**KILMAINHAM GAOL, DUBLIN, EASTER 1991**

Roadies in ponytails stringing lights and cables,

a beer can popped in the corner, echo of sound check.

Outside in the filling yard, hum of expectation.

We pour through the narrow gate under the gallows hook

in twos and threes, becoming an audience.

Before the lights go down we examine each other shyly.

The singer surveys his audience, heat rising

to the tricolour and Plough overhead.

As the first words of Galvin’s lament climb to invoke

James Connolly’s ghost, we are joined by the dead.

I say this as calmly as I can. The gaunt dead

crowded the catwalks, shirtsleeved, disbelieving.

The guards had long since vanished, but these

looked down on us, their faces pale.

I saw men there who had never made their peace,

men who had failed these many years to accept their fate,

still stunned by gunfire, wounds, fear for their families;

paralysed until now by the long volleys of May so long ago.

I think that we all felt it, their doubt and their new fear,

the emblems so familiar, the setting, our upturned faces,

so unreal. Only the dignity of the singer’s art

had power to release them. I felt it, I say this calmly.

I saw them leave, in twos and threes, as the song ended.

I do not know that there is a heaven but I saw their souls

fan upward like leaves from a dry book, sped out into the night

by volleys of applause; sped out, I hope, into some light at last.

I do not know that I will ever be the same again.

That soft-footed gathering of the dead into their peace

was like something out of a book. In Kilmainham Gaol

I saw this. I felt this. I say this as calmly and as lovingly as I can.

*for Frank Harte*