

Kilmalkedar (*Cill Mhaoilceadair*)

“Maolkerhair’s Church”
near Ballyferriter, County Kerry, Ireland

Kilmalkedar. I keep saying the word aloud—
the hard, crisp alliteration of the *k*’s,
the fluid, calm intervention of *l*’s and an *m*,
the growl of the closing *ar*—a strange
hunger for the feel of this Irish name.
Each time, something burrows deeper,
looking for a meaning, a home.

The ruined church, its massive walls,
the oldest part without windows,
is a blind face presiding over its flock
of lichen-covered headstones. Engravings
and the ogham stone with its runic spellings
seek to borrow for human speech
some of the endurance of mountains.

The stone walls weigh upon the eye,
graveling the light. They rest in peace
while restless generations of flesh
wash through them like the tide.
I think of bones, masses of them,
all that added humus
raising the level of the churchyard.

I am drawn to a small tree
budding out behind the back wall.
It reaches so nakedly skyward,
graceful and alive, expressing
something it can scarcely contain.
I imagine it with leaves,
wagging with the wind.

It is worshipping as a tree worships—
devoted to the star that gives it life.
This sole remaining member
of a disbanded congregation
seems to proclaim *Christ is risen*—
whatever a tree might mean
by *Christ* or *risen*.

Mark D. Hart