

AS BIRDS BRING FORTH THE STORY

The Elusive Art of Alistair MacLeod

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EARLY IN “THE CLOSING DOWN OF SUMMER,” the first story in *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun*, the narrator conjoins the quality of the local moonshine that he and his fellow miners are consuming on an isolated Cape Breton beach with their coming long, hard drive to Toronto to fly to South Africa, where they will take up again their trade as “perhaps the best crew of shaft and development miners in the world.”¹ The alcohol is of the best too. The “purest of moonshine made by [their] relatives back in the hills,” it is “impossible to buy” but “comes to [them] only as a gift or in exchange for long-past favours” (14). What is left of the drink, when they finally do embark on their procrastinated departure, will be transferred from the white Javex bottles in which they received it into forty-ounce vodka bottles and will be consumed during the drive. As the narrator comments, “we do not wish to get into the entanglement of moonshine brought across provincial lines and the tedium that accompanies it,” but fortunately “the fine for open commercial liquor is under fifteen dollars in most places,” and “the transparent vodka bottles both show and keep their simple secret” (15).

I begin with this minor detail in a story of men who, not surprisingly, put off the dark and multiple dangers of the distant mine for the sun and the sand of the local shore because it suggests an apt parable of Alistair MacLeod’s overall art of fiction. His short stories, too, characteristically both show and keep their simple secrets — keep them even by the open manner in which they duplicitously show them. Usually a straightforward and often retrospective I-narration setting forth a crucial experience such as dashed hopes, the leaving of home, a family death, or some similar disaster and a consequent recognition that one’s sense of self and of life need to be readjusted accordingly, the stories can seem simple and clear in both form (the bottle) and content (the drink). But on closer examination things are not always what they might first seem to be. In brief and as I will subsequently argue more fully, MacLeod’s fiction, like all good fiction, demands a careful reading. And a careful reading demonstrates how much his art is a matter of displacement,

substitution, elision, of homey Javex bottles filled with the most potent of moonshine, of one thing passing for something else and passing into something else. It is an art, too, that plumbs depths, that does not stay on the surface and the shore but appropriately requires the reader to take on what we well might call a miner's point of view.²

Even the poetically resonant titles of the two stories which MacLeod uses as titles for his two collections of fiction suggest his strategies of displacement, substitution, and elision. "As Birds Bring Forth the Sun," for example, takes its own title from the unlikely premise that predawn avian song serves as a kind of aubade to summon up the sun and then elides that folk belief with an individual family's five generation tradition of the *cù mòr glas a' bhàis*, the big grey dog of death, the ghostly animal whose appearance signifies the eminent demise of some descendant of a man killed by the wild offspring of his own found, lost, and found again great grey dog. Or the earlier "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood" records a father's return to claim his now half-orphaned unacknowledged illegitimate son and his consequent recognition that the best "place" for the boy is his present displacement (from the narrator's point of view) with the dead mother's parents. What is lost is found only to be lost again. And not lost too, as both those losses are transformed into a narrative setting forth the complex logic of a father's legacy of continuing, but now concerned, neglect.

A closer examination of these two stories bears out the implications of their titles. In "As Birds Bring Forth the Sun," to take the shorter work first, the original avatar of the subsequent ghostly canine is described, in the opening paragraphs, as "a sort of staghound from another time" that was "left, when a pup, at the family's gate . . . and no one knew where she had come from" (*As Birds*, 137). There is a double displacement here — the dog from another place and another time — that soon elides into the equally problematic matter of the dog's disappearance, how it reached the isolated island where it bore and raised its six pups which presently kill their master, and how it left that island to enter still "another time" in which it becomes the "spectre" that will appear to "succeeding generations" of the first victim's family as the sign of their impending death.

The first death is itself the consequence of a virtual series of displacements. The dog left at the gate is while "still a small pup . . . run over by the steel wheel of a horse drawn cart" (137). Pressed, broken boned, into the mud, it is lifted up by its new owner and nursed slowly back to health instead of being, "as the more practical members of his family" (138) counselled, put out of its misery. Saved, it grows to immense size, too large to breed naturally, so the man, moved by "the longing of her unfulfilment" and used "to working with the breeding of animals" (139), borrows the biggest male dog he can find and arranges, thanks to a hollow in a rock by the sea and his own assistance, a mating. Then, sometime after the dog has disappeared, he and two of his teenage sons, while fishing at sea, are driven

by a storm to seek shelter behind a small island. The dog appears; the man calls to it; he wades ashore to meet it; it rushes towards him and leaps, as it always did in the past, to put its paws against his shoulders and to lick his face; that leap which on solid land would stagger him backwards is here delivered on the “rolling gravel” of the seashore and knocks him down. “Six more huge gray dogs hurtling down towards the gravelled strand . . . and seeing him stretched prone beneath their mother . . . fell upon him in a fury” (140) and, though soon driven away by their mother, left him mangled and dying.

