



# CORK WORDS

AN ANTHOLOGY  
OF CONTEMPORARY  
CORK WRITING







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AN ANTHOLOGY  
OF CONTEMPORARY  
CORK WRITING

COMPILED BY

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## *Foreword*

It is my great pleasure to introduce *Cork Words: An Anthology of Contemporary Cork Writing*.

This is the first of what we hope will be regular editions of a Cork anthology – limited print editions with a selection of contemporary writers which are intended to let the world know the wealth of writing talent in Cork. This anthology was inspired by a recognition that, contrary to what some might think, as a city we are in danger of hiding our literary light under a bushel.

Cork has four significant literary festivals; Cork International Poetry Festival, Cork World Book Festival, Cork International Short Story Festival and the Winter Warmer Festival. These festivals are well spaced through the year, all of them attracting quality writers and good audiences.

In the city there are many supports for creative writing and writers. For example Cork city's libraries run a variety of creative writing initiatives, host writing groups and workshops. The libraries are popular spaces for book launches for both established and emerging



## CORK WORDS

writers. ‘Ó Bhéal’ and ‘Fiction at the Friary’ host regular sessions for writers and readers to meet and interact. There is the range of supports offered by the Munster Literature Centre, and the MA in Creative Writing in University College Cork.

Despite all this and while the interested public are well aware of what is happening, much needs to be done to have Cork recognised nationally and internationally as a writers’ city.

For this reason we asked Cork writers, some already well-known, some who will be better known, to contribute poems and prose pieces to this first anthology.

Enjoy.

**Liam Ronayne**  
Cork City Librarian





## *The Authors*

**Alannah Hopkin's** story collection *The Dogs of Inishere* was published in 2017. She studied literature at Queen Mary London and the University of Essex. Her non-fiction books include *Eating Scenery: West Cork, the People & the Place*. In 2016 she edited the popular anthology, *On the Banks – Cork City in Poetry and Song*. She is currently writing a memoir of her late husband, the novelist Aidan Higgins. [www.alannahhopkin.com](http://www.alannahhopkin.com)

**Afric McGlinchey** is a multi-award-winning poet, reviewer and editor. Afric's début, *The lucky star of hidden things*, was republished in Italian by L'Arcolaio. Her second collection, *Ghost of the Fisher Cat*, set in medieval Paris, will be translated in 2020. A surrealist chapbook, *Invisible Insane* (SurVision) appeared in 2019. One of Poetry Ireland Review's 'Rising Poets', Afric is currently completing a prose-poetry memoir, for which she received an Arts Council bursary. [www.africmcglinchey.com](http://www.africmcglinchey.com)

**Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh** is an Irish-language poet. She was born in Kerry in 1984. A graduate of NUI Galway, she now lectures in Modern Irish at UCC. Her books include *Péacadh*, (Coiscéim 2008), *Tost agus Allagar* (Coiscéim 2016) and a bilingual collection *The Coast Road* (Gallery Press 2016). Cois Life published her translations from the French of Andrée Chedid in 2019.

**Ana Špehar** is from Croatia, living in Cork for the last four years. Her work was published in A New Ulster, Solstice sounds, Good Day News and an anthology *A Journey Called Home*. She was invited to read at the Cork City Library for the World Book Festival 2018, the Winter Warmer poetry festival and at Many Tongues of Cork. One of her poems was also displayed on the Poetry Wall in Limerick. Her poetry is themed around love and her love of Ireland, her endless inspiration.

**Betty O'Mahony** was born in Cork City. She was raised in Jewtown until she was 21. She is currently completing an MA in Creative Writing at University College Cork.

**Billy O'Callaghan** is the author of six books, most recently the internationally acclaimed novel, *My Coney Island Baby* (2019) which has been translated into eight languages, and the collection, *The Boatman and Other Stories* (2020). Winner of a Bord Gais Energy Irish Book Award and shortlisted for the Costa Short Story Award among numerous other honours, his new novel, *Life Sentences*, will be published by Jonathan Cape in 2021.

**Billy Ramsell** was awarded the Ireland Chair of Poetry Bursary in 2013 and the Poetry Ireland Residency Bursary for 2015. His second collection, *The Architect's Dream of Winter*, was shortlisted for the 2014 Irish Times / Poetry Now award. He lives in Cork where he co-runs an educational publishing company.

**Cathy Ryan** runs movement workshops at home and abroad. Her background is in theatre – she trained and worked as an actor for many years. She is a founding member of Open Floor International, a school for conscious movement practice. In 2006 she had a chapbook of poetry, *I Dare You*, published by Tall Lighthouse. She is currently on the creative writing MA at UCC.

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**Cethan Leahy** is a writer and filmmaker. His YA Novel *Tuesdays are Just as Bad* was published by Mercier Press in 2018 and was shortlisted for the Children's Books Ireland Award and Great Reads Award.

**Daniel Johnson** is a 24 year old poet from Ringwood, New Jersey, USA. He lives in Cork, Ireland where he is completing an MA in Creative Writing at UCC. His work has appeared in several journals including *A New Ulster*, *The Onion River Review*, and *the Honest Ulsterman*.

**Danielle McLaughlin's** short story collection, *Dinosaurs on Other Planets*, was published in 2015 by the Stinging Fly Press. In 2019, she was a Windham-Campbell Prize recipient, and won the Sunday Times Audible Short Story Award. Her first novel, *Retrospective*, will be published in 2021.

**Deborah Oniah** is a mother of four. She has lived in Ireland for 3 years. Deborah has a law degree from her home country and has trained in facilitating intercultural dialogue in Ireland. Deborah is currently in the NLN Pathways to Employment program, studying for a PGDip in trauma studies (UCC Sanctuary Scholarship). She is a sanctuary runner and member of the women's coffee morning at the Cork Migrant Centre.

**Debra Fotheringham** is an American writer and singer/songwriter from Utah. She is currently living in Cork, studying for master's degree in creative writing at University College Cork. As a songwriter, Debra has released three albums of original folk/roots music. Her music has been featured on American television including CBS, PBS, AMC. She's also a featured vocalist on three albums from EDM megastar, Kaskade, including his Grammy nominated album, *Atmosphere*.

**Doireann Ní Ghríofa** writes both prose and poetry, in both Irish and English. Awards for her writing include a Lannan Literary Fellowship (USA), a Seamus Heaney Fellowship, the Ostana Prize (Italy), and The Rooney Prize for Irish Literature, among others. Her prose debut *A Ghost in the Throat* is forthcoming from Tramp Press in 2020.

**Elaine Desmond** lives in West Cork where she eavesdrops on curlews and herons. Elaine's poems have been published in *The Ogham Stone* and *Fresher*. She is a Part time student of Creative Writing MA at University College Cork.



**Gerry Murphy** was born in Cork City in 1952. His first collection *A Small Fat Boy Walking Backwards* was published by Commons Press in 1985. He has seven collections with Dedalus Press since 1993. His latest collection *The Humours of Nothingness* is published by Dedalus Press (2020). He is a member of Aosdána.

**James Harpur** is a member of Aosdána and has published six books of poetry. His latest volume, *The White Silhouette*, was an Irish Times Book of the Year. Particularly drawn to spiritual subjects, myths and early medieval history, he has won a number of awards for his work, including a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Award and the Michael Hartnett Poetry Prize. He lives in West Cork. [www.jamesharpur.com](http://www.jamesharpur.com)

**John FitzGerald's** chapbook *First Cut* was published in 2017. *Darklight* appeared in 2019 from The Salvage Press, who will publish his sequence *Haiku na Feirme* in 2020. He was awarded the Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Prize for 2014, a Key West Literary Bursary in 2015, and was shortlisted for the Hennessy New Irish Writing Award also in 2015. John lives in county Cork and works at University College Cork.

**Kathy D'Arcy** is a Cork poet, feminist activist and academic who completed an IRC-funded creative writing PhD in UCC in 2019. She is part of the Fired! movement challenging gender inequality in Irish poetry publishing. She was Chair of Cork Together for Yes and continues to participate in pro-choice activism with Rebels4Choice. Her collections are *Encounter* and *The Wild Pupil*. [www.kathydarcy.com](http://www.kathydarcy.com).

**Kevin Doyle** is the author of two crime thrillers set in Cork – *To Keep A Bird Singing* (Blackstaff, 2018) and *A River of Bodies* (Blackstaff, 2019). He won the Michael McLaverty Short Story Award in 2016 and co-wrote (with Spark Deeley) the award-winning illustrated children's book, *The Worms That Saved The World*. See also [www.kevindoyle.ie](http://www.kevindoyle.ie)

**Liping Xiong** was born and raised in Hubei, China. After graduating from Beijing Normal University with a Master's Degree in English Language and Literature, she worked in Beijing first as an English teacher and then as an English textbook editor. She came to Cork with her husband and her son in 2001 and has been living, working and studying in Cork ever since.

**Madeleine D'Arcy's** début short story collection, *Waiting For The Bullet* (Doire Press, 2014), won the Edge Hill Readers' Choice Prize 2015 (UK). In 2010 she received the Hennessy Literary Award for First Fiction and the overall Hennessy Literary Award for New Irish Writer. She holds an MA in Creative Writing (First Class Honours) from UCC. A second short story collection is scheduled for publication in 2021.

**Margaret O' Driscoll** is a traveling grandmother and lives in Cobh, County Cork. She writes poetry, essay and memoir and is currently a student of the MA in Creative Writing at UCC. Margaret is a member of Middleton Writer's Group.

**Mary Leland** is a Cork-born journalist. Mary has published two novels and a collection of short stories. A recipient of Arts Council bursaries and several awards, her stories have been frequently anthologised and she continues to work as a creative writer.

**Mary Noonan** is an Irish writer and academic who lives in Cork. Her first poetry collection, *The Fado House* (Dedalus, 2012) was shortlisted for the Seamus Heaney Centre Prize and the Strong/Shine Award; the manuscript of the collection won the Listowel Poetry Prize. She was awarded an Arts Council of Ireland Literature Bursary in 2014. Her second collection, *Stone Girl*, was published by Dedalus Press in 2019.

**Matthew Geden** was born and brought up in the English Midlands, moving to Kinsale, County Cork in 1990. His most recent poetry collection is *The Place Inside* published by Dedalus Press. He is also a reviewer, teacher and the Director of Kinsale Writing School. In November 2019 he was Writer in Residence at Nanjing Literature Centre in China.

**Nejla Gaylen** relocated to Cork from the United States after years of working in business and finance. As part of her transition from creative mathematician to creative writer, she is currently pursuing a master's degree in creative writing at University College Cork. Nejla is a poet and essayist.

**Patrick Cotter's** poems have been published in *the Financial Times*, *London Review of Books*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Review* and elsewhere. He has written three full-length collections. *Perplexed Skin* (Arlen House, 2008), *Making Music* (Three Spires Press, 2009) and *Sonic White Poise* (The Dedalus Press, 2021). He is a recipient of the Keats-Shelley Prize for Poetry. [www.patrickcotter.ie](http://www.patrickcotter.ie)

**Paul Casey's** *Virtual Tides* was published by Salmon Poetry in 2016. His début is *home more or less* (Salmon, 2012) and he has a chapbook, *It's Not all Bad* (Heaventree Press, 2009). He made a poetry-film of Ian Duhig's poem *The Lamma Hireling* (on vimeo), edits the annual *Unfinished Book of Poetry*, teaches creative writing at University College Cork and promotes poetry in his role as director of Ó Bhéal

**William Wall** has published six novels, most recently *Suzy Suzy* (2019) and *Grace's Day* (2018), three collections of short fiction including *The Islands* (2017) and *Hearing Voices Seeing Things* (2016), and four collections of poetry including *Ghost Estate* (2011) and *The Yellow House* (2017). He was the first European to win the 2017 Drue Heinz Literature Prize for his short story collection *The Islands* and part of that prize included being published in the USA.

He has won numerous other awards including the Virginia Faulkner Prize (for a short story), The Sean O'Faolain prize (for a short story) and The Patrick Kavanagh award (for poetry). His 2005 novel *This Is The Country* was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize. He holds a PhD in creative writing from UCC. His work has been widely translated and he translates from Italian.

[www.williamwall.net](http://www.williamwall.net)





*Prose*





Этель Лиллиан Войнич

ETHEL  
LILLIAN  
VOYNICH

ALANNAH HOPKIN

## ETHEL LILLIAN VOYNICH

ALANNAH HOPKIN

When the Chinese-born writer Yiyun Li, the inaugural winner of Cork's major literary prize, the Frank O'Connor Award, came to the Cork International Short Story Festival, the first thing she wanted to do was to visit the birthplace of the great Cork-born writer, E.L.Voynich, the author of *The Gadfly*. Imagine her surprise to discover that most Cork residents were not familiar with the name, and had not the author's famous novel, *The Gadfly*.

*The Gadfly*, published in New York and London in 1897, is a cracking yarn set in the stirring revolutionary times of the Italian Risorgimento, seen through the eyes of an idealistic young couple, a committed young Englishwoman, Gemma, and a brave, quick-witted outcast, the Gadfly of the title. It is rip-roaring stuff, with a strong anti-clerical and pro-revolutionary stance. Its appeal to youthful readers, keen to reject the establishment and all its ills, is very clear.

The philosopher Bertrand Russell called it "The most exciting novel I have ever read in the English language." D.H. Lawrence



and Rebecca West were admirers, while George Bernard Shaw liked it so much that he adapted it for the West End stage. *The Gadfly* also had its detractors: Joseph Conrad loathed it, writing somewhat paradoxically, “The Gadfly is a very bad book. I have read it four times.”

The book became popular among socialists in the years leading up to the Irish uprising in 1916 and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. It was essential reading in Russia, and has sold several million copies in the 18 languages of the Soviet Union. It has been filmed three times, most memorably with music by Shostakovich. It is also much loved in China, where it was one of the few western novels to survive the Cultural Revolution.

E. L. Voynich was born Ethel Lilian Boole in 1864, in the salubrious riverside suburb, Ballintemple on the south bank of the River Lee. She was the fifth daughter of the mathematician George Boole, ‘the founder of pure mathematics, father of computer science and the discoverer of symbolic logic,’ as his biographer, Desmond MacHale describes him. His wife, Mary Everest, was a mathematician, an educator and a pioneering feminist. George Boole died suddenly six months after Ethel’s birth. Mary Everest moved her family to London, and her daughters were cared for by relatives while she sought ways of making a living.

Ethel was sent to live in Lancashire with an uncle, who bullied and tormented her, to the point of breakdown. Happier times were spent back in Cork, where her mother’s uncle, John Ryall, was Professor of Greek. There she first read Giuseppe Mazzini, the Italian revolutionary writer, who became her hero. She took to dressing entirely in black, in mourning for the condition of the world, she explained, and preferred to be known by her second name, Lily. Friends describe a tall slim figure with “her extraordinary eyes and halo of gold hair”.

A small legacy allowed Lily to study music in Berlin, where she read Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, and *Underground Russia* by Sergei Kravchinski, known as Stepniak. Back in London she sought him out, and became a fluent Russian speaker. Stepniak’s descriptions of the suffering of the Russian people under Tzarist rule affected her so profoundly that she travelled there to see for herself.

So began her years of courageous activism, visiting prisoners, bringing medical aid to isolated peasants, and smuggling propaganda into Russia. She counted among her friends Eleanor Marx, Constance Garnett, Friedrich Engels, George Bernard Shaw, William Morris and Oscar Wilde. She married a Polish exile, Wilfrid Voynich, who became a rare book dealer, and she wrote *The Gadfly*.

She published four more novels, but never repeated its success. Wilfrid moved to New York in 1914, and she followed. She taught music and composed, and after Wilfrid’s death she shared an apartment in Manhattan with his business partner, Ann Nill. Money was tight, and as she got older, she worried that Ann would be unable to keep working and also care for her.

In 1955, through a Russian delegate to the United Nations, she learnt that she was a celebrity in the Soviet Union. Her many readers were astounded to discover the legendary author E.L. Voynich living quite humbly in New York. There were rumours of foreign royalties owed, and inquiries were made to the Russian Ambassador to the U.N. Two weeks later a cheque for \$15,000 dollars arrived, a huge sum then, enough to buy a comfortable apartment and have money left over.

There is a short clip on YouTube of dancers from the Bolshoi Ballet presenting the 95-year-old writer with a bouquet. Even at that great age, her eyes shine with an extraordinary intensity.

The academic year 2014-15, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of George Boole’s death, was designated the Year of George Boole at University



College, Cork, and celebrated accordingly. The George Boole T-shirt sold briskly on campus.

The anniversary of his daughter E.L.Voynich was celebrated more quietly on May 11, 2015 in the drawing room of the house in Blackrock where she was born 150 years ago. Desmond MacHale said a few words about the author and her most famous book, then we stood in silence listening to a recording of Shostakovich's beautiful Romance from the Gadfly suite. The silence had a very special quality, like prayer, only better, and the soaring, heart-rending music that filled the room seemed to epitomise the very soul of Ethel Voynich.

★★★



Этель  
Дилиа  
Войнич





An excerpt from

## The Dead House

Billy O'Callaghan

*An excerpt from*

## THE DEAD HOUSE

BILLY O'CALLAGHAN

She spent that late March and early April in West Cork, alone, touring the Beara Peninsula in a hired car, stopping with each night's darkness at the first guest house that offered itself, spending as much of each day as possible outside, exposed to the rigours of the natural world, drinking in the scenery and sensations. The worst of her marks had faded, her hair had grown back and been cut into a presentable, if somewhat boyish, shape, one that passed for fashionable as long as you had no understanding of just how little style and fashion actually mattered in her world. But even though she was nowhere near fully healed, she had to go, had to do this. She ached, she said, for the solitude of the mountains and the sea. And I understood. Part of it was running away, because there are times when we all need escape, if only to assure ourselves that we still possess some modicum of that courage, and part had to do with searching for the things she'd lost and given up, the things that helped make her who she was. I think, after all she'd been through, she just needed to start feeling like a complete person again.



‘This place is everything,’ she said, on the phone. ‘Even the air has wildness. I feel as if I’m out here collecting colours.’ This was the third or fourth night, and she had just left Bantry and stopped off in Glengarriff, at a hotel called The Eccles, a quaint, old-fashioned place with great rates, decent food and breathtaking views out over the bay. She had already been for a walk, through the village and back and then down to where the ferry departed for the short jaunt across to Garnish Island. Seals clung like hulking black molluscs to the rocks and, out on the pier, a couple of elderly tourist anglers, German or Dutch, and brothers or at least relatives if the striking resemblance was genuine and not merely suggested by the matching knee-length shorts and green plastic windbreakers, stood talking-distance apart and, without ever disconnecting their gazes from the water, conversed in half-finished sentences during the lulls between casts. She’d have happily stayed for weeks, she told me, maybe even longer, because there was so much to see and feel around there, but she consoled herself with the thought that, since she was basically travelling in circles, the road would bring her back this way soon enough and she could still decide to stay then, if the yearning hadn’t let up. Her plan, though, was to explore the peninsula in a slow anticlockwise sweep, keeping to a lazy fifteen or twenty miles a day limit, just a touch above walking pace, so that she could more thoroughly absorb the details of the landscape. Of course, the weather got in the way of everything good, the sky filthy shades of mud and rock, a west wind that opened you wide and got to know you from the inside out. But rain was this world’s natural and permanent condition, a soft, relentless fur that muted distances and clung to the mountainsides like the smoke of fairy fires. To meet the place under better circumstances would mean to see only its lying face.

