

Jeffery Donaldson

An Honest Man

This nostalgia for the origin of experience,
it wears us down but keeps sending us out
once more to get the knack of the evening

in the narrow streets before the evening passes.
And the evening passes and you come back
to where you started, not in time, for it is

later now, but to the place, to the doorway
you parted from, its barn wood still faded blue
the way you had left it. Another let down.

You keep feeling, in spite of yourself, that there is
an openness about the windows that you can
see through, and a scent under the clotheslines

not made from other scents. And yet how far
these mayhaps must be from their earliest
forms and templates, the evening's archetypal jig.

There is the story of the man who went out
one evening to find it, the primordial pattern,
the evening that had been used since the beginning

to make other evenings, and he carried a lighted
lantern as Diogenes had done once, when
the sun was still shining. He held it out in front.

And people thought it was odd the way he looked,
as he walked out beyond the end of the village
where the road turned and the streetlights fell away.

And the story has it that he failed like the others,
that once the sun had gone out on the horizon
he came back through the village streets in the dark

with nothing to show for his long excursion,
no branch or stone, no souvenir, nor any news
of the clouds and where they had come from.

Except that the lamp was gone, left somewhere
in the fields, you imagined, pointless there,
but easy enough to find before day break.