I have summarized and quoted in some detail to suggest something of the tone and texture of this paradigmatic story but also to set forth the crucial displacements and elisions with which it begins. The originally displaced dog is again displaced. Displaced to the same place to escape an ocean storm, the man re-encounters the dog, whereupon one leap elides into another that again displaces him, knocking him beneath the grown dog that he lifted up and saved as a pup. The dog is then replaced by her grown pups which kill the man who brought them into being by placing their dam and sire so that mating might occur. “The large and gentle man with the smell of animal semen often heavy on his hands” (143) (that detail twice noted in the text) dies with his sons able to do no more for him than “hold his warm and bloodied hands for a few brief moments” before he “slipped away” (another displacement) into death, leaving his survivors and a strange story to be told and retold (“All of his caring for her was recounted over and over and over again and nobody missed any of the ironies” [143]) and then, in part, re-enacted. One of the sons who saw his father die, after a particularly vivid nightmare of the *cù mòr glas a’ bhàis*, commits suicide. The other is killed in a drunken fight, a fight “perhaps” precipitated “some say” when he too “saw the *cù mòr glas a’ bhàis* or uttered the name” (143) to be “perhaps” misunderstood by a “large grey-haired man” with six similar friends waiting outside. Signs of uncertainty — “perhaps,” “some say” — preface the passage describing this third death and what is made of it: “the *cù mòr glas a’ bhàis* had come again, said the family, as they tried to piece the tale together” (144). But that first proposition is conclusion, not evidence. It is the consequence of the “tale” having been already pieced together, which sets forth still another crucial displacement and elision. Uncertain event gives way to explanatory story. Story is asserted to become family tradition through retelling. Indeed, we are told immediately after the passage just quoted that “this is how the *cù mòr glas a’ bhàis* came into our lives.”

The whole narrative itself further attests to the continuing currency of the belief pieced into story. The occasion of its retrospective recounting — “it is obvious that all of this happened a long, long time ago” (144) — is the impending death of another father, and that brings in the final displacements and elisions of this text. Another “large and gentle man” is dying, the great-great-grandson of the original victim. He too is attended by his sons who can do little more than take

“turns holding the hands of the man who gave us life” (146). His six sons partly recapitulate, of course, the two teenage boys who earlier attended their dying father as well as the ten other children not there. But grown and grey, they also evoke the six grey dogs following their mother or the “six other large, grey-haired men who beat [the second son] to death on the cobblestones” (144). “Bound here in our own peculiar mortality,” the narrator half acknowledges in the penultimate paragraph of the story, “we do not want to hear the voice of our father, as did those other sons, calling down his own particular death upon him” (146). But they too are themselves the sign they would not see, just as is the October rain in which the story begins with the saving of a dog and ends, generations later, with the impending death of another father.

“**T**HE LOST SALT GIFT OF BLOOD” is in some ways a simpler story in that the issues are rather clearer to the narrator even from the very beginning of his tale, which itself begins with him “at the final road’s end of my twenty-five-hundred-mile journey” (*Lost Salt Gift*, 67). At a small fishing village on the coast of Newfoundland, figuratively and literally at his road’s end, he well realizes he might best get into his car and return to the midwest heartland from which he came. From which he twice came, for this is the second visit, and as the second visit stands in for the first the narrator himself draws the significant parallels. In awkward silence, unable to speak his present purpose, he helps himself to his host’s smuggled rum and then notes the large implications of that minor action: “Not waiting this time for the courtesy of his offer. Making myself perhaps too much at home with this man’s glass and this man’s rum and this man’s house and all the feelings of his love. Even as I did before” (81). Previously he had helped himself to this man’s daughter, a daughter now dead who has left her — and his — illegitimate son.