Something like a week passed then before I heard from her again, but the length of her silence didn’t bother me. Fey to the point of

self-absorbed, she’d always struggled with a comprehension of time and its implications. And busy with my own small world, I hadn’t a chance to worry.

I’d just come in from a gallery opening in Chelsea where, as a favour to one of my contacts, I had stood, pushed beyond my usual tolerance barrier to sift the three or four acceptable pieces of work from the clutter of greater dross, then forced myself to endure half a glass of foul red wine and spent an hour or so slipping in and out of airy conversations. When the phone rang I was in the kitchen, barefoot, buttering toast.

‘I’m not coming back,’ she announced, without as much as a word of greeting. ‘Ever. I’ve seen a place and it’s perfect. It’s everything I want.’

I sat down with my tea and listened, knowing better than to interrupt. In gales of excitement, she described the small tied cottage in Allihies: a wild, beautiful, isolated ruin that dated to pre-Famine times, late eighteenth or early nineteenth century at least, with foundations that likely went back much further. Perched on its own hillside and spilling some five and a half acres down to the ocean and a rugged stretch of shoreline, it was blessed with the kind of scenery artists often spend entire lifetimes searching for and never finding. Going for less than the chorus of a song, too. A steal.

‘You said a ruin.’

‘Well, yes, I admit that the condition is a bit short of pristine, but what would you expect for nineteen thousand? In London, people probably spend that much on a garden shed.’

The truth, of course, lay between the lines. The cottage, which had never been wired or plumbed, was last occupied some time between the wars, and had stood empty and abandoned to the elements ever since. ‘Short of pristine’ was auctioneer-speak for the fact that it would require significant renovation both inside and

out. The little remaining thatch had long since turned rotten and been overrun with rats, the chimney had fallen in, and there was clear evidence along the gable end of structural collapse, possibly at foundation level. A well, some fifty yards away towards the bottom of the first acre and now partially caved in, offered the only realistic access to drinking water.

But these were all problems that money could fix, and, as far as she was concerned, the true worth of this place went far beyond mere stone and mortar. She'd seen it from the road, in passing, just as the noon light seeped momentarily chalky through the bluish knuckles of rain-cloud, and the ocean beyond the fall of land stretched off into the distance as a shifting slate pocked with the dapple of an entire submerged galaxy. And that single fleeting glimpse had been enough to capsize her world.

'I can hardly put into words how this place makes me feel, Mike. There's such a sense of isolation here, like nothing I've ever known before. Out here, it really does seem as if you're cut off from the rest of existence. And I mean that in the best way possible. Because it's actually not that isolated at all. Not really. Allihies is only a few minutes by car and maybe fifteen or twenty on foot. It's a small village, but there's a decent-sized shop, a post office, a choice of pubs. More than enough to get by. And for bigger needs, there's always Castletownbere, the nearest town of any real consequence, probably not much more than half an hour back along the southern side of the peninsula. But, I don't know, it's like there are two kinds of reality out here. There are the facts, and then there's something else. Within about a minute of seeing the place, you get the sense that when a storm blows even the least gale, the walls very quickly close in. This might be the twenty-first century, but civilisation around here feels only barely removed from myth.'

The road out from Reentrisk to the cottage was narrow and full

of twists, she said, a sort of boreen built with horses and, at a push, carts, in mind, and with a surface not always guaranteed to hold the weight of a vehicle. When the house first came into view below and on the right it was necessary to park the car on a verge and cover the last couple of hundred yards on foot, keeping to a suggestion of dirt pathway flanked and in places smothered with wild briar, down the steep hillside.

No artist could begin to hope for more than what she'd found: spectacular views of beaten hills and ocean, huge skies and, best of all, the light, a strange spectral light, peculiarly heavy and in a constant state of flux. Just breathing this air made you want to cry and laugh at the same time. Here the world had simplified itself down to rocks, ocean, sky, wind and rain; these because everything else was fleeting, and you felt overwhelmed by such a sense of permanence all around, by the realisation that what you could see in any one moment and in any direction had always existed and always would. Holy men built monasteries in places like this, trying to capture part of the alchemy that coaxed time into standing still. The immensity of so much wildness brought on a kind of melancholy, it dwarfed you, made you feel small beneath greater things, but it also made you feel oddly and fully alive. In the midst of such scale, she said, her awareness couldn't help but shift and become heightened.

Conditions inside the cottage were bad, apparently. Crumbling plaster, smashed windows, the stench of things dead and rotten, gulls, vermin and, in one of the two small bedrooms, the one that looked westward out onto the ocean, the whitened remnants of something bigger, a dog or fox, but now just a kindling of bones splayed in the natural order of its undisturbed collapse. The work involved in returning this place to some habitable state would, of course, be immense and daunting, but Maggie could see beyond all the problems.



# *The Recurring Nightmare of Wilhelm*

*Cethan Leahy*

## THE RECURRING NIGHTMARE OF WILHELM

CETHAN LEAHY

The small army contingent rumbled to life. Made up of several cars, a motorcycle and a canvas-roofed cargo truck, the convoy was in possession of a great and terrible secret, which lay inside the belly of the truck, resting within a large wooden crate, unfastened. It was vital to remove it from the site immediately. The desert had become inhospitable to its European visitors.

Seven men were charged with protecting it.

The crate rocked as it passed over the stony road and the men guarding it, save for one, flinched with every shudder. Each was, in his own way, troubled by the contents. Intellectually, they knew there was nothing to fear from an old artefact – they were members of one of the most powerful armies in the history of the world – but this remnant of the old world disturbed them. Far from home, in the heat and sand, they were susceptible to the potent superstitions that seemed to float in the warm air.

The remaining man, Wilhelm, was also uneasy, but his mind was troubled not by what lay inside the crate but lingering thoughts of his own.

‘I had a dream last night.’ Wilhelm said to the group.

Dieter stood across from Wilhelm, his hands steadying the crate between them. He sighed loudly.

‘What’s wrong with you?’ he asked. ‘I don’t want to hear about your dream.’

‘What’s wrong with me?’ Wilhelm replied over the roar of the engine. ‘I didn’t realise it was a crime to initiate a conversation with a colleague during the work day.’

‘Initiating a conversation is fine. The problem is that you initiate the same conversation each day. Every day this week you’ve described whatever gibberish entered your head while you were asleep the night before.’

“That’s true,” nodded Heinrich. He was crouched to the left of Wilhelm, picking a fly out of his teeth. ‘It has proven to be very annoying.’

Wilhelm was quiet for a moment. He looked out on the moving road. He was positioned at the head of the crate, which sat at the open end of the truck. He could feel the hot desert sun on his face and taste the sand in the wind.

‘Anyway, last night I had a dream...’

‘Oh God,’ Heinrich said.

‘Let him speak,’ said Karl, a soldier positioned at the end of the crate, eager for distraction. ‘I quite enjoyed yesterday’s dream, the one with the man dressed up as a bat, punching clowns.’

‘Fine,’ said Dieter. ‘Wilhelm, go ahead.’

Now the centre of attention, Wilhelm knew he’d need to engage his fellow soldiers. He drew in a deep breath and said:

‘We were standing in a strange corridor. We all wore this odd

uniform, gleaming white armour with a helmet that covered our faces and made us look like bugs. It was difficult to see out of the helmet, I recall. I was holding a strange gun with two hands. It shot fatal beams of light.’

‘A strange gun that shot light?’ asked Heinrich.

‘Yes, it was in the future, maybe. I remember now. We were in outer space in a floating ship. We heard that there were intruders in our spaceship so we had to run to catch them.’

‘Oh good, we are in this dream too,’ said Dieter, ‘Why don’t you ever dream of girls?’

‘One of them was a princess. She had really funny hair, like a pair of Plundergebäck. Anyway, we ran into this room where there was a massive gaping chasm. There were only two platforms. One was higher than the other. We were on the higher one. Suddenly the intruders...’

‘Wait!’

‘Yes?’ said Wilhelm.

‘What is the purpose of this room?’ asked Dieter. ‘Why is there a room with a great hole in it?’

‘Dream logic, I suppose,’ Wilhelm said. There were some images that recurred in his dreams. He knew he would never question the dreams, just as he knew he would never stare down into the chasm. ‘Anyway,’ he continued. ‘the intruders appeared on the lower platform. They saw us and ducked behind the wall. One shot at us.’

‘At which point,’ said Karl, ‘you got hit, tumbled over the edge and fell to your death.’

‘Have I told this before?’

The soldiers laughed. Confused, Wilhelm tried to solicit an explanation for this hilarity.

Wiping away a tear, Edvard, who had not said anything up to now, explained, ‘Wilhelm, all your dreams end this way.’



EACH TIME! EDVARD EX  
YOU HAVE SOME STRANGE  
AND EACH TIME IT ENDS THE  
WAY! YOU GET SHOT OR PUNCHED  
KNOCKED OR SOMETHING! YOU  
THAT SAME SCREAM AND FALL  
A GREAT HEIGHT!  
WILHELM NARROWED HIS  
EDVARD HE NEVER DID LIKE  
VERY MUCH!  
"I GUESS IT'S SIMILAR!"  
ADMITTED AND STARED DOWN  
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UNTIL NOW HAD NOT BEEN  
WITH THE OBVIOUS SYMMETRY  
ENDINGS HE BEGAN TO CONSIDER  
THE POSSIBLE MEANINGS WHEN  
WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE  
OF A WHINNY

'You even make the same scream each time,' added Karl. 'Argghh!'  
'How did you know about the terrible scream?' asked Wilhelm.  
There was indeed a scream. He remembered it well, his plaintive  
and unmanly final note.

'Each time!' Edvard exclaimed, 'You have some strange dream  
and each time it ends the same way! You get shot or punched or  
knocked or something, you make that same scream and fall from a  
great height.'

Wilhelm narrowed his eyes at Edvard. He never did like him very  
much.

'I guess it's similar,' Wilhelm admitted and stared down the  
road. He had noticed a passing similarity within his dreams, but  
until now had not been struck with the obvious symmetry of the  
endings. He began to consider the possible meanings when he was  
interrupted by the sound of a whinny.

'Is that a horse?' Edvard asked. The men looked out and saw a  
man in a hat appearing from the tall rocks on a white horse. It was  
the archaeologist everyone had been warned about. He had been  
in charge of looking for the contents of the box for the Americans  
and was not pleased with the National Socialist Party's attempts to  
hinder him.

He shouted giddy up at his horse and attracted the attention of  
the entire procession of Germans. Hanz, stationed at the mounted  
machine gun perched atop the car, began to shoot in the direction  
of the archaeologist, who was advancing alongside of the truck.

*Crack! Crack! Crack!*

The bullets popped through the air. As Hanz was a poor aim,  
they pierced the canvas of the truck. A hot chunk of metal whizzed  
past Wilhelm's ear. A fear ran through him. He had felt this high  
excitement before; not in the battlefield or on missions but in his  
dreams.

‘He is catching up on the front,’ shouted Edvard as the archaeologist disappeared. Wilhelm, feeling uneasy, clung to his gun.

*Chunk!*

A hand made a brief impression on the trunk’s canvas roof.

‘That lunatic is climbing on the side.’

Wilhelm heard a scream and saw Heinz rolling out on the road behind them. He had been sitting in the passenger seat. Wilhelm steadied himself. It was not the same scream that he himself had emitted those countless nights. He placed his finger on the trigger.

Nothing was going to make his dream a prophecy.

*Smack! Pow! Umph!*

The sounds of a struggle and fight. It was impossible to tell from the grunts and slaps and pounds who was winning. The truck swerved on the road, narrowly avoiding a passerby with a camel.

The truck braked, causing the unfastened crate to slide towards the front of the truck. Unable to stop in time, the car tailing the truck rammed straight into the back. In response, the truck accelerated again, sending the crate hurtling backwards. It flew past the men and, with a mighty thud, connected with Wilhelm.

Launched into the air, Wilhelm watched a grim realisation flicker across his mind. He had done this before. He knew what came next and it frightened him. He didn’t want to die in such a pointless, almost comedic way. He released all his fear and dread into a noise. Wilhelm screamed.

He fell forward onto the bonnet of the following car and his head connected with the windscreen. The glass shattered.

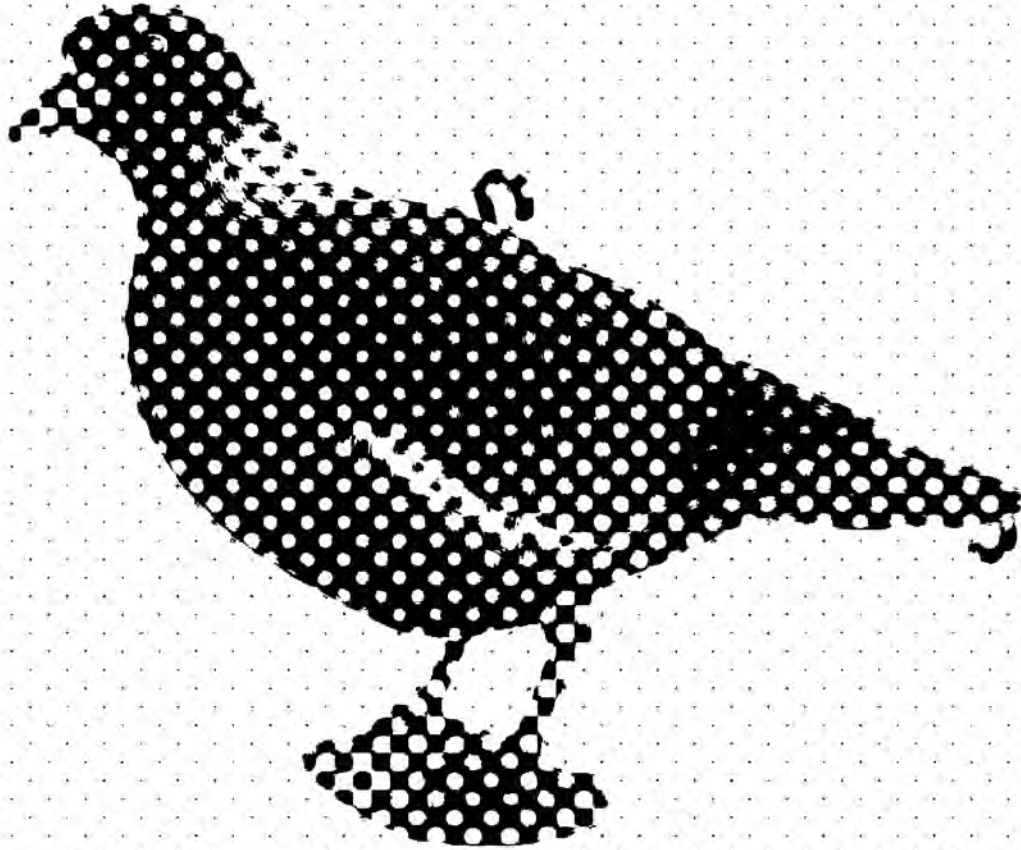
For a few moments, Wilhelm lay motionless. Then he shook his head and brushed the shards from his cheek. The driver screamed at him to get off the bonnet, but all Wilhelm could hear was his own voice whispering ‘I’m not dead’ – three words he repeated with increasing speed and joy.

He had a second chance. He was not to be the victim of some cosmic joke. Wilhelm would live to live another day and not be another forgotten fatality.

The car swerved and Wilhelm slid off the bonnet. As he dropped under the wheels, he felt the scream rise up again but his head was crushed before it had a chance to escape.

★★★





# HOOK

DANIELLE  
MCLAUGHLIN

## HOOK

DANIELLE MCLAUGHLIN

You wake to the squabbling of pigeons, the scratch of their claws on the window ledge. You wake, but keep your eyes tightly shut; it is not yet 7 A.M., too early to start seeing things. Your mother stirs in her bed on the other side of the room. Soon you will hear her moving around the flat as she gets ready for work. You wait until she's gone, closing the door quietly behind her, and then you jump out of bed. You put on your tartan skirt and polo neck, the Bay City Rollers bobby socks your aunt sent from Boston, your black shoes. You go down three flights of stairs and out onto the street. You walk past the grocers, the pub, the church, and the house beside the church where the priest lives with his housekeeper. Now you can run: down the avenue of big houses, past the new apartments and the old flats. In the fields by the canal, cowslips wet your legs with their white spit. Grass seeds stick to the wet, and your legs are like the loaves of bread in the window of Thompson's bakery, dusted

with sesame seeds. You're headed for the far field to count the horses; you've been counting them for four weeks and three days.

When you get near, you shut your eyes but keep walking, like a blind person. You climb the gate, measure the distance to the top of the hill by counting steps. Then you take a deep breath and open your eyes. One, two, three, four, five. Two palominos, a piebald, two grays. You release the breath. Now you must search for the hook.

One Saturday, four weeks and four days ago, your mother took you fishing. The people who lived in your flat before you had left a fishing rod behind. The reel was broken, but your mother said there was no need for a reel, and anyway you'd only get your fingers caught. You took cheese for bait, rolled it into little balls like *márla*. At the canal, your mother lay back on the bank and closed her eyes. Your eyes were on the river, watching for fish. When you turned to ask if there was more cheese, you saw that one of the horses had come up close and was snuffling at your mother's hair with his velvety lips. You shouted and he broke away in a gallop, his ears flat, his hind legs high enough in the air that you could see his hooves, and you jerked the rod out of the water so suddenly that it caught in briars and the line broke. That was when you lost the hook.

This morning, like all the mornings before, you don't find it. You wonder if it will soften as it rusts, if soon it will be so soft that it will be harmless, like Mr. Gordon in the ground-floor flat, or if it will be in the wrong place at the wrong time, like your mother's friend Colette. You walk home, put your copybooks in your schoolbag, sprinkle sugar on a slice of bread to take for lunch. You wish you didn't need to use the toilet, you would rather wait until you got to school, but it's an emergency. You take the roll of toilet paper from the cupboard and go down one flight of stairs. You're only in the toilet two minutes when Mr. Gordon starts banging on the door.

Your mother says that he's supposed to use the ground-floor toilet, but if you tell him that he'll only say that it's blocked, like he always does. You pee as fast as you can, and when you open the door Mr. Gordon looks at you, at your face and your tummy, and down at your legs, and says, "What have you done with my razor blades?"

"Nothing," you tell him. He is always saying that you've stolen things.

