

Yesterday
THERE WERE

things

to be done.

NOW,

nothing.

It closes in.

An Outlook

Peter Fallon

FROM STRONG, MY LOVE
(THE GALLERY PRESS, 2014)

They have ruffled
the embers of evening
and flap from its flames.
They come like clockwork,
minutes later every eventide,
a loud returning that proclaims

the row of limes in which
they pause, en route to roosting
in the rookery, a place of rest.
They sketch black scripture
in the sky. They watch
from trees where they don't nest –

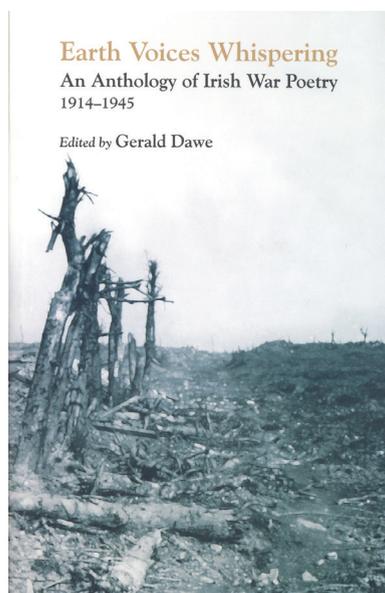
these pairs and threes, tens
and dozens making thousands –
while I, intent on praise
and mesmerized, wonder what,
as they fly by, they might be
and realize: they are the days.

WAR MUSIC

by Myles Dungan

Edited by Gerald Dawe, *Earth Voices Whispering*

THE BLACKSTAFF PRESS, £9.99



Earth *Voices Whispering* comes bearing the weight of being ‘the first collection of its kind’, according to editor Gerald Dawe. It seeks to anthologise Irish ‘war’ poetry and in the process assembles between two covers a disparate band of artists from Pádraic Pearse to Samuel Beckett.

Although the historic period covered by the anthology dates only from 1914 (the opening of the ‘War to end all Wars’) to 1945 (the end of the ‘War that followed the War that was supposed to end all Wars’), the poems themselves reflect some far more recent attempts to come to terms with military conflict, both domestic and international. The anthology is enriched by the poetry of Brendan Kennelly, Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Seamus Deane, Derek Mahon, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Eavan Boland and Paul Durcan. Most were barely out of nappies when World War II ended. It is all the better for their inclusion because some of the material dating from the 1914 – 45 period is more interesting as historical document than poetry. While most of the verse collected is compelling, poignant and riveting, some of the offerings are artless versified musings hardly worthy of being called poems.

With some military historians, and certain British politicians, on a renewed Somme offensive designed to discredit what they perceive to be the leftist caterwauling of Great War poets who have cheekily appropriated the popular ‘memory’ of the conflict, the pages devoted to the poetry of WWI are doubly interesting.

Stephen Gwynn’s ironically titled ‘A Song of Victory’ (written in 1923) is, largely, a eulogy for Tom Kettle. The two had been Irish Party MPs, had both enlisted at advanced ages and had become highly

active recruiters. Kettle, who recognised that he would be remembered, if he was remembered at all, ‘as a bloody British soldier’, is commemorated by Gwynn as follows: ‘You, not unforgetting,/Not without wrench at heartstrings/Yet in a jubilant sacrifice/Offered your life.’

Gwynn’s poem is interesting history, whatever about its merits as a piece of verse. It is the most concise summary, despite its length, of the experience of the Irish serviceman in WWI. He charts the often horrific and debilitating experience of the ordinary soldier and concludes of his fellow Irish recruits:

We trod our way to the end;
We were part of victory:
And in the face of the world
Ireland disowned us.

Kettle himself is represented by only a single poem, the affecting sonnet ‘To My Daughter Betty, a Gift From God’ written only days before his death at the attack on Ginchy in France by the 16th Irish Division. Kettle is erroneously described as having fought with ‘the Irish Brigade during the First World War’. There were numerous ‘Irish Brigades’ in the three Irish WWI divisions, the 10th, 16th and 36th.