He had been a bright young graduate student collecting folk songs and folk beliefs. She had apparently believed what he collected (a folk way of recognizing one’s “own true lover” is provided in the text) yet was obviously left to another fate (two traditional songs, one on faithless male lovers and the other on the eternal separation of lovers through the young woman’s death, are also appropriately provided). Although he supposedly has come back to claim his son, he knows, from the very beginning, just how insubstantial that claim is. And then he is further put off from his ostensible purpose by recognizing how naturally the boy fits into his present setting, by seeing how close he is to his grandparents, by hearing the grandfather tell of the one unsuccessful attempt to send the boy to his mother and her new husband in Toronto, by hearing from the child himself how little the city had

to offer him (only the gulls flying over the harbour), by noting in the grandfather's account of this separation ("Nigh sick unto our hearts we was" [79]) a love the father cannot even voice to himself, and by seeing how much his son has become the son of the grandparents, the son they never had. He also realizes how little he has to offer: "Come away from the lonely gulls and the silver trout and I will take you to the land of the Tastee Freeze where you may sleep till ten of nine. And I will show you the elevator to the apartment on the sixteenth floor and introduce you to the buzzer system and the yards of wrought-iron fences where the Doberman pinscher runs silently at night" (83). He realizes, too, that perhaps he came not even to offer that but to offer himself the vision of what might have been. "Again I collect dreams. For I do not know enough of the fog on Toronto's Queen St. West and the grinding crash of the pickup [the accident that killed the mother] and of lost and misplaced love" (83-84). Displaced himself a second time from the "heartland" of his unsatisfying existence, and recognizing himself the figurative depth of that displacement, he will not finally be party to a second displacement for his son and at the end of the story tacitly withdraws.

It is a necessary withdrawal as the story shows in still another way. In contrast to the grandfather's folk songs, folk beliefs, and even folk language, all of the narrator's language and figures are thoroughly academic. They seem as out of place as are his "smooth soled" leather shoes on the "slippery rocks" of the rugged Newfoundland coast. Indeed, back in the same room where he stayed before, he stands at the window and thinks of himself as "a foolish Lockwood" with "no Catherine who cries to be let in" (81-82). The comparison is doubly apt. Lockwood was, first, the intruder from somewhere else, and, still more to the point, Lockwood is also the man who tells himself out of even his own tale. In the final sentences of "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood" the narrator is, in fact, superseded and replaced by the passenger beside him on the flight from St. John's, a heavy-equipment salesman returning to his family after a week's absence: "The salesman's wife stands waiting along with two small children who are the first to see him. They race toward him with their arms outstretched. 'Daddy, Daddy,' they cry, 'what did you bring me? What did you bring me?'" (86).

The salesman takes the place of the narrator; the happy tableau of re-established domesticity with which the story ends stands in for the seduction and abandonment out of which it begins; this concluding reunion of father and children inverts the earlier reunion that did not take place. Yet still more is at issue in these replacements and reversals. The crude acquisitiveness of the children at the airport highlights the natural generosity of the other child left behind who, first encountered while fishing, offered his unknown father a try. He gave, too, to the departing, still unknown parent the particularly beautiful stone he had found on the beach that morning, a gift which oddly acknowledges the unadmitted paternity, for the son, it turns out, is also a collector. Furthermore, the gift is appropriate in still another

sense further underscored by whatever Newfoundland souvenirs the salesman may have brought back for his children. That father's gifts are the inverse of an earlier gift to a father, the stone presented to the narrator by his unknowing son, the son to whom he gave life (the gift of blood) and to whom he also gives the seaside life that son would choose. The almost perfect stone from the cold salt shore that the father carries with him back to the shimmering heartland of the continent sums up, then, the sorrow of his loss even as it also embodies the enduring salt gift of blood, the paternity that demands — an additional gift — it not be acknowledged.