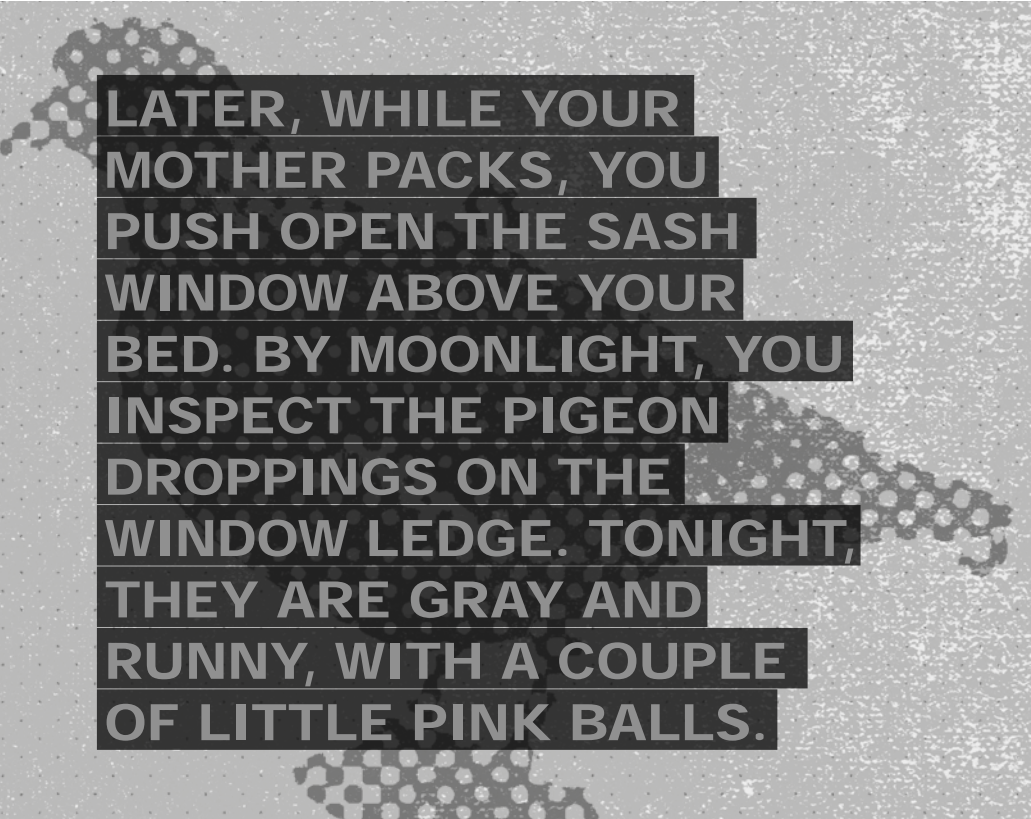
"I bet I know where you're hiding them," he says. At the front of your tartan skirt there are two pockets and he squeezes his hands into them, makes his fingers wriggle back and forth. "How old are you?" he asks. "Nine, ten?" But, before you can answer, he spins you around and puts his hand on your bottom. There are footsteps on the landing. Mr. Gordon steps away from you and picks up a towel. He rubs it all over his face and neck even though he hasn't washed himself. Miss Hegarty from the first floor, who usually stays in bed all morning, puts her head around the door. She frowns. "Out!" she says. "Now!" And you think she is talking to you, but she isn't.

At school, you try to learn your tables, but all you see in your head is a field of dead horses. They have eaten your fishhook. They are lying on their sides, their tongues hanging out, and there are flies crawling on them, the flies that feed on dead things and land on your bread when you leave the window open. In death, the horses have multiplied—there's a whole row of them when you close your eyes—and you think it must be like the loaves and fishes, because there was only one fishhook. It's a miracle, and it isn't fair. Maybe the hook split in two, like division; maybe it split in three or four or ten. At small break, you go up to Miss Carey in the yard and say, "Miss? How many horses could one fishhook kill?"

"What's this about, Lillian?" she says, but one of the senior infants falls and cuts his knee and she has to rush off.

Back at the flat after school, your mother is cross but won't say





LATER, WHILE YOUR  
MOTHER PACKS, YOU  
PUSH OPEN THE SASH  
WINDOW ABOVE YOUR  
BED. BY MOONLIGHT, YOU  
INSPECT THE PIGEON  
DROPPINGS ON THE  
WINDOW LEDGE. TONIGHT,  
THEY ARE GRAY AND  
RUNNY, WITH A COUPLE  
OF LITTLE PINK BALLS.

Later, while your mother packs, you push open the sash window above your bed. By moonlight, you inspect the pigeon droppings on the window ledge. Tonight, they are gray and runny, with a couple of little pink balls. The pink balls are as beautiful as pearls, and you would like to lift one out, but already a picture is forming. The ball, you are sure, is the head of someone or something, maybe even the head of someone you know. You leave it where it is, you don't want to risk it; you are already a killer of horses. Tomorrow you will ask Miss Carey if fishhooks dissolve in the grass like apple cores and peach stones, and how long it takes for that to happen. You'll ask her if she wouldn't mind checking on the horses on her way to school. It wouldn't be hard for her to drive that way in the mornings, to climb the gate. You will explain about counting them. As your mother rushes about, you consider the moon, notice how prettily it illuminates the pigeon droppings. You wonder what it is that keeps it up there, and what will happen when it falls.

★★★

what about. At teatime, she says, "I think we need to get away, you and me. I think it's time for us to move on."

"Where?" you ask.

"Maybe to your Granny's," she says. "Or to Auntie Ellen, in Cork."

You drop your fork and your sausage falls on the floor. You tell her that you can't go, that you haven't found the fishhook. She says that she's sick and tired of hearing about the bloody fishhook, don't you have anything bigger to worry about? But you can't imagine anything bigger than a field of dead horses.



## CAPRICORN

Kevin Doyle

## CAPRICORN

KEVIN DOYLE

Peader Hallisey looked along the shimmering streak of black bitumen and pulled on to the Northern Highway. The road was quiet and he headed south, the sun behind him at last. After a mile or so he pulled over, on to the hard shoulder and coasted slowly. Scanning the desert he finally saw the rock, peering over a clump of bottlebrush; in the intense sunlight it almost glowed.

Applying the brakes, the truck skidded to a halt on the dusty verge. He left the engine to idle and got out into the bright sunshine; it was like stepping into an oven. Looking around he saw dots of parched spinifex grass spreading across the plain of red sand. Further away there was a cluster of hills and beyond these, near the dry riverbed, a deep gash in the hillside.

Eighteen years earlier Hallisey had been shown this place by an elder of the Banjima tribe, a man named Thomas Bass. He had trekked with Bass for almost a month through the wilderness of the Pilbara avoiding the big mining towns of Newman and Marble Bar. Bass had shown him the aboriginal landscape and explained that it was custom to ask permission of the ancestors whenever one crossed



the boundaries onto their lands – boundaries that were not marked on any map of Western Australia but were there nonetheless.

Hallisey stepped forward now and shouted clearly, ‘I ask the permission of the ancestors to pass through these lands of the Banjima people.’

His statement was met by a pervading silence. Even so Hallisey remained a moment listening, until a long road-train passed him on the opposite side of the highway, its after-draft pummelling him and his vehicle.

Climbing back into the truck’s cabin, he closed the door and cooled in the air-conditioning. A short while later he was back on the road; he had about thirty miles to go.

A week earlier Hallisey had been out delivering supplies for the Shire in the lands around Jigalong, not far from the Rabbit Proof fence. He had come home from the long drive to find the light blinking on his answering machine – a rare occurrence. He pressed the button to listen. It was a voice from a long time ago. The Cork accent was strong and gravelly; the tone slightly jubilant. It was Tony Barrington. He began, I was in Dublin yesterday ... The message explained about a report that had just come out in Ireland about the industrial schools and what had gone on in them. Hallisey listened to the entirety of the long message. He didn’t really know what to make of its suddenness. Here, so far away, he hardly knew anything anymore about what was happening in the world, let alone back in Ireland.

He showered, listened to the message again and then went out onto his veranda to watch the sun set – something he did most evenings. Later, before going to bed, he listened to the message for the third time and took down the details.

He saw the Capricorn Roadhouse ahead, on a wide clearing; a

tar-side oasis – a place to get petrol, stretch legs and take a shower. It was the nearest settlement of any size to Hallisey, who lived by choice in the remote outback. The current manager, a Torres Strait Islander by the name of Lance Cooper, was a good friend of his. Earlier he had phoned Cooper to tell him that he was on his way in.

Pulling off the highway Hallisey drove slowly up the unsealed track that led to the forecourt, stopping as near as he could to the ugly white awning that afforded generous shade. Switching off the engine, he collected his cigarettes and got out. Again, he felt the blast of dry heat.

Lighting up, he took a long deep draw. Civilisation? Certainly, it was the largest human conurbation for a hundred miles in any direction. And it was busy today: a large campervan parked at the pumps, lines of road-trains parallel-parked in the truckers’ compound. Near him a Landrover was being kitted out for serious off-road driving. Jerry Cans marked ‘Drinking Water’ were neatly lashed to the sides and on the roof Hallisey spied one of the new GPS dishes that he’d heard the Shire workers talking about. He saluted the driver casually and she smiled at him.

Finishing his cigarette he stamped on the butt and entered the roadhouse. ‘Aaah,’ he said to the immediate effect of the air-conditioning. It felt glorious – one of the great inventions, he believed. He felt like raising his arms up high to let the air in but didn’t.

Cooper had new posters up about the Fremantle Dockers – the AFL footie team from down Perth way that Cooper adored. They were having another bad season – Hallisey would point that out to him.

He was hailed from behind the counter. ‘Okay mate,’ said Hallisey returning the wave. He indicated that he was fine to hang about for a while.

At the self-service coffee machine he made himself a cup of black coffee using three espresso shots. Taking a seat by the window he watched the goings on out in the forecourt. It was tough driving territory and anyone who was here at the Capricorn was happy to take their time before hitting the long road once more.

He drank his coffee and examined a slip of paper that he had taken from his breast pocket. There was an address on the paper – not that it looked like an address. ‘Address’ was the term Barrington had used in his phone message. Hallisey had faithfully recorded each letter and number of this ‘address’ which Barrington had said he should take to an internet cafe. Cooper was Hallisey’s internet cafe.

‘That’s three cups of coffee you had there,’ said his friend when he finally came over. ‘Don’t think that I didn’t see what you did. You’ll have to pay for all three.’

‘Put it on my tab,’ said Hallisey.

‘Your tab is closed.’

They both smiled and Cooper put his hand out to clasp Hallisey’s in welcome. ‘So what brings you to town Irishman?’

Hallisey handed him the slip of paper. ‘Does that make any sense to you? Seems I can listen to it.’

‘So the internet has caught up with you at last old man. Where did you get this from?’

‘A friend from way back. Phoned me up with it. Said I’d find it interesting?’

Cooper scrutinised the slip. ‘It’s an audio file okay. Podcasts they’re called. Something from the radio most likely.’ He paused. ‘Though occasionally it can be phone sex stuff too.’

‘That’s most likely it,’ grinned Hallisey.

‘I figured.’

Cooper set up Hallisey on the computer in the back office. He

helped him type in the internet address but they made an error and nothing happened. They checked it and made one correction. On the second attempt it loaded.

‘Play, pause, stop,’ said Cooper showing Hallisey with the mouse which icon was which. ‘Just like in the old tape decks,’ he added with a guffaw and thumped the Irishman’s shoulder.

Hallisey was left alone. He waited. There was intro music and an announcement. The programme was called Liveline and the presenter was talking to people on a march in Dublin. It was called the March of Solidarity and a woman explained that she had come all the way from the States to be there, in Dublin, at the march. Hallisey then heard a man being interviewed. He told his story in a plain, unemotional voice. He was abused at an industrial school he was sent to while preparing for his first Holy Communion.

Hallisey paused the recording. The noise and chatter from the counter outside receded and he felt his heart thump. After a moment he clicked the play button again. The next person interviewed, another man, was much more edgy and angry. As he spoke, there was shouting and cheering in the background from the march. There were more interviews and then Hallisey recognised his friend. Barrington began strongly but his voice grew quieter as he went on. He told about their school in Cork – Greenmount Industrial School. He said it out: what had happened to him there, the exact details. Hallisey hardly heard anything from that point on.

In forty-three years Hallisey had been back to Ireland only once – in 1991. That time he had stayed with his sister – she was now dead. He went by the old place where he had lived. Then he made one effort to walk out to Greenmount school but didn’t make it. Instead he caught the bus and went up to Galway. He wanted to see the beautiful Ireland that they all talked about in Australia. He didn’t go back to Cork.



After he returned to Australia, something had changed for Hallisey. The outback was different. Just as Ireland was more than what it appeared as on the surface, so also was Australia.

Soon after Hallisey moved out of Perth permanently and got work up north in the Pilbara at one of the mines. But it wasn't what he wanted to do. He took a variety of jobs after that – as a shearer, as a handyman and later as a farm mechanic. It was during those years, traipsing back and forth across the Pilbara, that he learned about the true history of the area and the different people who lived there – the Banjima, Yinjibarndi, Birrimaya, Ngaluma, Jaburara.

He gravitated deeper into outback; the remoteness and solitude drew him.

Cooper came in with a coffee. He saw the Irishman staring into space. There were tear streaks on his dusty brown face and the computer was silent. He put his hand on Hallisey's shoulder and left it there. Hallisey put his hand up onto his friend's to acknowledge it.

'I guess it's not phone sex then.'

'No.'

A while later Hallisey finished with the podcast. He got up, went out to the cafe and took his seat again by the window.

Cooper came over eventually. 'It's on the house, what do you want?'

'A can of your coldest Solo.'

Cooper returned with the lemonade drink and a straw. He explained, 'I got you the straw because you're such a baby.'

Hallisey didn't respond. He looked down, pulled the tab and took a long slug from the can.

'Why don't you hang about?' said Cooper. 'When Jenny comes on later we can take off and have a beer. Wouldn't that be an idea?'

'I might just do that,' said Hallisey.

He went outside, this time to the back of the roadhouse to where the well-known tourist attraction was. A metal rail like a single train track had been embedded long-ways in the red earth. The rail was polished from people walking on it and it glinted in the sunshine. A sign nearby said *This Is The Tropic Of Capricorn*.

Hallisey went and leaned against the sign. He was glad now of the hot sun. Staring out over the flat red outback, he thought about Barrington. He recalled an event a long time ago. He was sitting with his friend on the bank of the Lee, just under the Shaky Bridge. It was one of those times when they had run away from Greenmount. They were looking at the slow moving, silent flow of water. Suddenly Barrington began rocking back and forth the way a child might. His head was buried in his knees which he was clasping tightly into himself and he was crying. He wouldn't say what was wrong.

Hallisey had never known exactly what had happened to his friend until now. He had guessed of course, had guessed it was like what had happened to him. But it was never spoken of between them. Instead there had always been just this bond, a bond that allowed a postcard and an odd letter to float between them across the continents over the decades.

The odd thing was, Hallisey thought now, he envied Barrington. In some way, he felt, his friend had freed himself. By saying it out on the radio, in detail, about what had happened to him, wasn't that what he had done? And wasn't it something? Hallisey had never told anyone.

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*Where is the*  
**RICE?**

**LIPING XIONG**

## WHERE IS THE RICE?

LIPING XIONG

Gao Ming walked up and down the aisles three times but he could not find any rice in TESCO.

He had arrived in Cork the night before. East IT, the agency that recruited software engineers from China, had arranged to collect him from the airport and take him to the house provided for its recruits. It was a cold wet February night. Sitting in the car watching the city through the misty rain, he remembered thinking how dark the night felt and how weak the lights from nearby buildings seemed.

It still felt like as if he was having a strange dream. When he first saw the overseas job opportunity the agency had advertised on the Internet, he thought it was too good to be true. 'No need to study, invest or wait and you are paid from the first day... that is impossible!' One of his former colleagues had spent many years, and a fortune, to get a visa to go to the United States. Some of his friends were still waiting for news from immigration agencies that



had sprung up in the late 1990s helping Chinese professionals move to Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

He knew practically nothing about Ireland except the Chinese translation for IRA - which had appeared in the news so often that it was stuck in his head. When he searched for more information online, he was surprised to find that Ireland was the second largest software exporter in the world at the time. He could hardly believe it. Possessing no fortune and having no patience for waiting, he decided to try his luck and applied. He didn't really expect to hear any more of it.

And yet here he was.

Living in a villa-like house with a beautiful garden.

The kitchen was fitted, the toilets were tiled and the bedrooms were carpeted, which was all incredibly luxurious for him, coming from a small village in Sichuan. By working hard and doing well in his studies, he had escaped the fate of working in the paddy fields like his parents, either baked by the scorching sun in the summer or frozen by the bitter cold in the winter. He had a good job working in a hi-tech company in Beijing, and with a loan from a friend he and his wife had bought a small apartment in the heart of the city during the housing reform in 1997. They had only been able to paint the walls and put in the most essential items piece by piece: a double bed, a washing machine, a fridge, a dinner table with four chairs, two bookcases and two wardrobes. A Pentium 386 computer and a 25" TV were the latest additions.

He didn't know what half of the things in this Irish kitchen were. Following advice given by other Chinese engineers who had come to Ireland through the same agency, he had brought a rice cooker from home, but now he had to find rice to cook in it.

This supermarket was full of strange stuff, things that he didn't know what were for, or things that he thought he would never need.

His eyes nearly popped out of his head when he saw shoppers load their trolleys with large loaves of sliced bread and bags of 10-kg potatoes. 'My goodness, they must have very big families to feed ... but where did the shop keep their rice? Or did they have rice at all? I'd better go and ask.'

Even though he had studied English from secondary school to university, and then on and off in his spare time at work, he had few opportunities to speak it. He felt his face blushing again when he thought of the interview he had with an Irish representative from East IT the previous December. It was the most English he had spoken in real life. It felt very awkward and quite embarrassing. The words he knew quite well in the dictionary sounded very strange in his mouth and they refused to line up into coherent sentences as they were supposed to. He knew the grammar was all wrong even as he was speaking. He thought he had failed there and then, but he must have been 'the tallest amongst the dwarfs' and somehow got through. He was glad that he didn't drop English into the abyss of oblivion like many of his classmates did after graduation.

Thanks to his wife and the many English DVDs he had watched with her.

'I wonder how she is.', he thought, 'What is she doing now? Is she home from work yet? My elderly parents and our 2-year-old son, have I left too much on her shoulders?'

It suddenly hit him that he was all on his own.

In a totally foreign country. No family, no friends, no roots.

Only a contract with the agency and about 800 US dollars left in his pocket.

He stopped in his tracks. 'What am I doing here?' A frown crept onto his forehead, 'Everything is so expensive in this place! The cheapest tooth paste costs 1.19 pounds - that is about 15 Yuan,

which would buy me half a dozen of them in Beijing! I can find no rice, and there are very few vegetables!’

Turning on his heel, he came face to face with a shop assistant. ‘Are you all right?’ the middle-aged woman asked him. She must have seen the pained look on his face.

‘Oh, I ... I’m looking for ri ... rice,’ He stammered.

‘I’ll show you where it is. Follow me.’ She had a very kind smile on her face.

‘Here you are,’ she stopped and pointed to the shelves. ‘All the rice is displayed in this area.’

‘Thank you ... very much!’ he said and turned to look at the shelves. He had looked here a while ago but didn’t see any rice. Or to be more exact, he didn’t see any rice in the way he knew it. He was expecting to see big sacks of rice piled up by the wall and rows of half open ones squatting in front of them, waiting to be examined by the customers’ hands, eyes and noses.

All he saw was rows of small packets with strange names: fusilli, lasagne, penne... words he had never come across before.

Resigned, he moved his eyes to the shelf below and saw more things with stranger names: lentil, chickpeas, cous cous ...

He scanned one packet after another, and then he saw it: Rice! Jasmine rice, Basmati rice, brown rice, long grain rice, easy cook rice, boil-in-the-bag rice ... he was stunned. He never knew rice had such a different existence over on this side of the world!

He looked at the price: Jasmine rice, 1kg, 1.99 Irish pounds.

‘That is over 20 Yuan, enough to buy 5kg of rice in Beijing!’ He scrolled further down the shelf and saw on the bottom shelf the cheapest type, 99 pence in plain plastic packages. Dubiously he put one into his basket.

