

Stops Along the Way: six poems of place

Jane Kenyon: *Twilight, after Haying* (1995)

Yes, long shadows go out
from the bales; and yes, the soul
must part from the body:
what else could it do?

The men sprawl near the baler,
too tired to leave the field.
They talk and smoke,
and the tips of their cigarettes
blaze like small roses
in the night air. (It arrived
and settled among them
before they were aware.)

The moon comes
to count the bales,
and the dispossessed—
Whip-poor-will, Whip-poor-will
—sings from the dusty stubble.

These things happen. . .the soul's bliss
and suffering are bound together
like the grasses . . .

The last, sweet exhalations
of timothy and vetch
go out with the song of the bird;
the ravaged field
grows wet with dew.

Edward Thomas: Adlestrop (date withheld)

Yes. I remember Adlestrop—
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop—only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
No whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang
Close by, and round him, mistier,
Farther and farther, all the birds
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

Robert Frost: Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening (1923)

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

David Wagoner: Lost (1966)

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

Seamus Heaney: Postscript (1996)

And some time make the time to drive out west
Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore,
In September or October, when the wind
And the light are working off each other
So that the ocean on one side is wild
With foam and glitter, and inland among stones
The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit
By the earthed lightning of a flock of swans,
Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white
Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.
Useless to think you'll park and capture it
More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,
A hurry through which known and strange things pass
As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways
And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.

Joseph Stroud: *Directions* (1999)

Take a plane to London.
From King's Cross take the direct train to York.
Rent a car and drive across the vale to Ripon,
then into the dales toward the valley of the Nidd,
a narrow road with high stone walls on each side,
and soon you'll be on the moors. There's a pub,
The Drovers, where it's warm inside, a tiny room,
you can stand at the counter and drink a pint of Old Peculier.
For a moment everything will be all right. You're back
at a beginning. Soon you'll walk into Yorkshire country,
into dells, farms, into blackberry and cloud country.
You'll walk for hours. You'll walk the freshness
back into your life. This is true. You can do this.
Even now, sitting at your desk, worrying, troubled,
you can gaze across Middlesmoor to Ramsgill,
the copses, the abbeys of slanting light, the fells,
you can look down on that figure walking toward Scar House,
cheeks flushed, curlews rising in front of him, walking,
making his way, working his life, step by step, into grace.