Three poems

The Glimmer in the Moil

It can’t be what you think it is, spirituality.
If it were, the soft white glimmering
which blooms at night in the dim-lit waves
heaving through the kelp below Crag Point
would comprehend the ocean’s dark immensity.

It gathers, it seethes in the always just before,
the just before you waken, blissfully at peace,
before you hear yourself say on the phone, Sorry!
or out of nowhere, turning on a tap in the shower,
suddenly see Christ walking along a shore.

Don’t ask where it comes from, or why it’s here.
The moment it’s thought about, even vaguely,
it dies back into the moil and toil of the sea.
Gone again, you say as you drowse at your desk.
Gone for hours – till solitude unknows you, or
prayer.

Cynics blacken, fanatics red-tide its bloom.
If thoughts were plankton, and caritas oxygen,
then prayer’s the wave-pulse that gets it glowing.
Without it, I’d never write a line, for all the kelp
and sea-seethe in my psyche, the gloom.
Dancing in the Royal Hotel

Was it a foxtrot or waltz?
We weren’t much good at it
but that wasn’t the point,
you teetering in your heels,
me awkward in a dark suit,
two small-town newly-weds
who’d driven miles and miles
down lonely country roads
to dance in the Royal Hotel
on a misty Friday night.

There was hardly anyone there.
Do you remember the waiters
in black bow-ties and tuxedos
who leaned across a balustrade
and watched our every move?
And how the elderly pianist
kept on playing Summertime
and glancing over his shoulder
as if longing for someone
to step onto the dance floor?

You wore your party dress,
still my favourite, even now,
the one as black as mascara
with white Botticelli flowers.
Their fragrancy was you.
I was watching your hands,
candle-lit, slender, supple,
breaking open a bread-roll
when out of nowhere came
love’s tender, amorous gasp.
Next thing the gilded mirrors,
the dark mahogany wainscot,
the waiters just weren’t there
as haltingly we started to step
then glide across the floor.
I smelt your skin’s perfume
and felt your body’s touch
lightly coming and going,
so joyful I’ll never forget
the slow swirl of that dance.

Does music dance your shades?
Each time that Summertime
sings in my contemplations
you in your flowered dress
show up across the cutlery.

The Pool of Narcissus

He’s on his hands and knees beside the pool
staring at the face in the water.
The din of the city below the trees,
faint sounds of singing from the temple
dwindle in the silence of the glade.
The sun is hot on his back and shoulders,
a girl is calling from a bank of flowers,
he goes on staring, staring into the pool.

It’s been like this for weeks, months even.
Half-hidden in the trees, two figures
are watching, wondering what to do.
His parents, advised by his tutors,
have both become, how shall I put it,
discretely anxious about their boy.

Surely it wasn’t like this in the past?
Hadn’t they better consult an oracle?
Friends spoke highly of Tiresias,
although quite elderly and blind.

Perhaps that blundering enthusiast
Hephaestus was yet again to blame.
The lame god’s latest is in his hand,
a marvel, a miniature bough of gold
crafted in the sacred fire of his smithy.
This, surely, wouldn’t turn out to be
as awful as the chariots and arrows,
being, after all, so enlightening?

Bored, Narcissus dips it into the pool
and twitches it, this way and that,
above the rocks of an underworld
until an open-air theatre emerges
with arc on arc of crowded seats
applauding a singer raising a lyre.

He stares for a while, swaying slightly,
then twitches again, this way and that,
rippling the placid sheen of the pool
till athletes in a stadium take shape
sprinting towards the winning post
cheered on by throngs of spectators,
a Heracles next, smeared with gore,
hacking invading troops on a plain,
then gliding below the lily-pads
a naked nymph with long dark hair
so desirable he drifts into a trance.

‘Heavens above!’ his mother exclaims,
walking back through the dusty pines,
‘what if Narcissus grows up like this,
more attentive to the pool than people,
unable to love anyone but himself?’

A cloud floats silently above the glade,
a few warm drops splash on his back
as if the soft small voice of a girl
was trying to get his attention.
Narcissus stares on and on and on.