

## The Quiet Man

*an interrogation*

In family photographs from the fifties  
I find the young lads standing  
full of themselves, square shouldered,  
staring straight on at the camera  
striking the big Sean Thornton pose.  
And the girls, all lipstick smiles  
in tight waisted skirts and tied back hair,  
taking no nonsense from the boys.  
Bold and brassy as their feisty heroine  
Miss Mary Kate Danaher.

Who hadn't seen the film by then  
or made the special pilgrimage  
to Ashford, Cong and Connemara.  
Every summer it seemed, family or friends  
would trail off west, track down  
the film's locations scene by scene,  
bring back tales of the Lover's Bridge  
the whitewashed cottage and Cohan's Bar.  
My brother knew the script by heart  
and the name of every actor in a bit part.

This rose tinted spectacle  
this land of never was,  
where the fist fights and the feuds,  
the longest brawl in cinema history  
didn't draw blood at all,  
ending only in big manly hugs  
and tall pints of the black stuff.  
Where a sick man rises from his bed  
to join the death defying fun.  
Where the love-struck couple  
quarrel then clinch in a stormy kiss  
lashed by the rain and wind machine,  
blitzed in the flash of studio lightning.

This Technicolor fantasy  
now has me transfixed,  
uncovering its cinematic lies and tricks,  
knowing how all the indoor scenes  
were acted out and shot, constructed  
on some Hollywood back lot.  
A load of blarney and garbled brogues  
delivered on the set of Tinseltown.

I run the film forward frame by frame  
pause and play, pause and play,  
watch the frozen action tell another story.  
Curtains drawn I spend the day  
in half-light, my slow surveillance  
trawling evidence of a darker mood,  
a troubled narrative of times ahead,  
images we could never have imagined,  
never pictured, never understood.