

The Barra Boy

Travelling online again,
I sought emptied sites
on the very fringes of Ireland

Inish Mor, Dursey,
And the field cliffs of Allihies,
we've seen twice.

But what of
Inishark, Omey,
and the famed isle of Achill?

What echoed secrets will their
Caving hearths, creeping vines
And uneven ground reveal?

I seek the specificity,
the sublime drama of desolation,
Of ancient ways cleaved to

Then suddenly riven,
Like so much in that place.

II

"Like living in two eras," I thought,
As my eye caught the sidebar
For "The Boy Who Lived Before," about

The boy who told his mum as soon as he had speech
That he was a boy from Barra,
An isle like the ones I'd been seeking;

That he played in warm rock pools
With sisters and brothers,
Where airplanes landed on the strand;

That he braved the bracing sea with his Barra mum,
Tossed driftwood into the waves
For the black-and-white dog to give chase.

All this, before he fell through the sand
To gray Glasgow, when he came to her.
He was a Barra boy, though.

He could see the secret way to the shore
From his window at the white cottage.

III

Back he went, the Barra boy,
To see the place he knew so well
But never saw before.

It was just like he said it would be
Except for how it wasn't.
No Barra mum hanging the wash.

No sisters and brothers building castles
As the black-and-white dog stalked the gulls.
Time washed them away.

The Barra boy stared into the bright fire
Lit by the tenants of the white cottage,
His wet eyes reflecting the flames.

His grief cresting, his memory receding,
Like the tossing waves of the North Atlantic
He saw from his window at the white cottage.

But that was a lifetime ago.