As Ming was turning to leave, he stopped and searched the shelves again. ‘I wonder if they have any noodles.’ Noodles were

another necessity of his Chinese way of living. When he was too busy or did not feel like cooking a full meal with stir fries and rice, he could make an equally delicious meal with noodles in 10 to 15 minutes.

He found only instant noodles. ‘Yuck!’ He thought to himself, ‘These are regarded as junk food back home! They may be a popular convenience food on the train but people rarely have them at home.’ What he was looking for was dried noodles made of wheat flour, cut into straight strips, and packaged into 500-gram bundles. In the end he picked up a packet of spaghetti thinking at least it was similar in shape to what he was looking for.

‘Everything is so expensive here,’ he muttered to himself as he laid out his purchase onto the conveyor belt.

‘That’s nineteen pounds seventy eight, please,’ said the cashier.

He pulled out a 20 pound note from his inside pocket and handed it to the cashier. ‘That’s over 200 Yuan, with which I could have bought a full cart of things back home!’ He thought anxiously.

Before the cashier took it off him, he suddenly remembered that he had forgotten to buy any salt. So he asked the cashier: ‘Can I get ... some *sarlt*?’

The cashier stared at him and said: ‘Excuse me?’

‘I need ... *sarlt* too,’ He explained.

The cashier shook her head in bewilderment.

‘*Sarlt* for cooking. S-A-L-T.’

‘Oh, you meant salt. Ok, it is straight ahead, near the back of the shop, on your right.’

He dashed off in the direction the cashier pointed, stopped in front of the last shelf on the right, scanned it quickly and found there were several varieties. Conscious that he was keeping the cashier waiting, he took the one closest to hand and rushed back to the cashier.



‘Sorry!’ He said apologetically.

Beep, the cashier added his last item in, ‘that’s twenty one pounds seventy seven, please.’

He pulled out another fiver and gave it to the cashier.

‘Luckily I had some English!’ he thought to himself as he walked out, ‘Otherwise I could have bought dog food for dinner, just like the illegal immigrant in a story I read a long time ago!’ At the time he had thought it incredible, but now he knew it could be true!

Unfortunately he didn’t get to eat rice that day. After putting in the rice, adding the right amount of water, he was dismayed to find that the plug of his Chinese rice cooker did not fit into the Irish socket in the wall.

‘Damn! How could I have forgotten about this!’ he chided himself. ‘It seems I have to make do with these!’ He eyed the packet of spaghetti without enthusiasm. ‘Ah well, at least I won’t go hungry on my first day here!’

He cooked the spaghetti the same way as he would cook noodles, and was a bit put off by the length of time it took to soften. As he could not find any chopsticks in the cutlery drawer, he struggled to eat it with a fork. It was edible, he decided afterwards, but could not quite appreciate its plain taste and tough texture.

The next day he was quite happy to find an adaptor from a nearby hardware shop. When he came back and found that the two pins of his Chinese plug were a tad too long for the adaptor, he was speechless. ‘Just as they say, all is well when one stays at home,’ he shook his head in disbelief, ‘difficulties spring up as soon as one goes away!’

At his wits’ end, he took the adaptor and the rice cooker back to the shop. It was raining and soon his hair, his face and his clothes were all wet. The man saw his plight straight away, assured him with a smile, took out a file and started to work away at the pins.

‘Here you are,’ said the man presently, ‘it is all fixed for you now.’

‘Thank you very much!’ Ming took it with gratitude. ‘How much...?’

‘Don’t worry about it!’ the man waved him on with a smile. ‘Have a good day!’

And he did. Finally he could cook rice! Even though the rice tasted somewhat different to what he was used to, Gao Ming felt that he had never enjoyed rice as much as he did that day.



Three Excerpts from the draft novel

# Feeling Savage

Madeleine D'Arcy

CORK  
1979

Gog's  
Evil  
Design

*Three excerpts from the draft novel*

## FEELING SAVAGE

MADELEINE D'ARCY

Dan Dolan – Cork City, 1979

I can't stand Victor Hussey. He's putrid. Believe me. It's not just because his band, Gog's Evil Design, is in direct competition with The Dirty Pups. It's not even because of Tara.

I first got to know him years ago. Sometime during the summer holidays – it must have been 1973 – Victor and his mother arrived from Dublin. They moved into the terrace two doors down from us. He was sixteen, two years older than me. His Dublin drawl and torn t-shirts had me in awe.

God, that was a bad time for me and Mam. Dad had been dead a couple of years and Mam wasn't in good shape at all. The doctor gave her some kind of pills for depression, but they didn't suit her. She managed to go to work most days but she hardly spoke when she got home. She spent her time watching TV, drinking vodka and smoking fags. Don't get me wrong; I don't blame her. She was lonely. That was all.



That summer I had the run of the house all day while Mam was at work. I was a real ‘loner’ then, so I was pleased when Victor started to call into me. It was only afterwards I copped on that the only reason he wanted to hang out with me was because he didn’t know anyone else.

It was Victor who got me into glue.

‘Dolan, has your mother any Tippex?’ he said.

He knew she had a second-hand Smith Corona typewriter.

‘I’m not sure,’ I said.

‘Get it, will ya? We’ll have a laugh.’

I don’t know why – it seems pure mad now – I got into glue so fast. I nicked everything in the house I could possibly sniff and it was never enough. Tippex, hairspray, nail polish remover... even the lighter fluid for the Zippo lighter my Dad used until he died. You forget everything when you’re on glue, see. You only want more. I told my mother I wanted a model airplane for my birthday that year.

‘Get plenty of glue for it,’ I said.

Victor never seemed to be as desperate for the glue high as I was. He’d have a quick sniff, drink a can of Carling, laugh at me and say ‘Go on, I dare you,’ and ‘You’re a crazy fucker, Dolan, do you know that?’ while I fell around the place talking strange thoughts, telling odd stories I couldn’t remember afterwards. Down the park, Victor would laugh and tell the older fellas what a lunatic I was and I took that as a compliment.

Victor said you got a great buzz off the Airfix stuff. It was true. Mam didn’t seem to notice. I remember bits and pieces of model planes strewn across my bedroom floor for months, their sharp edges jabbing my feet when I shot out of bed, often late, to wash the ware and tidy up before Mam came home from Dunnes. I was like a wine connoisseur, only it was cheap chemicals I was into, fumes

and more fumes... and I never had enough money then. I’d been saving my Confirmation money to buy a motorbike, eventually, but that summer it disappeared on glue and chips and because I gave so much cash to Victor for supplies of fags and lager – he had to buy those because I looked too young – and soon I was broke.

Then Victor egged me on to steal the collection box from the church in Mary Street. Like a trained monkey I strolled in behind him, all hazy and high, picked up the wooden box when he told me to. ‘Turn around,’ he whispered. I followed him down the aisle of the church, past the pews, trying to walk steady but hearing a clickety-click noise from the coins sliding round in the box. ‘Run!’ he said as we reached the big wooden doors, and I tore up the street after him, turned into a side street, rounded a corner skew-ways, drew blood from hitting my skull on a concrete corner.

Later, he prised the top off the collection box with my mother’s kitchen knife and counted out the money.

‘I’ll keep your half for you and dole it out when you need it. I’m only doing you a favour,’ he said.

I was too confused to remember how much money it was, and too ashamed. A few days later he suggested I should nick some of my Mam’s house-keeping money. I nearly did but there was only fifty pence in the tin. I left it there and cried.

That afternoon, lo and behold, I found a plastic bag with six aerosols of spray paint in the dustbin right outside the Spar shop. Since Victor had shown me how to get the glue high, I’d gone from bad to worse. Now all I wanted was to forget everything, and I couldn’t resist doing them all, one by one, right there beside the bin, sucking the fumes into myself.

Apparently it was Mrs Sweeney from the shop who noticed me first. She sent her son Tim running to tell my mother I wasn’t well. By

the time Mam arrived at the shop I was gone, so they all got worried and Tim drove her round the city in his beat-up Triumph Herald until they found me lurching along Mardyke Walk. The park-keeper had thrown me out of the park and he was just closing the gates. Tim saw me first and pulled the car up beside me as if he was a cop.

My head was wrecked. I had no idea where I was and I didn't recognise the car either. The park-keeper was cnámh-shawling at me but the words were garbled and all I could see was a vague outline in petrol blue. Then I saw a fuzzy version of Mam with tears rolling down her face. Tim shoved me into the back seat of the car and Mam clambered in beside me.

Then I thought I heard Tim say he had to collect some pigeons on the way back. For a long time, I thought it was the glue making me imagine that, but I checked with Mam years later and I was right. He did collect a box of pigeons. The other things I remember are Mam trying to hug me, her sobbing 'Why, love, why?', the car smelling of Tim's roll-ups and her cardigan smelling of the fry-up we'd had the night before and of the perfume she had that smelled like lilies and that the side window of the car was streaked with pale grey bird shit.

After that, me and Mam agreed things had to change, that we'd have to give up the things that didn't do us any good and start doing things that made us feel better. Father Clancy, the youngest priest in the parish, came and talked to us a few times. He was surprisingly alright for a priest even though it was embarrassing when he tried to teach me how to play guitar. I couldn't manage it at all because my fingers wouldn't do what they were supposed to do. Then he gave me singing lessons. I liked the singing even though the songs he taught me – John Denver and the like – were kind of lame. Mam's friends finally got her to go out now and again, to the singing pub on Friday nights and to the bingo.

As for Victor, I kept away from him. It was a huge relief when he and his mother moved out to Bishopstown.

I didn't see Victor again for years, until me and Skid started going to the Paradise Club. Mostly, he ignores me and that's a relief. No one knows about the whole glue thing and if he doesn't tell, I'm not saying anything. But now, he fancies Tara and it's killing me.

I've kept my word to Mam and stayed off glue, though I still get a strange kind of feeling sometimes – it scares me, if I'm being honest – when I see cans of shaving foam, hair spray, superglue... when I pass a toy shop with Airfix models in the window.



### Ginnie Lane – Cork, 1979

In the morning, Ginnie wakes up in time for work, as usual, but to her relief, after the initial sick-in-the-stomach feeling, she realises that it's Saturday. The bedsit is freezing as usual, so she turns on the three-bar electric fire, not bothering to change out of the nightdress, socks and jumper that she regularly sleeps in. She makes some porridge, eats it with honey and milk. She fills the kettle and switches it on. While the kettle comes to the boil she empties both of her hot water bottles into the sink. She refills them and goes back to bed. She masturbates for a while, and then dozes. Later, she drags herself out of bed and washes under the tepid water of the shower. She stares at herself in a mottled mirror before putting on a bit of mascara, a streak of eyeliner and a touch of lip-gloss. After some consideration she pulls on her favourite blue jeans, her favourite blue t-shirt, her favourite cardigan (one her Dad had before it shrank



in the wash) and her pheasant feather earrings. Sure, she might as well go down town anyway. He probably won't show. Not that it matters. She'll get some fish. A bit of protein will do her good.

She walks down to the English Market and shivers in her duffel coat as she waits her turn at the fish stall. The tall young fishmonger is friendly, as usual, and rubs his hands together as he speaks.

'What can I get for you, young lady?' he asks, even though he's not much older than herself.

'Your cheapest fish, as usual,' grins Ginnie.

'Mackerel is good value,' he says. He'll give her two for fifty pence. As Ginnie waits at the counter she becomes transfixed by a large grey primeval-looking fish that lies in the midst of a crowd of trout and scowls at her with evil eyes from its bed of ice. He (for some reason she's sure it's a 'he') stares straight at her, mouth open in a sardonic smile, showing small sharp teeth, straight as the points of carpenters' nails.

Ginnie dumps the plastic bag of fish in her shoulder bag. She buys two apples and two oranges from the fruit stall. Vitamin C, she thinks. Healthy weekend. No Paradise Club for a change; she's seen the Blitz Boys before and they're honestly a bit too MOR. Ginnie has learnt that MOR means 'middle of the road' and therefore something to look down your nose at.

After buying the fruit she meanders down an alleyway onto Patrick Street. Later, and flicks through magazines in Easons that she can't afford to buy. She keeps checking the time, until she loses herself in a short story in *Image* magazine and gets shooed out of the shop, just as she's reached the second-last page. Then she checks her watch again and decides to walk casually past the Queen's Old Castle, maybe have a wander around the shops. So what if he's not there. It's no skin off her nose.

She tries to walk slowly, as if she hasn't got a care in the world.

Of course Victor won't be there. Last night was probably just some kind of weird aberration on both their parts. She's ten minutes early. And Victor is there, waiting for her, wearing his black donkey-jacket and a blue-grey scarf.

'Hi,' he says. 'You came.' He doesn't say anything else.

'Well,' she says. 'What do you want to do?'

He looks at the ground then. 'I've a bit of a problem,' he says. 'No money. Well, only a few pence.'

'That's ok. I've got some. Would you like to go for coffee?'

'That would be great.' He looks pleased. 'Where to?'

'Halpin's?'

'Grand.' He grins and takes her hand, and as they walk along Oliver Plunkett Street towards the cafe he keeps rubbing the inside of her palm, just as he'd done in the pub the evening before. She feels disjointed now. It's broad daylight and she hasn't even had a drink but already her sensible self is fizzling away now that she is with him again.

Halpin's Café is almost empty. He releases her hand and she sits across from him at a table for two that's right next to a radiator. It's nice and warm. She puts her shoulder bag on the floor and shrugs off her duffel coat.

She orders coffee for both of them and is surprised when he says that yes, he would like a cake too.

'How about a doughnut? They have those long ones with cream and a streak of jam in the centre.'

'Great,' he says. She decides to have one as well.

She looks at him while he eats. His lips are full, almost feminine, and his teeth are sharp and even. Pull yourself together, she thinks, and struggles for something to talk about.

'It was good to see you yesterday,' she says.

'Yeah, it was good.'

'I was so pissed off with work. Sorry if I went on too much about it.'

'No bother. I don't know how you stick it.'

'You're in college, aren't you?'

'Nah. I dropped out a year or two ago to concentrate on the band.'

'Oh.'

'The old lady went ballistic. She's calmed down a bit now though.'

'What does your father think about it?'

He lowers his eyes. 'My old man is dead. Keeled over at work one day and pegged it.'

'Oh. Sorry.'

'It's okay.' His lips tighten. 'Better off without the old bastard. He flaked the living daylights out of her.'

Ginnie feels bad for him. 'That must have been really tough,' she says.

'Yeah. But you know...' he shrugs. 'She'd already left him at that stage.'

'Good for her.'

'Yeah. Anyway, she's kicking up a bit about me moving to London but she's not the worst.'

'You're moving?'

'Hopefully. We're getting a fair bit of interest from a few record labels. At this stage we just have to wait for the right contract.'

'The Dirty Pups are thinking of going to London too.'

'Yeah, I know. There's fuck-all here.'

Ginnie's hand trembles as she pours milk into her coffee and her cup overflows. She puts her paper serviette on the saucer to soak it up. She tries to take a bit out of her doughnut without getting jam

or cream all over her face. The conversation isn't what you might call flowing. She doesn't know this guy at all, really. She's stone-cold sober now, and yet she wants to be kissed again. Just as she tries to dismiss this from her mind, a horrid smell wafts from underneath the table and she remembers the fish.

'Oh, by the way, I've got some fish in my bag,' she says. 'Just in case you think that weird smell is coming from me.'

'I thought I smelt something, alright.'

'I should never have put my bag right next to the radiator. It's probably half-cooked by now.'

'Let's bring the fish back to yours. You don't want it to go off.'

They walk back to her one-room bedsit. She tries to remember if she tidied up before she left.

'This is a great place,' he says, as he surveys the room. It's not that great, Ginnie thinks, but it's as nice as she can make it. She plugs in her three-bar heater, feeling relieved that she made the bed before she left. In one corner there's a kitchenette with a two-ring gas hob, a yellowed fridge, a sink and some brown cupboards. The single bed is pushed against one wall, next to a window with bamboo blinds. Facing the bed is a ratty little couch that Ginnie has concealed beneath a patchwork quilt and coloured cushions, all hand-me-downs from home. There's a cluttered clothes rail on castors. The black and white TV her parents passed on to her when they finally bought a coloured one is balanced on a battered chest of drawers while her ghetto blaster languishes in a corner, amid a sea of cassettes. Beyond the kitchenette the landlord has put in a tiny bathroom. It's concealed behind some plasterboard and the landlord hasn't bothered to put a handle on the door.

'It's okay for the moment.'

'No, it's great. I live at home, which isn't ideal. All my cash is



going into the band at the moment, you see.'

Her hands shake as she slides the two mackerel onto a dinner plate and places it carefully in the tiny yellowed fridge. It's difficult to know what to talk about. One part of her knows she doesn't have very much in common with Victor and anyway Tara fancies him like crazy and Tara is her friend and this, she knows in the sensible part of her mind is all wrong. The other part wants to eat him up.

'Would you like more coffee? I have some Nescafé.'

As she places the kettle on the two-ring hob he leans over and his lips are soft and in what seems like seconds they are feasting on each other. He licks her ear until she's afraid she'll pass out. With a huge effort of will she pulls away from him, saying 'I'm not sure this is...'

'It is a good idea,' he says, turning off the gas ring and leading her to her bed where they kiss and pant and dry-hump for ages and she's wet beneath her clothes, quivering after what his fingers have done to her and he has taken off all his clothes except his shirt and he is taking off her jeans and pulling off her knickers. No, she says, and she hears a whimpering noise she's never heard before and realises it is coming from her and as she moans he suddenly says Oh God and falls upon her. For a moment they are quiet. She wonders if this is how those mackerel felt, when they were alive, writhing joyfully in the vast dark freedom of the sea, ready to be hooked.



### Ginnie Lane – Christmas at home, 1979

The house is too hot, as it always is. Her mother doesn't like the cold and has a horror of draughts. Her mother's in her dressing gown and slippers when she comes downstairs at teatime. She thinks she has caught a bit of a cold, and doesn't have much of an appetite. She might have one of those scones that Ginnie baked today. There's ham and tomatoes and a fresh white sliced pan. Would Ginnie make sandwiches for herself and her father? She would. Of course she would.

Ginnie has a long soak in a Radox bath and puts on her pyjamas.

'I've switched on your electric blanket for later,' her mother says.

'But the house is roasting. I won't need it,' Ginnie says. She debates whether she'll chance going outside for a clandestine cigarette now or wait until her mother's gone to bed again.

'We'll get the 10 o'clock mass in the morning,' her mother says. Tomorrow is Sunday. Then there's Monday, which is Christmas Eve. Then there's Tuesday, Christmas Day, another mass. Ginnie says nothing, but privately resolves that in the morning she'll tell her mother she's tired out and that she'll go to the 12 o'clock mass instead. She'll go for a walk down by the river then, and smoke cigarettes for an hour instead. She'll sneak her book out with her. She's reading *Minor Characters* by Joyce Johnston and she likes it well enough, though she doesn't really understand why Joyce was so keen on Jack Kerouac because he sounds like a bit of an asshole. The parents will go ballistic if she tries to avoid Christmas Mass, but she's sure as hell not going twice during this precious week off.

