

## Niall Campbell

### *The Address*

The village was still there,  
its gossip well, the roaming animals  
disturbing the street-freed hens,  
a place to speak over by the market  
where some rope-dancer had set up.  
It wouldn't go as I had hoped.  
Such a grand evening, the darkness  
temporarily violet in the treeline,  
I'd wandered back after so long  
rehearsing something of the same subject:  
the sailor lost to the night's ocean,  
though truthfully, I wasn't sure  
what the image was getting at  
but I was there and wanted to be useful,  
even if only to say:  
*sailor, this sadness or whatever else,  
be alive to it, row or don't row,  
the hand can pull the fabric of the sea,  
there's beauty even in this trauma*  
and then a few thoughts on living—  
no great shakes, I know,  
but there you have it—a communion,  
since this is what I longed for,  
distant, displaced as it was.  
Only, as I was making to start,  
having shoo-ed some hens to the sidelines,  
a small group came up  
wanting to know exactly who I stood for,  
only I didn't stand for anyone—  
what can I say, a voice in a room,  
or rather a voice in the open air,  
if anything I stood for nothing  
but a desire to be there, present in the world;  
or stood there just as someone  
who wanted to talk, to lay things out

beside the fruit-stalls selling grapes  
and in my own way to be thoughtful.  
They didn't like the sound of this,  
and wanted to know, instead,  
what apologies I would be making,  
since this was the done thing now—  
I had none, *I am not sorry*  
for this or for any hundred things  
if only because I think that life  
is complicated and long—  
*I am not sorry*, an accepting prayer,  
the sound of water breaking in the stream—  
this wasn't what I came to say  
but how could I apologise  
when difficult and joyed and strange  
I wouldn't change the road one stone.  
It ended as you can imagine—  
me leaving the way I came in  
shrugging from the very heart of me,  
going back to addressing the other  
larger, smaller audience of the evening,  
and here is what I said.