

## ENTERING THE CILL RIALAIG LANDSCAPE

Here's a place for the ages: cliffs facing a bay  
bathed in perpetual grave gray. Even on days  
with sun, rain clouds are always on the way. Always  
waves—racing in—fail to contain themselves. The weight  
of the North Atlantic presses them, gales of wind  
push them to break against the base of the cliffs.  
But waves can't be destroyed so they're raised as spray  
and raging foam. Way out on the wavering horizon,  
fog fades to mist, mist pales to water-filled rays  
of light, traces of the last storm's passage, the coming  
grace of sun. All the while, two men in a lone bobbing boat  
wait for fish in the midst of the bay. Sheep and cows  
graze along the tops of the cliffs. Wind rakes the ferns.

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Isn't it the sweep of it? Why I keep turning to keep  
it all in my head, the eternally seething sea  
between these cliffs of grieving wet stone and the distant  
light-streaked line underneath the enormous domed clouds,  
clouds that allow brief moments of sun and then release  
sheets of rain. Mist and fog in the sweep west to east,  
erasing the far hills and islands. Look again,  
they're re-emerging while the sea's suspended  
in each wave as it breathes in, gathers and heaves itself  
against the cliffs, erupting like fireworks into mist.  
And that's if there's only a breeze. When the wind picks up,  
it can beat so wildly I can't even think. Yet sheep  
go on eating grass and weeds amidst their stone  
enclosures. I can see an oratory's ruins  
above me, an abbey's below. I'm so small here  
I could evaporate into the weep of rain.

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Yes, it's how wide the sky is, how high it rises,  
the far horizon dividing earth from air, fine line  
at times shining white light, at times impossible  
to define as rain clouds and rain and fog lie on top.  
High tide or low, there's never silence. Wild waves  
of wind, wild waves of sea hike themselves up  
the cliffs' sides. Magpies find and fly the thermals.  
This site the pious sought. Their rocks remain:

(continued, no stanza break)

ENTERING THE CILL RIALAIG LANDSCAPE continued, no stanza break

beehive huts, the outline of an oratory,  
inscribed stones still standing. Inside my cottage,  
the upper back wall's a skylight facing the side  
of the hillock. Birds fly in and out its rock clefts.  
A cow with lichen-colored haunches pauses  
on the high ridge. Here's where I've come to write.

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Oh, so much rain over the row of desolate  
stone cottages along the narrow road oh, so  
close to the cliffs' edge. The harrowing possible  
holds me back. Late October. The locals repeat,  
*Winter's approaching*. The long loneliness  
of cold, low clouds, blowing gales, evening's slow spread  
of shadows by 3 o'clock. Look, I chose to return,  
knowing it's not the cliffs' edge I need fear. It's isolation  
no one survives. But I believe no soul does  
without some. That's the narrow road I walk  
the days of my long stay here. Off to the west,  
polar air ever colliding with the warm  
Gulf Stream, so this endless rain. But also rainbows  
with huge distinct arches. Each of the three  
I've seen has had an echo, so double rainbows.

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The X on the new legend outside the ruins  
of the abbey documents *Anseo Atá Tú*,  
*You Are Here* at the entrance into the sacred  
universe of ancient monks. Verses of psalms,  
their music against a backdrop of winds that fuel  
the fuming sea here at a bay's brutal edge.  
A rain-filled seemingly useless life, its endless  
ritual of manual labor, clearing the endless  
rocks and roots in pursuit of the most elemental.  
Pared-down plain chant, conduit to the beyond.  
Or tribute to these numinous surroundings.  
For here, even rain can be translucent as the few,  
far shafts falling way out on the horizon show.  
This enclosure, a place they were not to leave,  
place of extreme beauty where their Rule set them  
on a perpetual journey. X. I am here  
at a measureless entrance in union with them.