Ginnie stopped believing in God when she was twelve. Limbo didn't make any sense at all. All those dead babies floating endlessly up in outer space, neither here nor there, neither in heaven nor in hell,

just because they died too soon to get baptised. She flat out didn't believe it. Later, other things too, put her off the whole religiosity stuff. A priest came back from the Missions to run a Retreat in the school and he decided to hear confessions in the nuns' sitting room, which seemed awfully trendy and modern. It still hadn't tempted Ginnie, age 15 by now, to confess anything. She was glad she hadn't when her friend Sue told her afterwards that the Retreat priest had asked her to sit on his knee while she told him her sins. 'I had to get up and leave without getting any penance or absolution because it was a bit weird,' said Sue, though she refused to specify any further details. Some of the other girls thought Sue was lying. Sue was very good-looking. She was just 'shaping' or 'looking for notice', they said.

When Ginnie was younger she'd devised a way of getting through Mass. It was a bit like playing 'Solitaire' and organising a fashion show at the same time. She used to mentally swap the clothes worn by the churchgoers. It was a self-imposed competition with only herself competing... to try to improve the appearance of everyone in the church, with no stray clothes or half-clad people left at the end. For example, one rich lady used to wear a nice fur coat to Mass nearly every week for a while, but she accessorised it with a really horrible headscarf covered in brown horseshoes and horses' heads, with a red and blue border. So Ginnie moved the headscarf to someone who actually did ride a horse; a tall country girl with a weather-glazed face. In Ginnie's imagination she tied the horse-scarf loosely around the horsy girl's neck and it looked fine with her red anorak. She found a nearly-matching fur hat somewhere in the congregation for the rich lady with the fur coat. She swapped jackets for coats and anoraks for raincoats, boots for shoes, mantillas for berets, ribbons for hair slides. Colour co-ordination was important

and she particularly disliked men's brown shoes with grey trousers so she swapped them in her head for black shoes wherever possible. It had, she realised, become something of an addiction. 'Will you stop staring at people?' her mother would whisper, sounding really angry even after she'd only just come back from the altar and was supposed to be pure of thought.

Ginnie's most concentrated mental effort was when people filed up and down the aisles during Communion, because at this stage she could see more clearly what they wore. This was handy because it was also the time when she was most conspicuous, most evidently a person not going up to receive Holy Communion and therefore a weirdo. She needed to keep her brain busy or else she might feel self-conscious to the point of agony and she might end up ditching her principles and acting like a hypocrite.

It got so bad, eventually, that Ginnie began mentally cutting people's hair and removing beards and moustaches. That's when she realised she had to stop. It was all too much for her. At the end of every mass, when she heard the words 'Go in Peace to Love and Serve The Lord' she couldn't bear the fact that – despite all her mental effort – everyone looked just the same as they'd been at the beginning and nothing had changed at all.

★★★



An excerpt from the unpublished novel *The Shulamite* (2017)

# Kilcrea

Mary Leland



An excerpt from the unpublished novel *The Shulamite* (2017)

## KILCREA

MARY LELAND

The monastery was like an island in a sea of grain. Una imagined something stirring under the turf as if sensing the warmth of the living. This was fanciful yet she smiled at the thought, the thought of a transfer of contact through flesh to matted soil to bone. She smiled and then she shivered in the quiet, hearing the garble of a hidden stream, the quake of a bird in the deep corn.

Near what would have been the chancel she halted, arrested by the ancient lettering on a plinth: *'I sleep, but my heart waketh'*.

The Song of Solomon. I slept, but my heart heard. It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh.

Stricken, she was captured defenceless amid the sepulchres, pierced by an aching stab of awareness as if her body were emerging from a coma, as if she had been submerged, or in a trance. Return, return O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee.

That was then, she scolded herself to quench even the memory

of memory. She must live in the moment, the sky forecast showers. Here she could see Martha with her feet in the stream running beneath the bridge. She could hear the child's squeals of excited pain from the cold hill water. She called her to the now, to the tombs packed into the roofless arcades, to the burial place of Art O Laoghaire. When she read '*Lo! Arthur Leary, generous, handsome, brave...*' the child heard 'Low! Arthur Leary!'. This was a good story, the story of the bay mare and Carriganima. Martha hung on the friable railings; the tomb was high, she said, but the words carved Low! And low nearby was the chieftain Cormac MacCarthy, great Lord of Muskerry, builder of mighty castles. Here he lay with plastic chrysanthemums blown beneath his monument.

It was time to leave Kilcrea, time to move on. An unearched kerb caught her shoe and she stumbled back to ordinary pain. Carriganimma is too far, she thought. Its sadness is just as the poem says, locked up like a trunk whose key has been lost. Instead she offered Martha the adventure of an old house glimpsed through trees by-passed on many journeys. They found it on this one. She followed the discovered avenue as far as it lasted, its grassed vertebrae brushing the undercarriage, its trees dropping their harvest of rain as she drove beneath the branches.

'Where's the house?' wondered Martha when the avenue ended at buckled gates. There was no house. The roof had stumbled gradually down through attics, nurseries, bedrooms and hall, the slates re-used to shelter the stables. No house, but coming slowly across a paddock towards the piers to which the gates were roped were the horses, two, then three of them, curious and soft-eyed. The muzzles twitched as they tolerated Martha's delighted hand, their lips folding on her fist of grasses. 'But where do they live?' the child asked; there was no visible shed or stall, not a stone left upon a stone.

Where the avenue dipped into a curve Una could see walls and a ramshackle roofline. Martha had no hesitation in running ahead, there was another gate drooping from its supports of wire and baling twine and her call to Una was heard by a man, an old man in shabby work clothes and one of those hats men never wore any more, the kind of hat Una remembered from her father, from his friends, the kind of hat that would be doffed in those days when men would still doff their hats to women.

He doffed his now, fitting his thumb and finger into the twin indentations in its crown as Una came around the corner to join Martha at the gate. 'Is this your mammy?' he asked the child. Martha laughed at the idea, no, Una was her aunty, her mammy and daddy were at home.

And where's your home?

'London', she said, 'I live in London.'

'Ah,' he said, 'you're from the city so. I lived in London for a time myself, but it's a big place, London. A big place.'

He spoke with a country accent, soft but precise. Una told him that they had been admiring the horses. He said there were more, if they liked he could show them something special in the yard. He untangled the wire latch and lifted the gate to hold it wide as Martha passed quickly through, her damp shoes smooth on the cobbles. Unwilling to give offence Una followed, catching suspiciously the hearty reek of muck from the gaping loose-boxes. She saw their darkness.

There was lawn beyond the yard and a mare, bay or chestnut Una could not tell, browsed close to its high hedged ditch. With its head to her flanks stood a foal, glistening with the drifting rain as if with birth fluids, it was so young, so new. She heard Martha's shaken breath as the mare turned towards the group at the gate, the foal tottering alongside.



‘A fine colt’, the man said. He put his hand to the mare’s neck as she stretched for a treat; from his pocket he took a little fistful of horse-nuts and even as the foal tossed its head and backed away the mare’s lips slobbered a grassy slick on his skin. ‘Born three days ago’, he said, piling a smaller heap of nuts on Martha’s ready palm. Slowly Martha lifted her hand to the mare, spreading her thumb out of the way and flattening her fingers as the big head came down, the long soft-lipped muzzle closing around the fodder and the nostrils gusting with soft breaths. The child did not quail, the treat was taken, the neck and flicking ears touched and stroked. There was silence, they were enveloped in silence, even the foal stood calm although the skin quivered where the old man whispered and petted the thin scooped jawline.

Then it was over. A helicopter scouted suddenly overhead. The mare disdained Martha’s still-outspread hand and swerved herself quickly away, the colt skittering in its turn back to her side. ‘Young things’, the man said, ‘young things move fast. Another week and he won’t be so pretty.’

Martha said she wouldn’t be here in a week’s time, she would be back in London.

‘Ah. London.’ The man’s tone hinted that more could be said about London.

Una asked: ‘Did you mind leaving it? Did you mind coming back here?’

‘Did I mind coming back?’ He weighed his answer. ‘No. No – I wanted to come back. It was leaving here that I minded. No, I’m content to be back.’

He had worked in London for thirty years. He had married there, had two sons there, had been widowed there. Nowadays, he said, he went over to visit his sons and to pay his respects to his wife’s grave. Every six months or so, just a short visit, always glad to come home.

Martha had lingered at the gate but now passed them by, jumping over the pools along the track. ‘Don’t you get lonely here on your own?’ Una was making conversation out of a sense of obligation, he was being so nice to Martha. Perhaps he had been a groom here in the early days before he left for England. But she thought he was too well-spoken, he didn’t seem to have the gait of a groom or a yard-man.

‘Why would I be lonely?’ He turned to Una as if there had been no interval between her question and his answer. ‘This is my place. I was the groom here from a youngster. We had hunters here, and a few show-jumpers. I rode them out.’

‘Well’, he said, ‘Well. Things pass.’ They walked back over the cobbles to the lurching gateway. ‘I live here now. I live where I used to live, up there, over the stable there.’ Una looked up and saw that there was indeed one intact building, one complete window and one solid timber door.

‘I roofed it myself. They let me roof it myself if I would stay on. Like a care-taker. It’s snug enough. Snug enough for me.’

‘Would you like to come in? I’d make a pot of tea?’

She could sense Martha’s yes. But she knew better. ‘No, but thank you. We have to get back. We don’t have the time, we’ve been too long already. It’s been very good of you to be so kind to us, but we have to return to town.’

‘Perhaps’, she said, ‘Perhaps we will come back some time and stay a little longer.’

‘Ah’, the man said. They were at the high-railed gate near where she had parked the car.

The wind had come up in a tremor on the wet air, the sun clouded, and a dew was shining on Martha’s hair, on the windscreen of the car, on her own skin. With it came the smell, the Irish smell of drenched meadows, of childhood and longing. She felt her heart

fill with the smell of grass and gust and mist, with the way the land could vanish as hedgerows thickened and disappeared, as animals faded beneath the trees. She turned as if to go back, as if to say yes, I'm awake, but it was too late, the gate was between them now, the way was barred.

She stood forlorn at the gate. The watchman who had found her laid his hand on her breast. This goodbye was the moment, the hand on her breast.

'Daughtereen' the old man said. Little daughter. She felt a warmth of more than flesh as his fingers splayed against the front of her blouse, only its silk between his skin and hers. Nothing preceded the touch, nothing followed from it except that his finger tipped the buttoned plaquet and she thought suddenly from nowhere, from schooldays, she thought – 'Pray you, undo this button.'

The touch was not a caress. It had the tenderness of fare thee well. But there was also a tenderness of difference, of the distance between his place and hers, his age and hers, their age and Martha's. A distance which rendered the endearment allowable, a custom of the place to button their encounter to her memory.

She smiled and moved away, Martha following in silent reluctance. Una looked back to hurry the child and saw again the old man, the stout little house he had provided for himself among the dissolving slates, and from this angle she could see on its other side a garden with apple trees and high above its fence a fringe of cottage sunflowers bending obediently west.

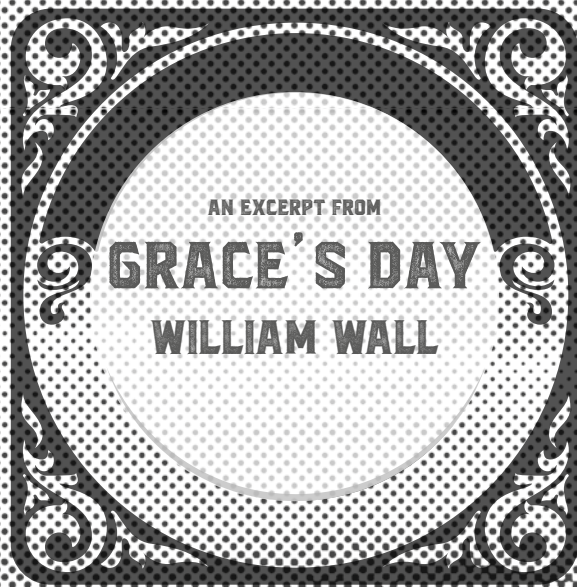
They drove off in silence. On the main road Una remembered that she had not given him her name, neither had he offered his own. She tried to understand this hesitation, was it a kind of embarrassment that despite this contact they would not meet again? Or was it that she had dozed through the encounter until that last moment, that one last moment in which he had touched her breast

almost as if he were claiming something, naming her daughtereen, naming her little daughter. There was a gentleness, paternal perhaps but a man's touch wakening her. His hand had not rested on the breast of her heart but that was where she felt his touch.

The aisles of the road passed cottages with their sentry sheep-dogs. She skirted the woods looming above muddied pastures hedged with furze. The hills of the city sprouted domes and spires and beyond them lay the half-imagined thin grey stroke of the sea, of a horizon. Waiting at a shrine of traffic lights she saw on the highway's disappearing ridge the battlements of a castle, the futile ramparts raised by MacCarthy the Mighty. She looked back swiftly to alert Martha, but Martha was asleep.







*An excerpt from*

## GRACE'S DAY

WILLIAM WALL

**One day on our island** my sister Jeannie ran in to say that she had seen a whale in the sound and I ran out after her, my mother calling me: Grace, it's your day, take Em. But I was too excited. And there were three fin-whales making their way into the rising tide. We heard their breathing. It carried perfectly in the still grey air. It was reflected back at us by the low cloud. The sea was still and burnished. We ran along the rocks watching for their breaching. We decided it was a mother, a father and a calf. They were in no hurry. When we reached the beacon, a small unlit concrete marker indicating the western end of the island, we watched them breaching and diving into the distance until we could see them no more. But they left behind their calmness and the unhurried but forceful sound of their blows. We were wearing our summer shorts, and so, once the whales were no longer to be seen, I pulled mine off, threw Jeannie my shirt and plunged in and swam out into the rising tide and allowed myself to be carried along outside everything

and back to the anchorage. That was how, so far out, drifting like a seal in the tide, I saw my mother kissing Richard Wood against the gable of our house. It did not come as a shock or a surprise but I felt a sickening sense of guilt and shame and I allowed myself to be carried past the anchored yawl and too far out into the sound, so that it was a struggle and a hard swim to get back. My sisters, Jeannie and Em, watched me sullenly for a long time. I think if I had drowned they would have watched that too with the same sullen disinterest. When I came ashore I was exhausted. I threw myself down on the strand and lay staring at the clouds for a long time. My mother was wearing her slacks and a jumper. Her sleeves were rolled back. She had put on weight and I could clearly see the bulge of her stomach low down, pressed against his belt. His hands were on her back inside the jumper. They could not have been seen from the shore. At that time my father was already in England. His name was mentioned in newspapers and from time to time when he wrote home, usually sending a cheque, he included clippings and reviews.

It's possible that Jeannie already hated me because while I lay on the sand she prised a large stone out of the shale and brought it steadfastly towards me, approaching from behind, and dropped it on my chest. The shock almost stopped my breath. I think she may well have been trying to kill me, but at five or six she simply didn't have the height to do it. The stone simply didn't reach a sufficient velocity. It landed flat and made a flat sound that I heard in my body rather than felt and I was too stunned to cry. I feel certain she dropped it on my chest rather than my head because she wanted to stop my heart. Had she been older she would have tried for my brain instead.

By the time I had recovered my breath she was gone. I searched for her, steadily and ruthlessly working my way west through

the hiding places that I knew, and found her near the old tower, crouched in the bracken. She had already forgotten why she was hiding. She had feathers and a collection of bracken fronds, playing some game that involved talking in voices. She did not hear my approach. I caught her from behind by the hair, which was shoulder length at that time, and swung her onto her back. I was on her then and we fought hard, scratching and pulling and in the end we had each other by the hair, slapping and pinching and kicking until rolling off me she struck her head on a stone and began to cry. I can see her now, a pitiful, snotty-nosed waif curled in a ball, holding her head and wailing for her mother. Now I feel nothing but shame at the memory but at the time I laughed at her, because children know that laughing is the most hurtful reaction to pain, and she ran away again.

She was gone for the rest of the day and we had to search the island to bring her home for tea. By then the calm was gone and Richard Wood was talking anxiously about his anchor and declaring repeatedly that he should make a run for it, and my mother was pressing him to stay.

My father's books, and his colour pieces for the Manchester Guardian, depicting a family surviving on an island on the edge of the world, part fiction part memoir, were all the rage when we were children. This was the late 1960s and the world had fallen in love simultaneously with two incompatible mistresses – self-sufficiency and conspicuous consumption. The books represented the former, but my father, I would eventually discover was more given at a personal level to the latter. It is my mother, my sisters and I who held the responsibility of acting out the life he felt bound to follow. We were the ones who lived in what he liked to call the peasant economy.



We called it Castle Island, but there never was a castle only a lonely watchtower, tall enough to survey the whole island and the sound and the ocean beyond, part of a network of revenue gathering outposts, not to mention occasional piracy some time in the fifteenth century, and now just two walls on the side of a cliff where even the crows did not think it safe to nest. He bought the land with the advance from his first book – in those days you couldn't give land away in Ireland – and installed us in what had been the last occupied house on the sheltered eastern shore, near a sweet well, a sheltered anchorage, in the shadow of the apple orchard, a small sandy strand. We were his experiment, he took readings of us as required. We were his instruments and his Utopia.

There were fields where we tried to grow potatoes and salt-burnt kale and onions. Other things too perhaps that I have not remembered. We kept hens one summer and had eggs for breakfast dinner and tea until the time came to pack up and leave again. Then there was nothing we could do for the hens. The following Spring there was no trace of them. We never repeated the experiment. We had a cat who kept the mice at bay – Flanagan was his name. He was white as snow and his eyes were like stones. When father was there he set a fixed trotline of hooks across the mouth of the strand and in the morning he often had fish – plaice, dabs, flounder, bass. Our job was to dig the worms at low tide and hunt under rocks for ragworm, and in the evenings to thread the hooks with the worms and lay them out in a special way. He took photographs. *The children baiting hooks*. We appear in more than one volume. In the morning he pulled the silver creatures ashore and we cooked plaice for breakfast and had bass for dinner. This was before the fishery had been ruined. He wrote about it all, of course: *Living An Island, Loving the World*, by Tom Newman. Now out of print.

