

Trees, Woods and Literature—12

EPITAPH ON A FIR-TREE

*She grew ninety years through sombre winter,
Rhododendron summer of midges and rain,
In a beechwood scarred by the auctioneer,*

*Til a March evening, the garden work done,
It seemed her long life had been completed,
No further growth, no gaiety could remain.*

*At a wedding breakfast bridesmaids planted
With trowel and gloves this imported fir.
How soon, measured by trees, the party ended.*

*Arbour and crinoline have gone under
The laurel, gazebos under the yews:
Wood for wood, we have little to compare.*

*We think no more of granite steps and pews,
Or an officer patched with a crude trepan
Who fought in Rangoon for these quiet acres.*

*Axes and saws now convert the evergreen
Imperial shadows into deal boards,
And let the sun enter our house again.*

*Quickly we'll spend the rings that she hoarded
In her gross girth. The evening is ours.
Those delicate girls who earthed her up are faded.*

*Except for daffodils, the ground is bare:
We two are left. They walked through pergolas
And planted well, so that we might do better.*

From *Sailing to an Island* by Richard Murphy. Reprinted by permission of the publisher, Messrs. Faber and Faber Ltd.

Richard Murphy was born in Galway in 1927. He won the AE Memorial award in 1951. For some years he ran a fishing boat on the west coast, the subject of his poem *The Last Galway Hooker*. He also wrote a long poem *The Cleggan Disaster* about an event in October 1927 when 25 fishermen from Cleggan and Inishbofin were drowned as a result of a sudden storm. He lives in Cleggan.