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Relations: New and Selected Poems

Eamon Grennan
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Eamon Grennan's poems seem to slow time. Their occasions are often ordinary enough—a walk with a daughter, watching three boys swim, meditating on a fire—but their language and energy are far from ordinary. Of the various ways to be original, Grennan's is one of the more difficult; he devotes himself to patient, gracious exploration of the everyday.

Russian critic Shklovsky claimed that "defamiliarization" or "making strange" was the fundamental project of poetry, and Grennan seems to agree. In "At the Falls" his three swimming boys are described as finally growing tired of "this making strange of themselves/ and the common element," but he is reluctant to let their memory go: "an opening to what could be/ nothing but change, yet stands, a constant thing,/ and flesh in the midst of it our signature saying/ we belong, saying nothing stays."

This volume collects poems written between 1978 and 1995, and allows readers to trace the deepening and widening of Grennan's vision. The early poems are rich and resonant in their praise of even the most homely gestures: "Amazing, how the young man who empties/ our dustbin ascends the truck as it moves/ away from him, rises up like an angel …"

The more recent poems tend to become longer and more complex, and include a moving set written on the death of the poet's mother. Though entangled in the darker realities, the poems time and again rise toward praise and joy. Patient and wise, Grennan manages to slow the movement of time for brief moments.
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