

1942

Early Mass

J. Patrick Byrne

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Searched for the note, looked in the hollow tree,
 Looked for the red stones hidden by the well-side,
 Looked, are looking, finding the spring turns up
 No forwarding addresses. No, no, no—

*Then hail and farewell. Friends, Brothers, all away,
 Lost as birds are on the mapless night of Asia,
 As bells in wind beyond the stormy Hebrides—
 And love O is lying under marble trees.*

THOMAS MCGRATH

EARLY MASS

Sodality's blue ribbon about your neck
 And Mary's medal trembling as you breathe,
 You kneel in fervent worship and offer up
 The Mass, following missal's ritual red.
 Proud head bent low in prayer; now all your being
 Taut with desire to take your God on tongue—
 Wombed in shy mouth and housed in maiden breast . . .

I stare on altar, habit bending knee
 And neck when bell for Consecration struck—
 But far from here my heart and soul are fled,
 All that I am is chapelled where you kneel.
 Yet, ancient rite and prayer the same; cupped
 Remote on altar, God—your God—now beckons.
 I cannot go. I do not dare receive
 Who once thought daily Eucharist scarce enough.

Then hands you clasped in prayer my own had held,
 Tongue that had tasted Godhead mine found sweet,
 And breast that cradled Him my lips might touch—
 I, too, had Christ for guest. Oh! then His blessing
 Made soul and body one, and ours to cleave
 In love.

Have I lost God in losing love?
 He, too, a stranger to my desolate flesh.

J. PATRICK BYRNE