

Spade Head, Monaghan, Medieval

Here is a spade head, drawn and beaten flat,
folded sides to clamp the missing shaft.
Narrow for cutting sod,
a ridge-maker, Neolithic concept.
It must have cut the wind,
and felt the enigma of a blacksmith's touch.
When I dip my hand into the bog
it brightens like a spade-head: the water quenches.
A dream-spade boils among iris roots,
bright colloidal ochre.
My fingers come up reeking of metal and blood.
The smelter's furnace, a bowl of cinders and slag
from unknown meadow iron,
a patch of rust among the ores of Monaghan.
A tongue saying nothing,
blunt from cutting silence,
helping the faith and needs
of a proto-engine on buttermilk and barley.
A mummified pampootie,
a foot stepping into the ground
to lift and fold the broken field,
a sound of sudden rain
as if someone is scattering earth on the window.
This spade may never have known the potato,
but it will not say.
There is always that explanation
for how an implement was made:
the ring of a hammer on the anvil-block,
the points of strike, nodes in the tension of a cobweb.
But we know the compacted soils are there
where it lay remembering
limestone flowers on the hems of Lough NaGlack.
I almost forgive its remains
for not having strength
to cut even the depth of its shadow,
one flap of a dwindled flame, a single antler-tip.
I think this is what a residue can be likened to,
holding a signal up to yearning blindness.
We have to imagine the abacus of the field,
the mysteries of tillage,
grain like beads being moved through the ledger of soil,
hammerscale in the bloom,
globular, minuscule particles of inner iron
caught in the shock of being made.
And here is its other detail:
that intra-granular scuff,
the wear of use and status.

Sean Borodale