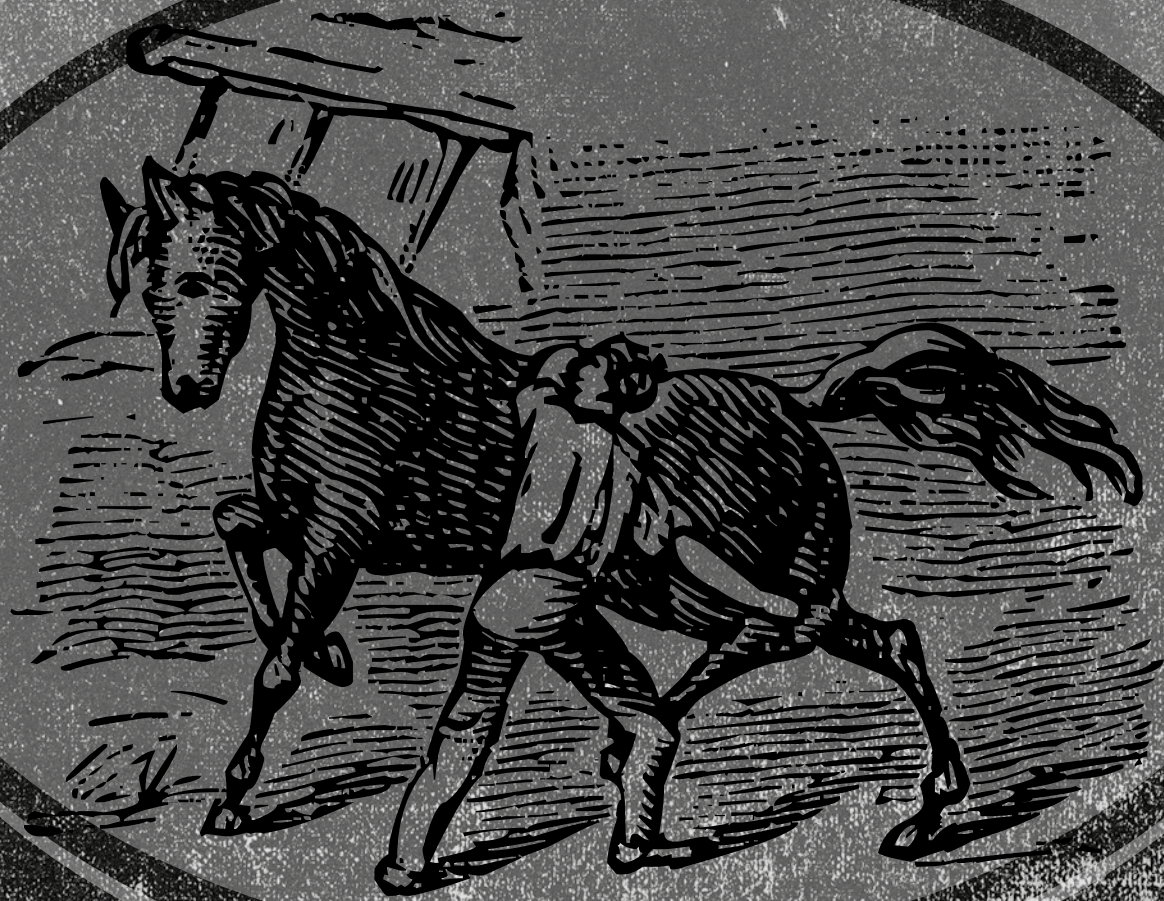
When he was at home the house was warmer, fuller, brighter; it

functioned as a home and a house, and we functioned as a family. When he went away we settled back into our animal existence. After a few weeks without him the house lost his presence. It began to be possible to think of him as a character we had read about, someone of enormous energy and vision whose part had been to bring life to the other characters, a catalyst at work among lethargic elements. But the elements only appeared lethargic. Things happened that no one has ever explained. And the dynamic by which we related was frightening and selfish and destructive. When I think of it now I realise that it was not that he made things happen, but that he prevented things from happening. And when he was away there was no god to stand in the doorway and watch inside and out, and what happened inside the house and what happened in the fields, in the orchard and along the shore were both separate and different, and inseparable and the same.

*Grace's Day*, William Wall  
(Head of Zeus, London, 2018)

★★★





*Poetry*





THREE POEMS BY  
**AFRIC MCGLINCHEY**

*Between before and after*

Most days, my little sister can run for an hour.  
Like an animal, she knows how to hide.  
She watches what goes on in the valley below,  
people passing in vehicles, or watching screens silently  
at the base of the mountain.

Those Lucifer-stars.

She's gone somewhere high, far from those who decide  
who is unacceptable.

Far from what is unacceptable.

I can imagine her singing  
that no one wants death today, that nobody's going to die,  
especially because this is the lightest of borders and her feet feel safe.

*Want an apple?*

*A free ticket?*

Offering nonchalance, then accepting a coffee with her mouth open  
on the third roof on this third week –  
perhaps her luck turning  
into no one refusing to let her stay.

And the bicycle she is riding hands free is not hers, but yes, hers is  
the spirit  
through provinces of irregular shapes and erratic lawlessness.

*Get past the black nights; you'll find open doors,*

I wrote in my letter.

She'll be wondering what's next. Only we'll know  
(involuntary noise) what went before.

Afric McGlinchey

## Three Little Birds

Far above the Triskel, three  
little birds are navigating the blue spectrum,  
wings as delicate as your fluttering.

A kid, a handful of years ahead of you,  
is launching a pink and yellow  
ball into the fountain.

I'm expecting a kick  
any minute...or a series, like the scudding  
cirrus clouds that have just appeared.

June's as fickle  
as a teenager, rushing in and out  
of love. Like you'll be doing, maybe, in 2032.

There's your dad by the oak tree,  
curved like a bass clef,  
scribbling notes into his moleskin,

looking skyward now and then,  
to give ideas space.  
For the moment, you and I

are keeping a safe,  
cross-legged distance.  
It was the morning after,

right in this very peace park,  
that I told him.  
Now he's tuning in.

He's coming over, abandoning  
his task of reconstructing  
the universe.

You feel that, Smidge? You listening?  
He's drumming on my belly, your ceiling,  
*every little thing.*

**Afric McGlinchey**

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This poem was commissioned for a collaboration  
with the Irish Composers' Collective. It is also  
displayed at the Breast Clinic of Cork University  
Hospital.



## Body notes

i

Fish swim, oblivious of song  
until their body leaves water.  
Think of fish sailing  
through air, while a radio  
is playing Dvořák.  
When she was a pipefish wheel,  
she watched the cumulous journeys.  
Cloud on the body of sky.

ii

The tall hill is layered with trees,  
sun bolting to red.  
Think of a rocket, a blaze.  
Soldiers on the horizon.  
Think of the rack of bodies  
as a war machine.  
Think of the rhythm of truth  
as the rhythm of ricochet.

iii

The room is a suitcase  
and does not belong to the doll.  
The walls are a swallow of blood.  
The stigmata is male.  
Think of the notes of his bones.  
Think of the pit; think of descent.  
This is otherness. Sometimes  
the body whimpers.

iv

The tongue is the keeper of flame,  
especially when singing.  
Think of the tone as a swooning,  
nakedness as intuitive.  
Think of light through a dream.  
Now a body is unlocking a door,  
spilling a cup,  
blooming with scales.

### Afric McGlinchey

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An earlier incarnation of this poem, titled *The Ignorance of Fish*, was commended in an Oxford Climate Change competition and published in their anthology. This version is published in a chapbook titled *Invisible Insane* (SurVision, 2019)





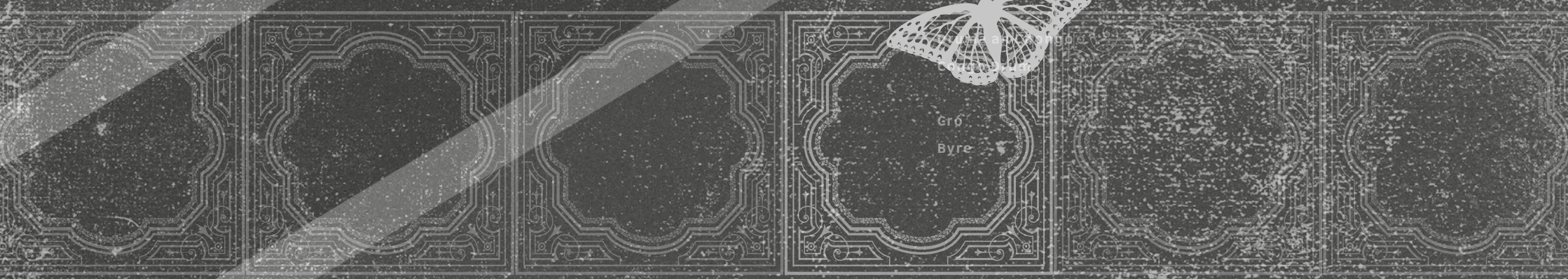
THREE POEMS BY  
**AILBHE  
NÍ GHEARBHUIGH**

WITH TRANSLATIONS BY  
**BILLY RAMSELL**

Tar Éis na Réabhlóide  
After the Guillotine



Cró  
Byre





## Tar Éis na Réabhlóide

Tar éis na Réabhlóide  
cuireadh fiacha fola  
ar gach mac tíre;

Gan le déanamh  
ach a cheann a stolladh  
tar éis na Réabhlóide.

Fiche nó níos daoire  
ar choileán tollta  
gach mic tíre;

ar ainmhí fásta  
daichead punt bronnta  
tar éis na Réabhlóide.

Caoga an luach  
má bhí sí ag súil,  
gach iníon tíre;

Céad caoga an duais  
ar mharfóir daonna  
i gcló mhic tíre  
tar éis na Réabhlóide.

Sealgaire nó creach na héinne  
tar éis na Réabhlóide.

**Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh**

## After the Guillotines

After the guillotines  
A blood debt was settled  
On each wolf's head;

The one thing needful  
was grey necks to sever  
after the guillotines.

Twenty or more  
for the run-through pup  
of any wild cur;

Creatures full grown  
fetched forty a head  
after the guillotines.

Fifty marks were marked  
for the terrified prize  
of a still-breathing she-wolf;

Fifty and a hundred  
were laid for each man-killer  
for each fierce head  
after the guillotines.

So choose to hunt or be hooded bird's meat  
after the guillotines.

Translated by **Billy Ramsell**

## Druma an Chongó

San áit a labhraítear *Kele*  
tá ceol tonúil na teanga  
ar bhéalaibh na gCongólach  
arbh íseal nó géar gach siolla.

Roimis an teileafón  
bhí teanga eile acu  
– teanga an druma –  
a chloistí i rithimí mírialta  
an bhodhráin sa dufair,  
macalla á iompar  
trí fhás tiubh,  
buillí tolla an bhongó,  
buillí géar ‘gus íseal.

Bhíodh sárdhrumadóir i ngach baile  
is tuiscint na ndrumaí ag cách.

Thuig na hEorpaigh go maith  
nár thuigeadar puinn di.

Ach d’fhoghlaim misinéir amháin í  
– an Sasanach, John Carrington –  
ainneoin go raibh sí i léig,  
ná raibh sí fiú á teagasc  
sna scoileanna glégeala.

Is ní foláir nó gur fhoghlaim  
a bhean í freisin  
nuair a bhuail sí amach  
an teachtaireacht seo a leanas:

*Sprid an fhir ghil  
sa bhforaois  
Tar! Tar!  
go tigh na slinne  
anseo thuas  
sprid an fhir ghil  
sa bhforais  
bean le yams  
ag fanacht  
Tar ! Tar!*

Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh



## Congo Drum

There is a place where today  
Kele is spoken,  
a tonal language  
where Congolese lips  
make each phoneme a sharp or a flat.

Before telecommunication  
there was another tongue here  
– a language of drumming –  
heard in irregular rhythms  
of stretched skins in the jungle  
an echo that carried through undergrowth  
the hollow beats of the bongo  
the sharp beats, the flat beats.

Each village chose one drum virtuoso  
but all understood the percussion and code.

The Europeans who came to the jungle knew  
well  
that tapped language for a known unknown.

But one missionary learned it  
– an Englishman, John Carrington –  
though by then it was weakening,  
was considered hardly worth teaching  
to the children in their brand-new schoolrooms.

And it was obvious  
his wife had learned it as well  
when she beat out to him  
the following broadcast:

*White man spirit  
in the forrest  
Come! Come!  
to our hearth  
on the heath  
white man spirit  
in the forest  
Come! Come!  
a woman is waiting  
with yams  
Come! Come!*

Translated by **Billy Ramsell**

## Cró

Címid í ag tomhas an raghaidh sí isteach:  
méid na trucaile trí fhráma an dorais,

Chonaiceamar a leithéid roimhe seo,  
éiginnteacht ar an tairseach,

Ach ní gá di bheith idir dhá chomhairle,  
slogfar í ar aon nós isteach i ríocht seo an teasa.

Tá scata again anseo cheana,  
súile éisc orainn is sinn ag cur allais;

Tá an caife sa phota lag agus bog  
is tá dream ag faire go géar ar an gclog,

Formhór againn beag beann ar an uair  
just ag maireachtaint ó néal go búir,

An t-ocras ag diúl orainn le fada, le stáir,  
an smior súite as gach cnámh,

Gleo damanta na háite seo ag réabadh,  
cogarnaíl is geabaireacht is scréachadh.

Tá sí fós ar an tairseach ag faire isteach  
ach níl aon dul siar aici ná aon teacht as.

Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh

## Byre

We measure her measuring will she come in,  
will her carriage pass through the doorway.

We've registered this kind of thing before,  
uncertainty at the threshold.

But no need for her - between two words- to hesitate,  
she'll be swallowed anyway, into this kingdom of heat

There's a scatter of us here already,  
salmon-eyed and sweating,

the coffee in our coffee-pots sweet and ineffectual.  
A few of us monitor the clock on the wall

but most wouldn't give you spilt milk for the hour,  
stationed here between drowsiness and roaring,

the hunger sucking at us, braon i ndiaidh braon,  
the matter sipped out of each bone

Oh how this cursed acoustic titillates and stabs,  
the whispering and the shrieks and jibber-jabber

And still she cogitates athwart the doorway  
But the only way out for her is to come in.

Translated by **Billy Ramsell**





## ANA ŠPEHAR

### Beamish

That feeling of you, so soft on my lips  
So firm under my fingertips.  
The taste you leave in my mouth, so sweet.  
Incomparable, unforgettable, the ultimate treat.  
Since the first time I felt you  
I can't get you out of my mind.  
You're the one that I want  
You're the best of your kind.  
Me and you, it was love at first sight.  
If my day is bad I know that you will make it right.  
I find comfort in your softness  
There is safety in your darkness.  
You are my desire, you put out my fire.  
You extinguish my thirst.  
For me you will always be the first.  
You will always be my biggest wish  
You, my lovely pint of Beamish.

Ana Špehar





## BETTY O'MAHONY

### Jewtown

The last time I went there it was summer.

I was drawn back to the small red brick house  
where my grandmother used to tell me about  
hearing the Yiddish murmurings

on a gentle cushion of wind.

I can still taste the sour emissions from the gasworks  
and recall the factories beckoning to the workers

from the tree lined avenue of the marina

where the ships raising anchor at the docks

would blast their intentions through funnelled horns  
to the citizens of the city still wrapped in sleep.

These comforting thoughts transport me back

to Jewtown, the forgotten refuge in a city that was  
a salvation for another generation of the lost.

### Betty O'Mahony





**BILLY  
RAMSELL**

**Lament for Christy Ring**

*to my father*

Aboriginal, electrical,  
his great bulging eye

amid the stadium's temper  
amid the furies and exultations  
of the great-coated stands,  
as he lopes in a bull's diagonal goal-ward.

Improbable balance  
of ball on broad *bas*,  
on his stick of ashy liquidity  
that's rippling, eel-flexible, alive.

And now his body it is liquid too,  
an impressionist version of itself  
as he slights the wall of three defenders,  
pours himself through some improbable gap  
and on the other side re-solidifies.

He swerves, ducks his shoulder, elegantly jerks.  
And what gap now between thought and act,  
his software melting together with the chassis that carries it,  
his spirit and firmware fusing?

And is it only in his own mind  
the underwater silence for his backswing,  
for his shape's familiar coil into potential  
for the glance, the pull and the connection?  
And the cork-hearted ball  
becomes nothing at all

is too nimble, too cute for the eye  
and the goalkeeper's beaten,  
and Clare and Tipp and Kilkenny are beaten  
and the terraces inhale themselves  
and the air is vibrating in shock and in awe.

Patricia Horgan's was the last face he saw.  
She stepped out for the messages  
and walked into history.  
She went to buy butter  
and became a minor character

His chest clenched, clenched and accelerated,  
bucked and ratcheted,  
in the eye of the forming throng  
as he flopped there watching  
behind her cow-eyed gentle expression  
the usual mergers of cumulus, a crow,  
and the gulls at their shrill affairs over Morrison's Island  
until the clouds themselves clouded over.

She said: *Ní fheádfá an fear sin a adhladhach.*  
*Mór an peacadh an fear sin a adhladhach.*  
*You couldn't bury that man.*  
*It'd be a sin to bury that man.*

And to this day I still can't bury Christy Ring.

We'll carry his washed and scented remains,  
in procession, by candlelight, by hand-held electric light,  
from the cemetery at Cloyne  
to an undisclosed location in the midlands,

shoulder him into a mossed-over dome,  
to the burial room  
through the long corbelled tunnel,  
and in that chamber of must and slow-tutting stones  
lay him out on a bier of amethyst  
that's been carved, that's been perfumed  
with palm and with cinnamon.

And on all sides  
the surprisingly petite skeletons of our ancestors,  
the priests, the chieftains,  
all the princes of swordplay and laughter:

their careful lines of dowry and cousinship  
all merged in a carpet of loam,  
the victories, the enmities rusted,  
and the quarrels, ah the quarrels all gone,  
the quarrels all long processed by worms.

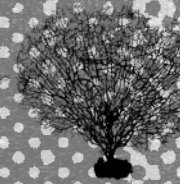
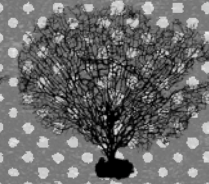
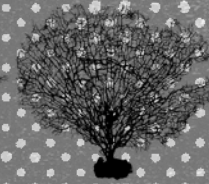
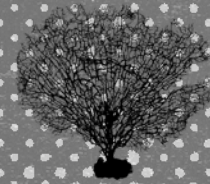
Leave him there in that society of bone  
and walk back through sock-drenching grasses,  
the spiders and the daisies, water cresses,  
past one particular field of rape outside Edgeworthstown  
that stretches in primrose,  
that soaks up the buttery sunlight of late morning,  
that never knew his name to forget it.

*after Seán Ó Tuama*

**Billy Ramsell**



**CATHY RYAN**





## Once

Once I was a skyscraper  
Touching the clouds over Shanghai  
A piece of earth air fire and water  
Moulded into brick after brick  
Piece of steel after piece of steel  
The imagination of a man  
Whose brain I was once a part of  
Passed down through the skeins  
Of memory and patterns  
Black skin passed through the loins of men  
The wombs of women the seeds of flowers  
The breath of mountains  
The pulse of oceans  
The flicker and bite of fire  
Once I was in a dark dank putrid  
Prison cell my only pleasure  
Ejaculating onto the handle of my cell door  
So the sticky seed kissed itself to the warder's hand  
Once I was the lips and tongue  
Of a witch looking for god  
In the beauty and pleasure of the  
Human body in the herbs  
In the dancing in the nakedness  
In the wind of separation  
The tearing of childbirth  
Once I was a piece of coral  
Filling around the creatures

And secrets of the seas  
Once I was a murderer  
The lust to take life  
Smash it to pieces and try to keep it in one place  
Driving me through moment to moment  
Once I was a piece of sky  
Changing texture changing colour  
Every time you looked at me  
Because you looked at me  
Once upon a time  
Once upon all times

Cathy Ryan





All things are possible given enough sky.

**DAN JOHNSON**





**04:57 AM**

The seagulls congregate to hear my silent preaching as I walk through the vacant void of Grand Parade and over the arch of the footbridge.

The River is risen to meet me, lapping the high water mark, reaching up to lick the mossy underbelly of the bridge that bears my weight.

Flags flap and snap and trash skitters on the pavement with a musicality that is pregnant with the dew drops of quiet after a long night of work.

The drunks that I pass walk empty steps. They do not understand the beauty of the canvas of nightsilence that gives me pleasant pause.

What secrets might the predawn September breeze whisper in my ears? The quill is in my hand, gifted by the gulls, while the city sleeps to wake hungover.