One of the most interesting revelations is Thomas MacGreevy, author of a single book of poems published in 1934, critic and director of the National Gallery from 1950–1963, and Great War artillery officer. The title of the anthology is taken from MacGreevy’s short poem ‘Nocturne’ written in memory of Lt. Geoffrey Taylor of the Royal Field Artillery:

I labour in a barren place,
Alone, self-conscious, frightened,
blundering;
Far away stars wheeling in space,
About my feet, earth voices whispering.

The book is full of unexpected nuggets, like this apposite quatrain from the

virtually unknown and unpublished Eileen Shanahan. She worked as a secretary in Woodrow Wilson’s brainchild, the League of Nations, in Geneva. She was clearly not enamoured of the conservative nature of the ‘revolution’ that took power in the wake of the Anglo-Irish treaty of December 1921. Her assessment is succinct and caustic.

O Ireland once as Rosaleen
Your woes were heard across the sea
But now assuaged, we’ve lost a queen
And found instead a bourgeoisie.

Some of the poems represented in the collection, while fascinating in their own way and worthy of inclusion, are truly awful compositions, and they include Austin Clarke’s well-intentioned litany of female revolutionaries ‘The Subjection of Women’. This, for example, is his paean to the unruly Constance Markievicz:

The Countess colled *
With death at sandbags in the College
Of Surgeons. How many did she shoot
When she kicked off her satin shoes?

Professor Dawe is to be congratulated on his disinterment of many pieces of long-forgotten verse, some by unfamiliar poets. Perhaps some were better left buried but Dawe, through his scholarship and diligent research, has made an enormous and invaluable contribution to the burgeoning field of Irish World War I studies. The fact that he is let down by one or two of his poets does not detract from the enterprise.

*To coll (obsolete) is to embrace

Myles Dungan is an historian and broadcaster. He is the author of a number of works on Irish and American history, including two on the Irish experience of the Great War. He is a Fulbright scholar (U.C. Berkeley, 2007 & 2011) and completed his Ph.D. at Trinity College, Dublin in 2012. He presents the weekly *The History Show* on RTÉ Radio 1.

Ticket to the River: the autobiographical

I in poetry

by Tara Bergin

‘Nothing is invented. Everything is invented.’ *Susan Sontag*

Ticket to the River’ is a poker term. It means ‘a hand you intend to play right to the end’, which is a good way of thinking about writing a poem, especially when you are considering who will be the speaker of your words, and how closely they’ll resemble, or differ from, your actual real self and your actual real feelings and experiences. I am not a poker player, but I recently came across *An Introduction to Poker* in a second-hand bookshop, and it seemed the sort of book which might be useful to a poet, especially one who is trying – as I was at the time – to create a dramatic situation in which their poem can take place.

The working title of this article was in fact ‘The Dramatic Voice’, the title of a poetry workshop I taught several months ago, and the views and ideas that are expressed here are based on the sorts of things discussed with my students then. Before I begin, however, it should be pointed out that I taught another class recently, called ‘The Opposite is Also True’. This is worth mentioning because ultimately there is no single or best way into writing poetry: whenever you find a system that seems to work, you can be sure there’s an opposite system that works just as well. Whatever is said here therefore, could be turned on its head and still make perfect sense – a notion which in fact supports the real

advice a writer needs to hear, which is to try to cultivate self-criticism, and have fun exploiting your limitations.

There is usually a moment in a Chekhov play, or a play by Ibsen, when one of the female characters moves towards a window or a door and mentions the weather. She’ll say something like “How hot it is today”, or “It’s so light, still, even though it is night”, and you will know all of a sudden that everything which until then had seemed quite normal and busy and domestic is about to tip over into some kind of intense, nervous anxiety; that all the problems lurking beneath the initial quiet scene will soon be exposed for us to see. It is a thrilling moment – a very subtle turning point – and one which I often think has a great deal in common with poetry.

This is because poems are often entirely centred around a similar kind of turning point, a similar thrilling moment in which we as readers are suddenly made aware of what is really at stake. It may happen in the final couplet of a poem or right at the start, but what the two forms really share, I think, is that sense of underlying tension towards a revelation, that subtle unwinding. And the direction of movement in a poem (like the movement of the character in a play towards the window) is often signified by a similarly subtle use of voice, a particular tone, or pitch.

