

Unsettled

The builders swear the cracks
are settlement; will settle. May
even in time close. They don't.
Widening, they let in wraiths
of Grand Duchesses, demanding
to be fed on eggs and cream,
fattened back to dimples;

their gloves never white enough,
they throw off the crazy pieced
patchwork, bruise themselves
on makeshift fences, scratch
themselves on young hedges;
having never known unwrapped
corners, thorns, hidden tree stumps.

In the Dalldorf Asylum Clara Peuthert
is reading a map of silver scars.
Elsewhere, a boy cuts himself
to prove he cannot stop bleeding.
Every day plaster crumbles under
nervous fingers, every day more
visible the rag stuffed wattle daub.

Anchor and Anchor

The cloister folds itself in,
a closed accordion of stacked
pleats; sharp pressed edge
to sharp pressed edge.

Tomorrow the day's wings
will gather in battlefield
stumps and mouldy barley,
disobedient daughters, debt.

Now is the time for the soul
facing window, a narrow
point of lamp light where
God swoops and soars.

And behind the door so secret
it can hardly be seen, yawning,
narrow sleeved girls wait,
goffering irons in hand.

That last thing

They belong to the air, know
the time by dandelion clocks;
the feather thieves. Light fingered,
bird boned. Slashing at pillows,
swooping on warehouses,
hawking *strippings* and *drivings*,
the very refuse of feathers.

At the Cape of Good Hope,
the ships pause, take on fresh
fruit, pass it among the cargo;
robbers of gates and grates,
fire irons and plated candlesticks.
The feather thieves peck
at oranges, feel the air thickening,

watch the skies shifting; untangle
their hair, face south. In Newgate,
Elizabeth Flinn, *ten pounds worth
of ostrich plumes, sentence death*,
blows a stray feather, marvels
at its faint flutter, its irresistible
mimicry of flight.

Horror Vacui

In these maps for mothers, compass
roses sheath their thorns. Barely allude
to north; fields of ice where your lovely
sons might freeze, snow dusting their
eyelashes, their just emerging beards.

In a winter story, swans spread their wings,
cocooned each other from the deathly
cold; synchronized their breath; made
of themselves a glowing hearth until
spring thawed out their entangled beaks.

But that was a family; a sister mothering
brothers. I gave you no such protection, must
trust to sturdy, well provisioned ships; believe
the sea has been accurately measured, its
hopscotch of islands make a path to home.

Annexed

'..we shall annex an Account of Men eminent for their useful Invention, Learning or Promotions.'

The Antient and Present State of the County of Down
Walter Harris, 1744

Then dispositions, like diseases, were heritable.
We lived among the notional and flighty, those
who wore their hand me down bad luck easily;
and the gifted, tea leaf readers, predictors of rain,

the early riser waking us for the Holyhead boat,
the wheel of fortune spinner without whom,
no garden fete could start, the man who docked
the tails of all our pups. In their mouths, a world

of dying words; speckless, tay, conacre. Sometimes
I try them out; nostalgia, faint echo, something false.
Here is a coat with not a brack on it, and that drunk
outside Starbucks, look at the slew of him.