The arching spider eyes of Finbarr's house meet mine from atop their graveyard mound and the golden glow of streetlamps dissolves us like butter in a frying pan.

On dirty pavement and granite stone of yesteryear, how many walks have you seen, old Saint? These absurd and lofty thoughts trip over soggy containers

That once were womb to chips, cheese, and garlic. The décor of the moment: vomit confetti, banana peels, glitter of cheap cans that leak faded laughter.

It's a strange sensation. This aloneness that is not loneliness. The way I can walk in the middle of the road, every street my own Grand Parade.

I see it when it's all over, the stagehand that wades through the climactic streamers when the final curtain has closed and all the actors have taken their bows.

The Lee, the river, is verse and has stretched out its hand to guide me on a stream, carrying me across and around itself to the final dark of my bed.

**Dan Johnson**





# DEBORAH ONIAH

## Belonging and Becoming

I am here  
But do I belong here  
These are some of the many questions I ask myself sometimes  
And everyday I am finding different answers to my questions

Being here  
I am becoming stronger, wiser, better, healthier, free-er  
I am learning new thing  
I am becoming a better version of me

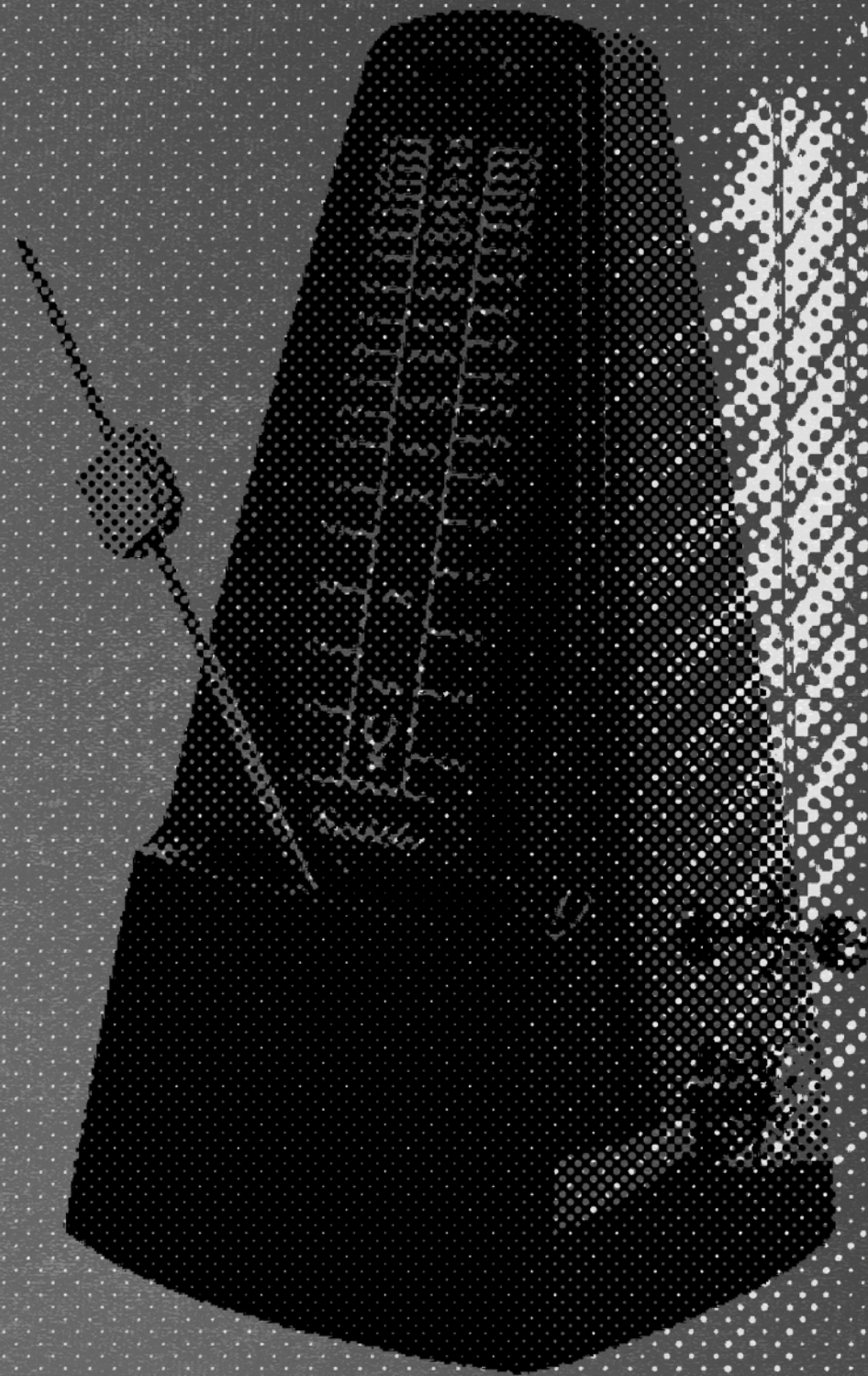
Isn't that how life is supposed to be?  
Isn't that why we are created  
To find ourselves and our strength

Nowadays I feel a sense of belonging knowing that I am not alone,  
but still with all my personal growth and becoming I still struggle  
with separation in my head sometimes and I tell myself it's all in my  
head, I am not treated separate

I am here in my new community I am becoming and truly I Belong.

**Deborah Oniah**





**DEBRA FOTHERINGHAM**



## The Siren

In Utah, the light  
through the window slats  
it sings so steady  
it pulses with no  
accent, with no rests  
with no crescendo  
and the shadows move  
across the gray wall  
like a metronome  
over the guitars  
over framed albums  
hung in the same spots.  
The paint has faded.

In Cork, the light is always shifting  
a demonstration of dynamics  
gliding  
from breathy to  
belting sliding from  
pianissimo  
to fortissimo, an aria performed through a pop filter  
of clouds  
playing out over my thighs.

I came here to  
tune out the siren  
that sings of safety in steadiness  
and startle my  
heart  
with these sudden movements  
these shimmering melodies through the glass.

**Debra Fotheringham**

# DOIREANN NÍ GHRÍOFA

## From Richmond Hill

Home from hospital, you doze in my arm, milk-drunk,  
all eyelashes, cheeks and raw umbilical, swaddled  
in the heavy black smells of the brewery.

Your great-grandfathers worked all their lives in that factory.  
Every day they were there, breathing the same air, hoisting  
barrels, sweating over vats where black bubbles rose like fat.

At dusk, they poured into pubs and ordered porter,  
neat black pints lidded with white silk, thick as cream  
from frothing milk, and their replies were always the same:

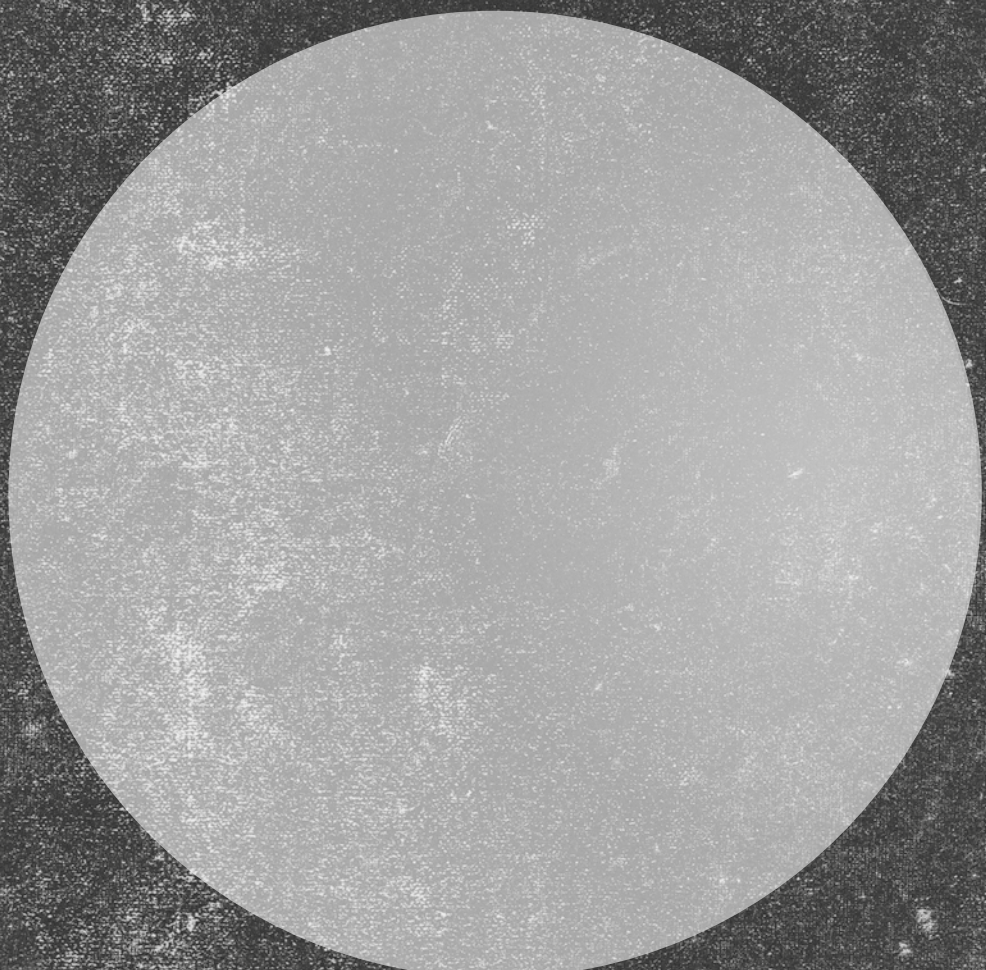
the gasp, the nod. Down gullets and guts went the porter,  
went the pay, went the nights and days. Every day  
the same — coins slapped on the counter. No change.

In my arms, you stir. A thousand streetlamps  
flicker to light in the dusk. As I watch your eyes open,  
the reek of roasting hops knits a blanket of scent around us.

**Doireann Ní Ghríofa**



# ELAINE DESMOND



## Moon-Wish

Will you right me he asked of Moon,  
let night-sharp words shower down  
through swaggered light.

Something will write me said he to Moon,  
to clouds like sand drifts upended,  
pulling towards night's cyclops.

Emptied sycamore tense themselves upwards,  
a fingery reaching he copies, pen and paper  
in each hand, pointing his divining rod.

Distant dogs bark their opinions back  
and forth against ocean's long sliding echo,  
that sound of all sound, like a deity's exhale

or some great waiting over the world.  
Moon make your shape on him, mark  
him with some kind of easy wildness.

And then, then a curlew calls, loops over  
everything that matters, trills through  
solid shapes, brings him back —

pushing moonlight through his bones,  
his meaty self, priming every cell.  
And when no one talks again

he returns inside to less bright  
fireside, speaking with flame, freely,  
of what birdsong might be.





THREE POEMS BY

**GERRY MURPHY**

## The Algebra of Algebra

(for Jack Healy)

How were you to know,  
Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi,  
when you restored Algebra  
to the West as a parlour game,  
all those years ago,  
that it would prove to be  
an intractable bone of contention  
between my soutane-wearing,  
cane-wielding, frothing-at-the-mouth,  
Maths teacher and me.



## **Tito to Stalin 1948**

(for Slave Dimoski)

That's five assassins  
you've sent,  
Comrade Stalin,  
five failed attempts.  
If you don't stop,  
I'll send one to Moscow,  
I won't need to send another.

## **Fur**

(after Pere Quart)

What can we fashion  
from the skin of the supermodel?  
A winter coat for the vixen?  
A spring jacket for the mink?

**Gerry Murphy**





THREE POEMS BY

**JAMES HARPUR**

## Gougane Barra

The mist sucks in our car to a world  
That's pure except for leaves that drop  
like bits of flame or scraps of gold.  
We arrive just as the drizzle stops;  
The lake deepens the unpeeling hills.

The pilgrim hostel has no guests.  
The chapel's closed; and at the well  
We marvel at a sign's request  
To refrain from throwing in our pence –  
As if officials could outlaw  
Whistling or smiling, song and dance.

We walk beside the lake, and sure  
Enough the shallows buff a mine  
Of coins, like amber eyes of fish,  
That keep lit, and hard, the faith behind  
The spinning moment of each wish.



## Finbarr and the Serpent of Gougane Barra

Did it exist?

For hours I'd scan the surface  
Hope for a splash, a shadow in the water,  
Anything  
to puncture the mysterious.

At night I'd set the traps with squeaking bait.  
But nothing came  
except a badger and an otter.  
Yet still I felt its presence by the lake.

At last, I snapped: I drove the serpent out  
With curses shouts – I exorcised the beast  
Along with every slithering scaly thought.

But soon ... I could not bear the certainty  
Of absence, emptiness.  
I headed east  
To settle where the plains of marshes lie

And built a trap, a cave-like oratory;  
And here I pray for god  
to coil around me.

## St. Kevin and the Blackbird

I never looked, but felt the spiky feet  
Tickling my outstretched hand. I braced my bones,  
My heart glowed from the nestling layered heat

And later from the laying of the eggs  
Heavy, as smooth and round as river-rolled stones  
Warm as the sun that eased my back and legs.

When I heard the cheepings, felt the rising nest  
Of wings, the sudden lightness, cooling airflow  
On my fingers, I did not know the test

Had just begun – I could not bend my arms  
But stood there stiff, as helpless as a scarecrow,  
Another prayer hatching in my palms ...

Love pinned me fast, and I could not resist:  
Her ghostly nails were driven through each wrist.

James Harpur



THREE POEMS BY

**JOHN FITZGERALD**

## 1 WTC

A schoolyard in Tribeca, mid-morning,  
mid-winter, shrill cries swarming like gulls  
around a figure in a long leather coat who  
consents with a smile to take each rubber  
ball and punch it with the top of his  
piston fist high into the air, up where the  
children's faces follow their eyes beyond  
fist, beyond head, beyond steel roof, to each ball  
at its exhilarating but dependable point of fall,  
and indifferent to the continuing upward going  
of this glimmering backdrop to it all: this one  
thing that will become everything that is  
impossible and beyond reasonable reach, on  
the first unexpected sight of the rest of their lives.



## Hen Boy

It's how he handles animals that matters most to him. Out walking yesterday, we came across a racing pigeon crash-landed in a stream, its neck unscrewed from a swollen body, ringed legs mangled—but the eyes still bright, and so he steeped it into sleep, deaf to our disgust; the two escaping frogs I stopped the mower to point out to him, how he tracked down each one among the docks, homing them both into open-hearted hands—just as all the hens ran amok when *Whitey No-name* speared a third and paddled off, jelly limbs limply flapping, the others bearing down in hot pursuit, and he whooping at all creation, like the circus-master's son.

## Seeing Clear

*for Nicholas*

This spring morning  
the full throttle of a passing tractor  
will draw one of them running out  
to stare down at the gap between the piers,  
wait for the flash revelation: whose tractor it is  
and what they're up to on a Sunday.

And sure enough, I see him  
standing on the lawn  
in his favourite jumper,  
a hand raised to shade his eyes,  
brown curls catching at the tips  
a glint of auburn from the sunlight.

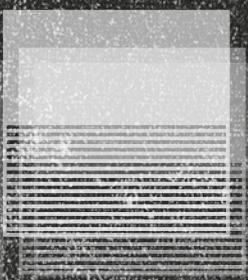
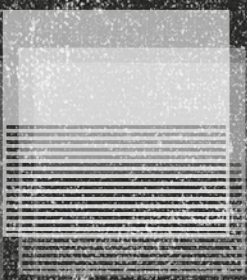
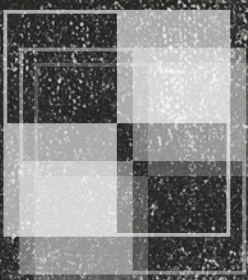
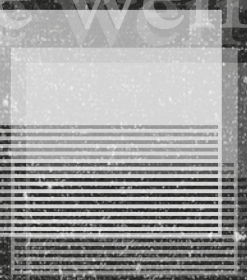
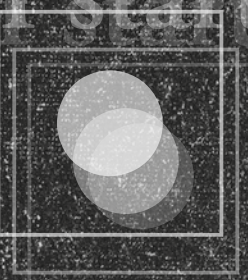
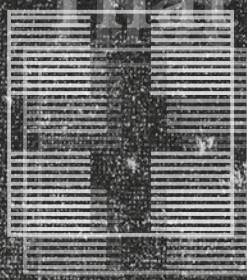
He turns and waves to me, and I wonder  
if my real purpose in returning here  
has been to make good the past,  
ensure that someone gets it right this time  
so that, even if only for an instant,  
this much can be clear.

John Fitzgerald



TWO POEMS BY  
**KATHY D'ARCY**

That I start at the weir





## River Lee<sup>1</sup>

What I am/

I am water, black and still, far  
away at the dam, just waiting until –

I am many  
am one  
I am always  
new/

I am you, but not you, you  
are talking to me  
about me/

I am filling the shape  
of the ones who made me  
I am filling the places  
you let me/

You are looking at me  
you are talking about me  
to me/

But I have words still to say/

That I start at the weir, where  
I run over fields, into underground  
car parks, locked boxes, closed rooms/

That I start where I split into two, under  
separate bridges and sometimes  
over and through/

That I start to sing as I run through  
the grass, through the branches of  
trees, through the doors of  
the houses, the hospitals/

That you are walking in me/

That I start where you come to an end  
at the tallest obsessions of you, the  
parts I will run into too, in time –  
you can't build away from me/

That you are sinking in me/

That I start where I leave you behind, at  
the point of the port I am free/

the part where I spread out  
my arms and embrace the sea/

that I start where you end –  
that you have long since  
stopped listening to me.

## Kathy D'Arcy

- 1 The River Lee runs through Cork City. It is named for a monster which lay down on the land forming its bed - 'lay' in Irish is 'luaigh.' The Irish government is currently working on a flood relief plan which involves walling the river off: the 'Love the Lee' movement is asking for a different, possibly more sustainable, approach.

## Girls, Scarecrows and Dragons

Mary was born twice, once,  
and her sisters Mary soon after and before.  
The bumps of their heads uneven the ground,

enrich the mulch of leaves  
so something grows in the shape of a man,  
a man always standing across the road.

When visitors come, an orange  
falls from his hard old hand,  
dimple-belly, to the ground

like an invitation. The maw  
in the centre of the diningroom is uncrossable  
(whorls of old carpet).

The orange could be handed round  
to take the heat of our pink hands,  
germinate.

Mary is both so angry  
that her bodies rotate at the rate of once a year.  
She must surely act.

As it grows older it changes shape,  
smells stronger, begins to kick;  
dimple-cocoon.

The little juice-slits sustained  
from a lifetime of cutting  
drive many mad

but are unnecessary.  
Who is the one who has broken this one  
and this one but left this one alone?

Now he sees us, though we close our eyes  
for the kind of fire on the inside.  
He dropped it to see if it flies.