In fact, considering the personal poetic voice as similar to the sort of voice we might hear coming out of the mouth of a character in a play, allows us to consider the idea that the voice in a poem – the ‘I’ – might also be seen as a combination of both truth and performance. The words that Masha in *The Three Sisters* says and the feelings that she expresses are no less sincere than Chekhov’s own words and feelings – indeed they *are* Chekhov’s words and feelings! – but Chekhov has removed them from his actual self; they have become what you might call first-person-dramatized. A scene has been imagined and a character created, and it is a kind of pretence – you could say – yet it is grounded in reality. I would go further; I would say it *is* reality, just of a different sort.

What this suggests is that a poet, like a playwright or a novelist, is perfectly within her rights to seek representation by making an imaginative leap from her own perspective to that of another character. Furthermore, making that leap can become one of the most enjoyable aspects of writing poems. You may argue that this is simply dishonest, and in one way you would be right. But you could also argue that deceit is as fundamental to the poet’s craft as is telling the truth. The point is this: poems can be fiction; poems can be made up. Is all fiction false? Is all fiction based on untruth?

Is all fiction a lie? No. No more than all metaphors and all symbols are merely fakes; merely *forgeries*. On the contrary, fiction and metaphor and simile, and so on, can sometimes offer us the truest paths to understanding.

From the point of view of the poet then, who is so often working in isolation and drawing on her own feelings, the act of seeking new perspectives can be one of the most rewarding aspects of writing, because it forces you to look beyond yourself and your world and your stifling desk, to make new discoveries – about the basic rules of poker, for example. Seen in this way, the masking of the autobiographical ‘I’ is really just one more part of the formalising process of writing poetry, along with creating rhyme or short lines. And like these, it’s a formalising which is not restricting. On the contrary, it can allow for the greatest of freedoms, and for the greatest rebellions against the conventional.*

Tara Bergin is from Dublin. She recently completed her Ph.D. thesis at Newcastle University, on Ted Hughes’s translations of János Pilinszky. Her first poetry collection, *This is Yarrow* is published by Carcanet Press, and has just been awarded the 2014 Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry Prize.

*As an example, here is a strange poem by Christina Rossetti, in which the objects and emotions appear deeply personal and autobiographical, even though it is written from the point of view of someone who has just died.

After Death

Christina Rossetti
(1830 – 1894)

The curtains were half drawn, the floor was swept
And strewn with rushes, rosemary and may
Lay thick upon the bed on which I lay,
Where thro’ the lattice ivy-shadows crept.
He leaned above me, thinking that I slept
And could not hear him; but I heard him say:
“Poor child, poor child”: and as he turned away
Came a deep silence, and I knew he wept.
He did not touch the shroud, or raise the fold
That hid my face, or take my hand in his,
Or ruffle the smooth pillows for my head:
He did not love me living; but once dead
He pitied me; and very sweet it is
To know he still is warm tho’ I am cold.

1801

Sinéad Morrissey

FROM PARALLAX (CARCANET PRESS, 2013)

WWW.CARCANET.CO.UK

A beautiful cloudless morning. My toothache better.
William at work on The Pedlar. Miss Gell
left a basket of excellent lettuces; I shelled
our scarlet beans. Walked out after dinner for letters—
met a man who had once been a Captain begging for alms.

*

The afternoon airy & warm. No letters. Came home
via the lake, which was near-turquoise
& startled by summer geese.
The soles on this year's boots are getting worn.
Heard a tiny wounded yellow bird, sounding its alarm.

*

William as pale as a basin, exhausted with altering ...
I boiled up pears with cloves.
Such visited evenings are sharp with love
I almost said *dear, look*. Either moonlight on Grasmere
—like herrings!—
or the new moon holding the old moon in its arms.

'1801' IS INSPIRED BY DOROTHY WORDSWORTH'S
THE GRASMERE JOURNAL 1800 – 1803
(OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1991)

Gallaras

Simon Ó Faoláin

I.M. SEAMUS HEANEY

Bairneach buan
Ag searradh
Uaidh ualach
Síoraíochta

Bunrud beacht
Gan aon locht,
Barrfhoirfeacht,
Fís mar thost.

Cluintear ceol
Aireagail:
Ceathairéad
Ceathairdhúil’.

Áilleacht mhall,
Éifeacht thar
Ardeaglais
Mheánaoiseach.

