

Deimheas Caorach – Sheep Shears

- for Richard Mannion

i

Such a fine feat of engineering,
shy simplicity, bold silhouette,
unchanged since iron began.

A keyhole and an invitation,
a portal to the past.
A dancer, *échappé en pointe*.

Or a cowed monk in meditation, a nun
disappearing down the corridor, her
conscience in pursuit, a spill of ink.

It's Little Red Riding Hood, tired of red,
off to meet the wolf on her own terms.
It's the terror of my childhood, the story of

Little Suck-a-Thumb and *the great, long,
red-legg'd scissor-man*. And it's my father,
lord of the Sunday roast, sharpening his knife.

ii

But it's summer too and
I can tell by ear alone:
my neighbour's shearing his sheep.

This evening there's an ease
in the steady swiping of
blade on blade, blade on blade

giving an edge
to the balmy twilight,
whetting its appetite

for dark. And there's the
passive ewe, upended,
stock still and submissive

as a sheep before her shearers –
waiting for it to be over and even then
not quite wanting to get up, and run.

Geraldine Mitchell