

Ulster

James Longwill

I. *Tain Bo Cualigne*

Bothys with their waisted pots
and beds of rushes
are put to the flame.
Medb's men of Connacht
rape the women and braceleted girls.

Ulster's brown bull of Cooley
fouls its horns and the curls on its anvil head
with blood sponges of flesh.

After its fury
fifty Connacht warriors weep their last blood and fluid
—so Ulster's Iron Age Tale.

II. *January 1976*

Today rumours of war flit like disease
through the council estates of Londonderry,
the terraces of Belfast, the painted country towns.
Workers are ambushed and machine-gunned.
Parents are shot over the threshold.
Life is grabbed out of marbled eyes.

III. *Summer 1975*

Last summer there
we kept to the empty places.
The blue hills and stony plains.
Waters that trout and salmon thrash
to climb up whitening streams
and spawn in pools.

Each day we drove by the rath,
and my mind dwelt on the ancient hill-fort
its buttercups, its yellow furze and grass.