

Malcolm Guite

The Magic Apple Tree

Someday make a journey through the rain
Through sodden streets in darkening December
A journey to the magic apple tree.
And journey also, darkling, through your past
Journey through your seed time and your summer
And through the fall of every fruiting time.
Journey through the pictures packed like loam,
The rooting places of your growing soul,
The subsoil of your oldest memory.
Walk through the outer darkness of the world
Towards a buried memory of light
Whose faded trace no photograph records.
You glimpsed it once within the garden wall,
The image of an ancient apple tree,
The fall of light through branches and the fling
And curve of colour on the golden fruit...
All buried in the rubble of your fall.

Walk through the present darkness till you come
To the stone steps, the lions, the façade,
The white Museum with its plate-glass doors.
Through these you pass and up a flight of stairs,
To find the case and lift the dull brown cover
To see, at first, your image in the glass.
You see yourself, and through yourself the tree,
And through the tree at last, the buried light.

Boughs form an arch, the painting draws you in
Under its framing fringe of rich green leaves,
Beyond the music of the shepherdess,
Down through the dark towards the grey church spire
In to its heart : the arching apple boughs. . .
The sky is dark, intense, a stormy grey,
But just beneath the darkness all is gold:
The slope of hills, the fields of barleycorn.
The loaded branches of the apple tree,
Glow red and ripe and gold and bow themselves
To bless the fruitful earth from whence they spring.
These colours seem to fall from Eden's light,
The air they shine through breathes a change in them,
Breaking their sheen into a certain shade
Particular and unrepeatable.
Some golden essence seems to concentrate
From light to air, from pigment into paint
In increments of incarnation down
to burn within these apples and this bough,
Which here and now at last, you recognise.
This is your own, your ancient apple tree
And here the light you buried for so long
Leaps up in you to life and resurrection.