

The Holy Nativity of Our Blessed Lord

Picture a snowbound lake and a burning barn,
Or a house inhabited by the moon:
See how the beams of cunning silver light
Send out the radiance of the Eternal Girl.
See now a cowshed in the dead of winter,
And in the thickening darkness, fire
Like a galleon ablaze upon the sea.
The pinprick stars nod in their wisdom;
Three bare trees bend on the horizon
Under all that silveriness
To remind us that birth and death are
The start and end of the same reality.
His mother holds him now
As she will hold him again
In thirty years, under that sparse hill:
Mary, Maria, Mater Dolorosa, Ewig-Weibliche, Princess
In the crib of thine arms is our salvation born.
But today it is the angels' song
Brash, radiant; fire and the flicker of fire,
All incipient, telling us what we do not want to know:
That darkness will cover the earth
From the sixth hour to the ninth;
And that the spirits of the saints will
Walk abroad on a Friday afternoon.
Only, for this moment
Heaven and earth are in this barn:
She looks and he looks back at her:
There is a small movement –
The slight adjustment of his shawl;
Her hand moves in a half-light gesture, slow.
As kings and shepherds, stars and distant worlds
Behold the little boy from heaven:
Darling Jesus,
Emmanuel, thou art come,
Come, rejoice us,
And turn our hearts to thee