Colún aeir
Go scamall,
Seo aisling
Do scafaill.

Cloch ar chloch,
Ghlacfaínn geall
Ná fuair fear
Bás ar d’shon.

A Rí Rinn,
An Darwin
Fé ndear a
Éabhlóide,

Gur bé an
Timpeallacht
A mhúnlaigh
Scéimh is creat?

Nó ar fhás
A cholainn
Amach as
Broinn talún?

Colm cloiche
Gan bun cleit’
Amach ná
Barr isteach

Thuirling ann,
D’fhill sciatháin,
Chrom ar ghor
Go Lá Luain.

Seo mo ghuí,
Mian críonnacht’:
Deonaigh dom’
Dhán simplíocht.

Symphonies

by Thomas McCarthy

Patrick Deeley *Groundswell:*

New and Selected Poems

DEDALUS PRESS, €14.99

Paul Perry *Gunpowder Valentine:*

New and Selected Poems

DEDALUS PRESS, €14.99

These two very substantial books mark a moment of high seriousness in the publishing life of Dublin's Dedalus Press. Their more than two hundred pages of space, coupled with very substantial and considered Introductions, speak to us of a strong presence in publishing. There is nothing tentative about their heavy presence: they are a publisher's statement of permanence by an assertive and ambitious house. Reading them together in the days when I heard of the death of the great William Roth, founder of Colt Press in San Francisco, supporter of Coracle Press and Atheneum Books, is doubly moving. Publishing poetry is a serious business; over time it is almost as important for a culture as the making of poems. Publishers conduct the orchestra and what gets published is a kind of orchestral scoring; publishers, literally, determine what we hear.

Patrick Deeley and Paul Perry very nearly belong to different generations, the one born in the bleak 1950s, the latter born in the '70s. Deeley is the laureate of the Callows, Perry is the poet of dislocated presences. Deeley recreates childhood on the Shannon flood plain with a photographic fidelity, while Perry is a modernist exiled in the present moment, waiting in the hinterlands for an invitation to history. Deeley plays rhythm to Ó Direáin and Hartnett, while Perry is the poet in dark glasses playing saxophone behind Kevin Barry and Paul Muldoon – it is a generational thing, but also a matter of sanguinity or discomfort with national orthodoxies. Theo Dorgan in a simply brilliant introduction to Deeley's book rightly identifies his descriptive tough-mindedness, and an imagination that is 'as much at home in our common high and low cultures as any of his contemporaries'. His range is wide, both in theme and tone, from 'The Mantle' ...



Scant sloe bush and shellacking
hailstones
saw him off, who shouted
hay and oats for the Mullagh goats,
eggs and rashers for the Corbally slashers

... to the rhythms of 'Riviera' ...

we watch the Cannes lighthouse
repertoire.
And exaggeratedly dance each other up
Palais steps
the stars take to wave to flickering
multitudes

... or the sharp recollection of the
Chernobyl disaster, in what must be one
of the finest poems ('His First Word') of
nuclear tragedy in any language:

voluntarily entering the hell-mouth
which would breathe on him
for three hours as he fought to keep
the reactor roof from caving in. He
recalls Tisschura,
Vashchuk, others who fell.
Now he awaits death, or a miracle ...

But, with Deeley, it all begins with the
'Callows Water Barrel,' that omphalos of his

personal making: 'Child, you seek for what/
can't be proved by trawling a butterfly net.'
This water barrel is the cave of origins; and
the axis of his imaginative life is the line
between that water barrel and the Dublin
suburbs, as real as the Nebraska trains that
carry art through the mind of Willa Cather
to settle upon a *New Yorker* reader. This
is how Deeley's art comes to us. And the
poems here have accumulated like a second
growth of timber: indeed, he is a king of
wood, of ash, pine, Dargle oak, pollarded
beech and monkey-puzzle. Acutely aware
of life cycles and the cyclical nature of
husbandry, even in Rathgar, Deeley accepts
that 'the world is busy forgetting us even
now' as he writes in 'Song for a Centenarian'.
There are poems here of very serious
ambition, poems such as 'At Pompeii',
'Fastnett', 'Fear Bréige' and 'Fruit Man,' that
deserve long and considered exegesis. This
New and Selected Poems is a reminder, to
those who need it, that here is a true poet
whose work will survive as a crowning
privilege in our generation.