OTHER STORIES ALSO EMPLOY distinctions and elisions to set forth their calculus of gain and loss. "The Golden Gift of Grey," for example, obviously does so even in its title. Or in "To Every Thing There Is a Season," the season is both present and past, Christmas and a time for dying. The adult narrator who "speak[s] on this Christmas 1977" is "speaking here of a time when I was eleven and lived with my family on our small farm on the west coast of Cape Breton," of another time when time itself passed differently. "My family had been there for a long, long time and so it seemed had I. And much of that time seems like the proverbial yesterday" (*As Birds*, 61). He remembers the slow advent of winter and how he waited for the coming of Christmas and the return of his "magic older brother . . . from half a continent away" (68), a brother who was working on the "lake boats" and who could not leave for home until ice ended, for that year, all Great Lakes shipping. He remembers, too, his continuing struggle to believe in Santa Claus. But the story is saved from being mostly a sentimental remembrance of a Christmas past by the adult narrator's awareness that the child's attempt to salvage Santa Claus (he already knew it wasn't true) was itself an almost necessary substitution for and displacement of the much more painful awareness that the father, only 42, was dying of lung disease. That awareness is worked into the details of the story — "sometimes we argue with our father, but our [returned] brother does everything he says" (66) — and into the ending. On Christmas Eve the 11-year-old is invited to stay up with "the older members of the family" (67-68). The cartons of "clothes" that the brother has sent back from various Great Lakes ports prove, of course, to be presents. Those for the younger children are marked "from Santa Claus"; those for the older are not; his are not and he knows "they will never be again," which elicits "a pang of loss at being here on the adult side of the world" (68). On that adult side now, he can see the care and concern that hold together the other adults in his family. But the struggle between this new awareness and the old illusions of childhood still continues to the end. The last sentence of the story reads: "'Every man moves on,' says my father quietly,

and I think he speaks of Santa Claus, ‘but there is no need to grieve. He leaves good things behind’” (68).

What holds the story together is the narrator’s awareness of the inextricability of the different items out of which it is made — how much the boy’s attempt to retain the world of childhood proved his knowledge that it was passing and that his father was dying. Similarly, the narrator also knows that he cannot know in his present adult recounting “how many liberties I may be taking with the boy I think I was” (61). And these awarenesses elide in the story too: “It is true that at my age I no longer *really* believe in him yet I have hoped in all his possibilities as fiercely as I can; much in the same way, I think, that the drowning man waves desperately to the lights of the passing ship on the high sea’s darkness. For without him, as without the man’s ship, it seems our fragile lives would be so much more desperate” (62). The situation is the child’s. The figurative depiction of that situation is the retrospective adult’s, a man now well aware of his own mortality. As the reader should note, the ship sails on, not stopping to save the drowning man. Yet something still remains, if only the passing of the ship.

Or a crucial disjunction can centre on the difference that even a day makes, as in “The Vastness of the Dark,” a story that moves from the pre-departure perspective of a young man determined to leave home on his eighteenth birthday to the way he sees his going. “After today,” he can say on the crucial morning, about his present assessment of his past and his parents, “I will probably not have to think about it anymore. For today I leave behind this grimy Cape Breton coal-mining town whose prisoner I have been for all of my life. And I have decided that almost any place must be better than this one with its worn-out mines and smoke-black houses” (*Lost Salt Gift*, 39).

A little distance, and something more than distance too, soon teaches him differently. Hitching his way, he is given a ride by a crudely loud-mouthed businessman who presently stops in an even more unfortunate mining town, Springhill to be precise. “A hell of a place,” the businessman observes, “unless you want to get laid,” and then “it’s one of the best there is,” thanks to “lots of mine accidents . . . and the men killed off,” leaving “women used to getting it all the time” (55). The businessman hopes to oblige one of those deprived women. The hitchhiker, invited to come along for this ride too — “There’s always some left over” (59) — declines and remains in the car, to become victim, as the language of the story attests, to his own sudden cave-in disaster.

“The reality of where I am and of what I think he is going to do seems now to press down on me as if it were the pressure of the caving-in roof which was so recently within my thoughts” (59). He has just recalled the 1958 Springhill Cumberland mine disaster. Now, waiting in the car, he is a stand-in for the man elsewhere who would, himself, be a stand-in for some man killed in that disaster. He sees the businessman as hopelessly “other” and knows how shallowly that individual

assessed the town's inhabitants as shiftless and gutless. He sees himself as "other" and sees those passing the car seeing him that way too — "as if I am not part of their lives at all but am only here in a sort of moveable red and glass showcase, that has come for a while to their private anguish-ridden streets and will soon roll on and leave them the same as before my coming" (59). He sees how they see him and he agrees. "And I am overwhelmed now by the awfulness of oversimplification. For I realize that not only have I been guilty of it through this long and burning day but also through most of my yet young life" (59).

