

The Writing of Absence

it's evening when she writes
how the last light of winter
reddens Tai Shan's late snow

through the open window
smells of early spring trouble
the candle's shadows

as they move across
the darkening wall
his absence opens

into those dreams she fears
she's lost somewhere
far beyond that stillness

the quiet room folds
around her pen
moving the calligraphy

of the poem she writes
to send him as another day
without him dawns

my life is a candle in daylight

Zhang Ji

Too Soon

over the lake beyond the house
there's such quiet

even the clouds have stopped
as evening falls

into the first night
of your abrupt death

in front fields your cows
wait for you to milk them

that single blackbird you fed
has lost its song

in the small room
where you wrote

your wife collects and places
unfinished pages

into the new dark
your death has opened

you've gone at last
to find your mother

one May she walked away
holding the small bouquet

you always brought her
when spring had come

with that slanting light you saw
whenever her death touched you

now wind lifts your bedroom curtains
where your silence gathers and holds

for John McGahern

1934 - 2006