

## ROBERT FLANAGAN

### *The Garden, The Children*

Dirt where I promise beans and corn,  
you ask when they will come.  
I tell you what I can:  
“These things take time.”

Your mother has cried with pain  
from childhood scars and, given nature,  
memories of your future.  
“The beans need rain.”

Blood-dark, I at times become  
a man to fear, the stranger  
who masks fear with anger.  
“The corn needs sun.

Safe for now from flood or drought,  
we stand by our measured plot.  
“Children, I’m . . .  
Sun. Rain. And time.”

### *Kathleen Ni Houlihan*

Black shawl binding  
pinched meal-grey face,  
the old woman is  
knotted  
by hunger’s drawstring.  
On the road  
an Irishman is fallen  
young as other sons, broken  
as a husband left unburied  
in the bogs.  
She touches the body  
inquisitively  
as a lover, cradles the head.  
Her lips brush a cool cheek;  
teeth, yellow and long,  
tear into meat.

### *The Song of the Separated Man*

I  
she hurt  
I am  
and the children  
I am afraid  
touching hurts  
I am afraid of  
loneliness  
my comfort  
I am afraid of being  
alone  
untouched  
hurt