

## St. Tegla's Well

An indistinct space of ivy and moss  
    dead leaves strewn about the hollow with the look  
        of old pennies, ferns bending  
as though guardian angels  
    over the source.

We idle in the shade of a willow,  
    read how epileptics once came to wash  
        clutching hope, four pence and a chicken.

How daft, you say, to imagine walking thrice  
    about well and church would make a difference. How mad  
        to spend the night lying  
under the communion table, a bible –  
    leather-bound pillow for the head –

poor folk blowing into the cock's beak  
    believing their fits might, without pills,  
        be sent, like sheep, over a cliff.

So I tell you how my mother taught me  
    to throw salt in the Devil's eyes over a shoulder,  
        how father said never to step on pavement cracks  
            for much the same reason.  
And all of it only half a joke.

Superstition, you say, folklore of unlit minds taught fear  
    by the Bible. And I don't want  
        to argue. Instead I trail my hand  
through clover hoping to be lucky and think how, years ago,

a friend's sleek-haired daughter convulsed  
    as a toddler, sirens puncturing  
        her childhood, till one day  
her slight body crumpled. I reach

into my inner well, still clogged  
    with the scripture of Sunday School, to ask,  
        what would I do,  
        what would I not do, to beckon a miracle  
from black, orphic water, if a child of ours  
    was as blue as Mary's mantle  
        for want of breath?