He still goes on but he realizes now how much he will have to go on, too, thinking about his past and his parents and that he must try, henceforth, to do so more honestly. Leaving the businessman, he is picked up next by three Cape Breton miners on their way to whatever possible new mines their old car might manage to take them to, and they drive "into the night" following, in the headlights, "the beckoning white line which seems to . . . draw us forward . . . forever into the vastness of the dark" (62). That last metamorphosis of "the vastness of the dark" conjoins the narrator's newly recognized uncertainties about his past with those of his future, the mine disasters he has heard about and imagined, the life his grandfather and father have led, and the life he will probably lead too. As Colin Nicholson aptly observes, the "twin and rival themes of entrapment and escape, enclosure and escape" that characterize this story elide into one another, just as they "mutate" through MacLeod's other fictions as well.³

THE LAST WORK I WILL LOOK AT in some detail is "Vision," a work whose title elides in two directions in the story itself. Most of the characters in this complex tale fall victim to blindness or second sight and often to both. It is, moreover, a story of place and displacement, of 11-year-old twins who go alone for the first time to visit their grandparents on a different isolated coastal peninsula; who are delivered by mistake to the dilapidated home of a mad, blind woman; who, after that error is rectified, spend a week with their grandparents and hear the grandfather's stories of "why this place is called Canna," after an island in the Hebrides whose people are now "all gone," and how, consequently, "we carry certain things within us . . . which we do not know or fully understand" (*As Birds*, 172); who later doubly reverse their ancestors' westward journey and on their way to World War I meet another young man from Canna to hear the local story of their grandfather and to discover thereby that the madwoman, now dead, was their grandmother, and how still later in World War II one of them was saved from death when the grandmother appeared to him and warned him back from the explosion that did blind him so that he never sees the son who later pieces together

the different stories and different tellings of the same story out of which this story comes.

“Vision,” in fact, begins: “I don’t remember when I first heard the story but I remember the first time that I heard it and remembered it” (149). In one of the last paragraphs the narrator looks back at his own account to see how “this has been the telling of a story about a story but like most stories it has spun off into others and relied on others and perhaps no story ever really stands alone” (188). There are, indeed, many different stories at play and interplaying in the field of this text, so much so that a whole essay could well be devoted to the attempt to sort them out — an enterprise that the story itself, with its concluding double parable on the limits of perspicacity, calls into question.

In the last paragraph the narrator remembers how “when we were boys we would try to catch the slippery spring mackerel” to perhaps “see” in the iridescent scales, which at first cover the eyes of these fish, “our own reflections” (one blindness mirroring another). He remembers, too, how, “when the wet ropes of the lobster traps came out of the sea, we would pick out a single strand and then try to identify it some few feet further on,” and this time the lesson is explicitly drawn in the last words of the tale itself. “Difficult to be ever certain in our judgements or to fully see or understand. Difficult then to see and understand the twisted strands within the rope. And forever difficult to see and understand the tangled twisted strands of love” (189). But that final figurative denial of the possibility of some full and final unravelling does suggest that we can examine how the different strands are twisted together.

Thus a boyhood friend’s romantic story of how blindly the gift of *Da Shealladh*, second sight, was used by an ancestor gives way to the stories the grandfather tells of Saint Columba driven from Ireland to the islands of northern Scotland by his gift of second sight and how he vowed never to look again on the Ireland that he loved, and these are superseded by a chance acquaintance’s story of the grandfather’s own gift of second sight and its consequence of misplaced love and marriage. All of these passed-on family stories are passed on again when they are incorporated into the narrator’s own family story, a story that also tells how the former friend lost an eye in a senseless barroom brawl with the narrator who knew what his antagonist was going to do before he did it. We can notice, too, how the same words of the Gaelic exchange between their grandfather and the strange blind woman that the puzzled children overhear are repeated but reversed when the grandmother “appears” to her grandson on the Normandy beach. Or, finally, we can also notice how much of the story is itself repeated — and not repeated — as it is rendered from Gaelic into English which, we are told in the story, is, of course, “not the same” (182). For example, *Mac an Amharuis*, the Canna Gaelic designation for the grandfather, that commemorates his probably illegitimate birth, might be translated into English as “Son of Uncertainty.” This most effectively

evocative Gaelic term is radically different from the crudely expletive English “bastard.”