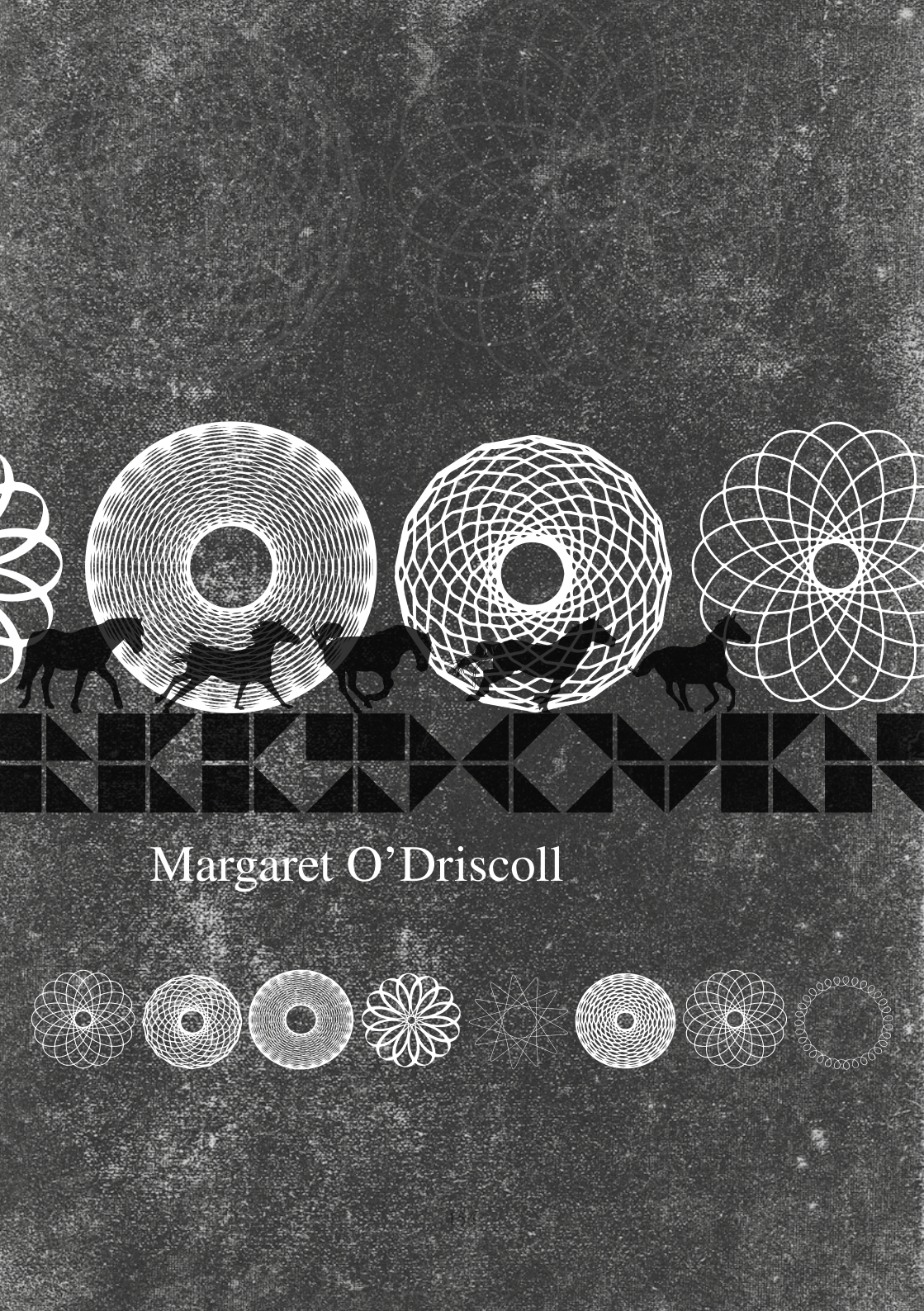
Dark whirl-holes over the edge of the sink.  
The juice is the reward.  
Inside, the juicy reward.

The trick is to play hide-and-seek  
Until it is tricked out of hiding  
And caught.

Will you come out, creature, and show your brazen wingspan?  
It broke when he dropped it, whirled,  
and something showed in the gap.

Kathy D'Arcy





Margaret O'Driscoll

## Shame Will Not Let Me Forget

The opening notes of Beethoven's fifth  
reverberated boom – boom – boom – baam  
around my head,  
four words, four chords, repeated,  
*you're a dark horse,*  
dit – dit – dit – dot,  
her piccolo voice shrilled at top register,  
her beaky nose stabbed the air like a baton,  
*a dark horse indeed.*

Beethoven heard the notes without hearing,  
the words drilled into my brain,  
young student made scapegoat.  
Earlier, we convent boarders had performed  
our own symphony, metal wash bowls  
clattered like symbols down some stairs,  
invaded the sisters silence, a tambourine  
swish of long skirts, the timpani clack  
of hard soled shoes heralded the tirade.

All across the third movement  
days like a dark scherzo hobbled my gallop,  
rode me over failed relationships,  
bound me in a web of shyness,  
rendered me invisible. Only in the finale,  
the movement of destiny have I dismounted,  
and to the sound of the full orchestra  
notes and words suspended.





**THREE POEMS BY  
MARY NOONAN**



## My Mother, Aged Fourteen

Their shoulders are hunched, as if they are cold, or frightened, and they are wearing shy, half-smiles, heads cocked slightly to one side, quizzical, wary. Their skirts are of boiled wool and worsted, their cardigans darned, too short in the sleeves. Their flat brogues are laced with mud.

You are the only one wearing a jacket, and you sit bolt upright, eyes glinting. Is that defiance on your face, or am I asking too much of this worn photo? The sole of your left shoe, which you are trying to tuck behind your right leg, is gaping.

But Dorothy is dancing in your head, clicking the heels of her ruby red slippers to magic herself back to Kansas.

*There's no place like home, there's no place like home.*

Where will you go? To Mayes Drapery in Fermoy, or to William Hill Bookmakers, Picadilly Circus? To rear five children on a new Corporation housing estate in Cork City? Your feet have chilblains.

How could you have known that your children or your children's children would fly to New York to buy shoes fashioned by men with a sense of humour and names like Manolo, Louboutin, Jimmy Choo?

And that their confections would have names too –*Very Privé, Toutenkaboucle* – and plunging necklines, revealing toe cleavage? Or that they would be cantilevered, engineered to tip hips and bottom up and out, for optimum *bootiliciousness*? What do you think of that, my little mother, looking, with serious intent, toward the nun who is snapping you on your last day of schooling? How do you like our foot candy?

Mary Noonan

## Rue St Paul

I see them standing in the small room, the one I rented  
for them on rue St Paul – *Hôtel du Septième Art*.  
A couple from Ireland, in their fifties, in a hotel

on a street crammed with shabby-chic antique shops.  
Do they look out of place ? They had lived in London,  
and in a provincial city, but their blood

was of the rural parishes of county Cork.  
I'm older now than they were then.  
In their unfashionable clothes and poor hair-cuts

they stand by the bed and marvel at the framed  
black-and-white posters on the walls – Bogie, Bacall,  
James Dean – as I outline my plans to shuttle them

between the Sacré Coeur and the Eiffel Tower, taking in  
*a bateau-mouche* trip on the Seine, and they give  
themselves up, willingly, to my banal tourism.

But my mother, menopausal, got up each morning at dawn  
to walk the *quartier* in search of its wild cats. Maybe she met  
the ghosts of the animals from the zoo put there by a king.

And my father scrutinised the French racing pages,  
trying to figure out the PMU betting system. He might  
have got on well with the Portuguese migrants

who lived on the street in the fifties, when TB was rampant.  
I stand there looking up at the boarded windows  
of the cheap hotel, its fake Hollywood nostalgia

so at odds with the street's seventeenth-century houses  
where the spectres of monks and merchants shuffle  
between the roof beams. I see my parents

standing by the bed in the small room, desperate to  
show me they understood what all the fuss was about.  
I hope I was kind to them, but I doubt it.

Mary Noonan



## Elysian

Through green, I view the city's remains. Green glass of this colossal tower, relic of the Tiger years whose sole lodger is me, riding the crystal warship high above what used to be the skyline, now the water line. Pea green from pole to pole.

I spy with my little eye three green copper cupolas, the crowns of City Hall, St Francis and the Courthouse floating on moss-green clouds. A golden flying fish, the city's flag, is still intact. I crouch above algal infinity, a hawk plotting the horizon in vectors.

But my vantage is not safe. Bodies float by. Debris of green cranes. At first, the floor show was all uprooted trees, and cars. Then came the stampede. Murders, cullings. I helped to fling the dead from the penthouse balconies. Now I lie alone on cool marble.

The emerald light of evening floods the empty rooms, long redundant. I listen for sounds, whirring of a lift in the shaft, the whoosh of automatic doors. Ghost lift, ghost doors. When I sleep, I go back to the old city –

the mysteries of the timber yard on Water Street, where my father worked; the temptations of the sidings of the West Cork Railway on Albert Quay; the olive majolica tiles of the Eglinton Street Swimming Baths, bobbing before chlorine-pricked eyes;

our flat on Lower Road, where water rats danced over our beds as we slept. My sister and I would play at skipping on the docks, watching for the timber boats coming up the river from Sweden, the banana boats gliding in from Africa, or Jamaica. And we would wait

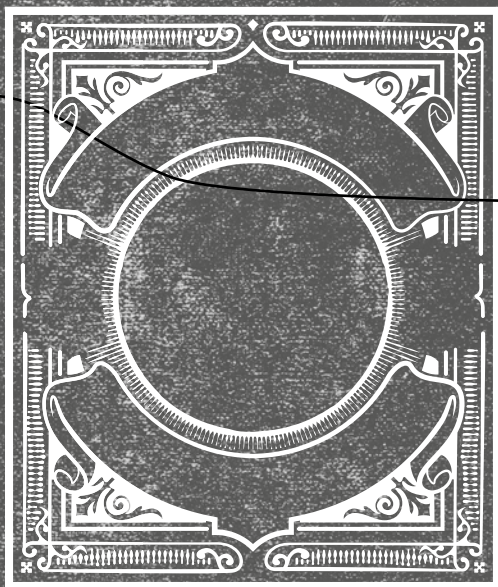
for hours in the rain to snatch our prize: rotting bananas flung to us by the black sailors. That was our playground, the port where Dutch merchants built their watery empire, a market where Bordeaux wine was swapped for butter. I close my eyes, try to conjure butter,

the faces of my father and my sister. Fields of flowers. Elysian fields, where the gods went to die.

Mary Noonan

THREE POEMS BY

## MATTHEW GEDEN



### Coral

*'There shall be corals in your beds,  
There shall be serpents in your tides'*

Dylan Thomas

The coral beach crunches beneath  
our feet, skitters across the floor  
to the left or to the right as we follow  
the wild Atlantic way driven or borne

along by the prevailing winds  
fragments scattered just  
like bread crumbs or immaculate  
sea creatures reduced to dust.

Carraroe is now long past  
but still we turn corners in surprise,  
caught out by one new vista  
a shimmering balm for the eyes.

We too were exotic once,  
swam in technicolour; sea anemones,  
zoanthids, blue coral, soft corals,  
sea fans and sea whips, surreal reverie

in last year's tides. Now we are ground  
down, debris in the ashtray,  
on the carpet or the car seat -  
soon all coral will fade away,

a reddish stain or slight blush  
as the afternoon filters into dusk.



## Caliban on Cape Clear

Here they are, like me, a breed  
apart, tanned leather for skin  
and watchful eyes. There's no need  
to leave; we dine well and spin  
out the hours with stories, spend  
our days as free men in pursuit  
of the Green Hairstreak or tend  
to the melancholy tides of the heart.  
At night, though, this thing of darkness  
rages at the milky sea, seeks  
out the wreckage, the corroding cars.  
Between two worlds the whales pass;  
I cry to dream again, to sleep at last.

Matthew Geden

## By the Wind Sailors

Downwind from 'Stranded' tiny sailors  
lie exhausted, beached blue veins  
quiver in the February flurries

as the word for sea spray  
blisters in from the wave tops,  
gathers in a wash of drifting foam.

They have crossed the lifespan  
of civilisations, survived the piracy  
and sea sicknesses of the High Seas,

now await the swift whack  
of a spade or perhaps the tender  
chops of some rough, slobbering beast.

Matthew Geden

# NEJLA GAYLEN



## The Commandments

In the crisp chatter of wind  
there is purpose and logic

and in the moment when  
it is decided  
that tides shall change  
that times shall change  
that man must yet be different

the wind speaks loudly  
a whisper of history upon its lips

Nejla Gaylen





THREE POEMS BY  
**PATRICK COTTER**



## The Singing Bichon

My dog sings arias but only to me. Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* he knows imperfectly. The *In Paradisum* of Faure's requiem he renders with a strong nasal strain. He can't quite reach all the notes of Purcell's *The Plaint*, but hey, he's just a dog.

He began to sing when I began to ignore him.  
Neither of us can stand each other's company.  
When he shakes his Bichon curls, doggy whiffs tinged with bitter fermentations assault the upper reaches of my nostrils. His piss perfumes the corner of my living room with a pungency made worse by the addition of the mop-bucket's ammonia-based floor fluid. I can't stand him because he smells.  
He can't stand me because I'm impervious to his plaintive, glistening eyes.

Regularly we each need to elude the secret inner lives of our separate solitudes. I, by listening to my music, he by stepping outdoors to sniff the arses of other dogs or to beg attention of passing children.  
After I ignored his whines to be let outside he learnt to sing.  
That first night I could not avoid paying attention to his original interpretation of Raphael Courteville's *Creep, creep, softly creep*. I released him. He arse-sniffed.

The following night I ignored his Courteville and he sang something by Durefle. I once tried to arrange a soiree where I planned to accompany him on cello, my living-room is too bijoux for the pianoforte, but with the house full of guests he had no solitude to escape and no need to sing. He doesn't know I know he sings Rufus Wainwright when he thinks I'm not around.

Smelly bastard.

Patrick Cotter



## Music for Ghosts

As an offering to the ghosts  
I left some music playing  
when I shut the door

on the empty house.  
Even when a house is full  
of ghosts we say it's empty,

empty when you step out  
and there's no one left inside  
breathing. 'Lost in Music' by Sister

Sledge and 'Good Times' by Chic  
both by the same composer.  
You might say if I was truly

considerate of ghosts I would pick  
songs more than forty years old.  
I should leave playing tunes

by Cole Porter or the sort warbled  
by Count John McCormack.  
But I believe playing ghosts

any music in an empty house  
all to themselves while the dial  
of the electric meter spins wild

is a gift and not only the living  
but ghosts too, deserve harmony.  
Even when a house has every wall

lined with books we can call it empty;  
even when plants exhale from inside  
every windowsill we can call it empty;

when I am sitting on the stairs staring  
at the shadows thrown by the morning sun,  
as you sleep under stars in a distant timezone

Patrick Cotter

## The Discoveries of Thomas Fynch

The talk of trees goes mostly unheard by man  
but trees, like people, are full of feeling  
and leaves are their vocal cords.

So discovered Thomas Fynch  
who became aficionado of rustles,  
expert on the Aspen leaf's sonic white poise;

who grew to know pine needles keened  
before their boles were felled for coffins  
and wrote of the chestnut's clack-clack

when slapped by raindrops and the crackling  
of underground fire amidst the ash tree's rooted filigree.  
He was born deaf, but his deafness was banished

when his infant body was passed by the village  
healer through the cleft of a split juniper.  
As the bush healed, the sound of the Earth

grew stronger in Thomas's ears. Among  
his discoveries: the melancholy cry  
of the Serengeti acacia is addressed solely

to giraffes who hear the leaves say "eat me, eat me"  
in clickety giraffe tongue; undersea forests of kelp  
record in analogue on their ululating thalli

the songs of extinct whales, replayed when caressed  
by waters of a neap tide; graveyard yews draw up  
through their roots the weeping of the dead

on All Souls' Day; the protests of gust-ruffled oak leaves  
can be silenced at night by piercing the bark  
with a beloved's toenails, clipped after a clamorous orgasm.

He plans to invent contraptions to help others to hear  
what he and birds and insects hear, by combining  
graphene nanowear with the ear nerves of bluebottles and finches

so even you can listen to the tulip summon the blackbird  
when slugs attack or to the choral symphony  
manuka blossoms sing to burrows of bumble bees.

**Patrick Cotter**





THREE POEMS BY  
**PAUL CASEY**

## International Citizen

The eyes are passports  
as the eyes of wildcats bright beneath the moon  
that say, *we are from here*

as oxygen water sun are  
arctic tern, shearwater, sandpiper, godwit, wheatear  
as monarch, the humpback are

the probing nostrils of newly acquainted  
rhino, hundreds in the pitch black at lake rendezvous  
from miles every which way

dawn leaves only footprints.  
Ghosts in New York, Seoul, Damascus have mouths  
that sound as birds or goats sound

Who drew these lines between us?  
In the daylight, their busy heads control remote bodies  
passport gazes set straight ahead

Paul Casey

## Laughing Lama

*"Difficulty comes with the third mosquito" – Dalai Lama*

*how shall we lift the blindness he asks  
between fits of laughter  
that hides the imperceptible source of their joy?*

when we could all be laughing  
through the day, through loss,  
death. Just imagine the world so

once-stoic, briefcase emissaries now laughing  
chuckling bus drivers, beggars in stitches  
prisoners in spasms, celebratory dustbinmen

judges. guinness book records  
for the longest, loudest howl,  
shriek and scream of laughter

most aesthetically pleasing giggle  
most people laughing at once  
deepest and highest pitches of hysterics

signs in operating theatres  
*No Laughing During Surgery Please*  
competitions for the sweetest

most experimental  
immediate, quickest off the mark bursts of laughter  
most infectious

trios and quartets of laughers  
national orchestras of merrymaking  
and International public laughing holidays

a ministry of mirth  
*it's so simple*  
he sees

takes a breath  
and bursts  
into laughter

**Paul Casey**

\* First published in *Live Encounters*



## Something to Give

I'm an unseen red dari seed  
an untouched sunflower seed  
around a vibrant heart pumping  
vulnerable beats into corrupt atmosphere

The gold I spin to cast away  
the art I build from air  
and a full belly, is hardly privileged -  
is it a privilege to eat?

An unheard horse chestnut seed  
I hand out leaves in the street, the last  
of the year before life finds its beginning  
I gift unearthed weeds to well-suited unhappiness

sprinkle wildflower seeds for my mother  
into grooves between the edges  
where narrow beds keep grass from concrete  
where the lawnmower man can't go

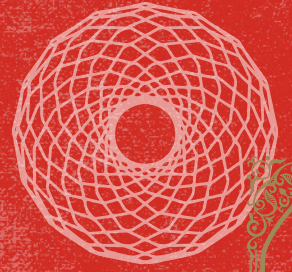
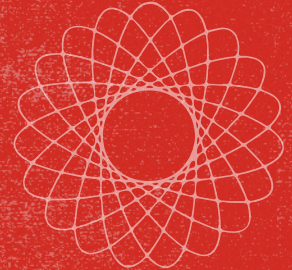
Even spread along the haphazard craters  
remnants of thistle and groundsel  
chickweed, ragwort and dock  
I cover them over

'We can't let the place go to the dogs'  
the landlady barked, she says, as her left knee,  
the one on the polio side, retreats forty-five degrees  
left knuckles whitening over the shillelagh

We'll sort that out mom, have you fed the birds today?  
We don't want them stealing all tomorrow's colour

Paul Casey







The first of a regular series of Cork anthologies – Cork writers, some already well-known and some who will be better known, have contributed poems and prose pieces which celebrate Cork, a city of writers, a city of readers.

*featuring*

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Billy Ramsell

Cathy Ryan

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