen curtains of your room
I hear Volente at the harpsichord;
the notes float up through shoals of sweep,
you smoke and listen as the table turns
aware of crayfish under granite boulders,
your library, the Bonnard lithograph.
Words from that time have all been washed away,
fine shells of wit ground to a standard sand.
I search for them among the abalone
but find only abstractions and fragmented things;
refusal to indulge in sentiment,
willing your body to the hospital
for students to dissect and analyse,
the broken spiral of a winkle shell
denoting immortality, perhaps,
impatience with my gratitude for gifts,
a notion that the giver is enriched,
pieces of mother of pearl and dream and stone.