The transition from Gaelic to English that is regularly noted in these stories, and that is marked also by the need to gloss the few still surviving Gaelic expressions such as *Mac am Amharuis* in the work just considered or *cù mòr glas a’ bhàis* in the earlier “As Birds Bring Forth the Sun,” constitute one of the most significant displacements out of which MacLeod forges his fiction. In a number of the stories we even see a clear connection between physical displacement, impending linguistic dispossession, and the origins of the story itself. In “Vision,” for example, the twins find out the crucial story of their grandfather’s tragic past when they meet, bound for war, the young man from Canna. “And then, perhaps because they were far from home and more lonely and frightened than they cared to admit, they began to talk in Gaelic (178). Similarly, in “The Closing Down of Summer,” the narrator notes his own “Celtic Revival,” a return to “Gaelic songs because they are so constant and unchanging and speak to us as the privately familiar” (*As Birds*, 24), but he also sees beyond that constancy to both his passing and the language’s. “For all of us know we will not last much longer and that it is unlikely we will be replaced in the shaft’s bottom by members of our own flesh and bone. For such replacement, like our Gaelic, seems to be of the past and now largely over” (27). In the face of that impending double loss, the narrator would like to leave some record of his life, and thus the story that does just that.

Yet there is more to what we well might term MacLeod’s poetics of loss than just the inevitable passing of people and the language that some of them once spoke.⁴ Displacement, substitution, and elision do give these stories a characteristic elegaic tone and that tone is as much a matter of retrospect as prospect. Or more accurately, prospect and retrospect themselves regularly conflate into a present awareness of a past heritage of loss, a continuity, so to speak, of dispossession. Thus the miners, in “The Closing Down of Summer” (to end with the same story with which I began), driving hard to Toronto to fly to Africa, will find, during roadside stops in Quebec and Ontario, “small sprigs” of Cape Breton “spruce still wedged within the grille-work of our cars.” These they will remove and take with them “as mementos or talismans or symbols of identity,” just as their “Highland ancestors, for centuries, fashioned crude badges of heather or of whortleberries to accompany them on the battlefields of the world. Perhaps so that in the closeness of their work with death they might find nearness to their homes and an intensified realization of themselves” (*As Birds*, 15-16). The sprig of spruce stands in for the sprig of heather; the leaving of Scotland is regularly re-enacted by the annual leaving of Nova Scotia; the men departing for the mines in Africa take their place in a long line of similar men similarly displaced. Moreover, “an intensified realization of themselves” works both forwards and backwards in the story. The departing miners can better know who they are because they know who they were. In Robert Frost’s memorable phrasing,

they recognize their place on “the long bead chain of repeated birth” but they also know that one bead does not always lead to another. Their sons will follow different courses “to become fatly affluent before they are thirty,” to not die in some mine disaster. They will follow these different courses, the narrator acknowledges, “partially . . . because we have told them” to and consequently we must watch in “anguished isolation” and “confused bereavement” as they travel “to distant lonely worlds which are forever unknowable” to us but which perhaps offer only “another kind of inarticulate loneliness” (27-28).

One generation succeeds another, which is both the displacement and the replacement of that which came before. It is this awareness of their provisional place in time that especially distinguishes MacLeod’s characters, informs their accounts, and gives form to their narrations. Indeed, we could conjoin the implications in the titles of the two collections into a kind of composite, “As Birds Bring Forth — and Take Away — the Son,” and emphasize thereby the interplay, in all of MacLeod’s best stories, between the generation of fiction and the generations of life.

NOTES

- ¹ Alistair MacLeod, *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun and Other Stories* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), p. 12. Subsequent references to stories in this volume will be made parenthetically in the text as will references to stories from *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976).
- ² Through his choice of narrators, MacLeod regularly arranges to have the major perspective provided within a story be that of a miner too.
- ³ Colin Nicholson, “Signatures of Time: Alistair MacLeod and his Short Stories,” *Canadian Literature*, 107 (1985), 91.
- ⁴ Nicholson notes, too, the degree to which MacLeod is “both memorializing [the passing of a New World Highlands Scottish culture] and, since he is writing in English, enacting that moment of slippage” and how this dual tension produces “MacLeod’s . . . abiding note of loss and regret . . . as if the style itself were keening” (98).

SCARED SPINELESS

Gillian Harding-Russell

When it’s raining out, big drops
falling off the eaves and you push in the key
the wrong way and then the right way
the wind blowing great puffs out of clouds