

'There's not many who ken the sheep like Michael does.'

On the hill that summer's day, grey cloud hung low
like a lid.

Under foot, wet grass, bracken, and tormentil standing in for sun.
We passed Low Bridge Beck and Shepherd Gill,
Walked beneath broad bog patches and Dawson Pike,
Tracing the wall, holding the line between intake and fell.

We looked back along Duddon Valley, over Turner Hall,
Onto a land of crag, fells, screes, tarns, trees and sky,
Onto distant ridges of England's highest crumbs of earth,
Across trails shadowed by shepherds, for generations,
While above, two ravens, silhouettes, soared.

Michael's hands raised rocks as big as lambs, and heavier.
As stones were lifted, passed and teased into spaces,
And boulders hauled from the chill flow of a beck,
Gentle banter and laughter, like moss on rock, formed
around the edges of this symphony of work.

These walls, land's bones borrowed and stitched by man,
May stand, unchanged, for a century. But on a farm this size
There are always gaps, forced by unforgiving rains and snow.
Today two hundred stones are fetched, fitted, back in place,
Two gaps, three men, one rhythm.

Now the valley has a gap a man gone, a rare breed.
There's that many, says Anthony, raising four fingers of a weather-worn hand,
That many young ones in Cumbria who could take over a farm.
But now he's gone. *How will you find another like that?*