

Gloss / Clós / Glas

Look at the scholar, he has still not gone to bed,
Raking the dictionaries, darting at locked presses,
Hunting for keys. He stacks the books to his oxters,
Walks across the room as stiff as a shelf.

5 His nightwork, to make the price of his release:

Two words, as opposite as *his* and *hers*

Which yet must be as close

As the word *clós* to its meaning in a Scots courtyard

Close to the spailpín ships, or as close as the note

10 On the uilleann pipe to the same note on the fiddle –

As close as the grain in the polished wood, as the finger

Bitten by the string, as the hairs of the bow

Bent by the repeated note –

Two words

Closer to the bone than the words I was so proud of,

15 *Embrace and strict* to describe the twining of bone and flesh.

The rags of language are streaming like weathervanes,

Like weeds in water they turn with the tide, as he turns

Back and forth the looking-glass pages, the words

Pouring and slippery like the silk thighs of the tomcat

20 Pouring through the slit in the fence, lightly,

Until he reaches the language that has no word for *his*,

No word for *hers*, and is brought up sudden

Like a boy in a story faced with a small locked door.

Who is that he can hear panting on the other side?

25 The steam of her breath is turning the locked lock green.