The cool Paul Perry is a different fish in
the Irish water barrel. Highly educated and
widely travelled, dislodged and dislocated,
he is the Desmond O'Grady of Rome

and the Montague of rue Daguerre. His poetic antenna receives signals from the fading pulses of Denis Devlin and Brian Coffey; his art yearns to be the residua of Beckett's 'Slow black with ruin true refuge'. The honesty of his enterprise is beyond question and, therefore, his books accumulate like a Francophone journal of technical heartbreaks. Siobhán Campbell states the case shrewdly in discussing the superb book *108 Moons*: 'We see now that a project which did not seem "Irish" as such has nonetheless been necessarily driven by a set of obsessions emanating from, but not confined to, the contested state.'

Perry puts it best in 'August 30, 2012':

and so my mother is weeping and
and my brother wants a lift
lift lift home
he talks talks talks talks to himself
and says says says Ireland is an
everywhere ...

That Everywhere is full of drama, full of late arrival and missed departure in the widest social sense. In 'Seven Days in Chicago' we have this:

On the first day
you said let there be pain
and there was

While in 'Variation on the word "love"', 'one of my friends dies in a parachute/in the ice' and in 'Ingredients for a Childhood Saturday', the more orthodox Dublin childhood of, say, Valentine Iremonger, is vectored with fear:

lay low, hide,
play dumb and for god's sake
say

nothing of your whereabouts
to the buddha of insomnia,
the owl, or his friend,

otherwise known as judas, the crow.

This is poetry as life in dramatic close-up. Perry makes consistent, determined efforts to get close to the action, to measure life minutely, to resist the 'average real', as Camus might say, while conferring unity upon it. His descriptions are neither easy nor conventional. While walking the long road to Templeogue in 'The Red Dogs of Wicklow', he is 'hesitant, unsure, afraid of disease//and cold with rain' – and, in 'Ode to a Car Crash', he introduces us to 'one beggar who found the calamity/took himself a coat he still wears today'. This is part of his honest effort to find unity in remnants, to rake over the tea leaves of Irish life rather than consume the tea; in other words, to read Ireland and not succumb to it, 'to make lists and listen'.

After *108 Moons: The Selected Poems of Jurge Ivanauskaitė*, Perry's aesthetic, his tone and forms, ascended a watershed. His later work is finer, less dramatic on the surface, but deeper and more mediated by the ambiguities of both language and memory. The work becomes more complex precisely because it is more distilled. In *Gunpowder Valentine* he bends to the water but drinks very cautiously of conflict, massacre, and the clothes of buried children. This *New and Selected* is a record of self-conscious modernist ambition, challenged and tempered by the narratives available to a white male of European temperament. His poems have created an important voice. They are a reminder to us slightly older folk that high ambition is still abroad; and that we live in a literature of perpetual, sometimes sinister, departures:

we gathered at the train station
it was May
we had been chosen

Thomas McCarthy's most recent collection is *The Last Geraldine Officer* (Anvil Poetry). His awards include the Patrick Kavanagh Prize and the O'Shaughnessy Award for Irish Poetry.

ON BLUE POLES

by Caitríona O'Reilly

It would be nice if poetry wrote itself. Occasionally, when I was younger, I had the feeling that it did: poems were likely to be written quickly, in a flush of enthusiasm it pleased (flattered) me to call inspiration. Sometimes so quickly that in some kind of weird hippocampal storm I had the feeling I was remembering something and copying it down rather than making it up as I went along. Those were the best times. As one gets older the realisation dawns that the hotline to Parnassus was little more than the excited firing of youthful synapses and that the process happened quickly because one's brain was younger. Idleness was also a factor. Now it feels more like hanging onto a rising balloon, or chasing after a snatch of melody just on the edge of earshot. I'm referring to the initial draft only here: the spit-and-polish stage can take anything from days to months to years.

I had got it into my head, after reading a biography of the American painter Jackson Pollock, that there were uncanny similarities between his 'predicament' and that of the English yachtsman Donald Crowhurst. If I had stopped to think about how irrational this comparison was I would never have attempted to write a poem about it, but the initial enthusiasm for a poem can feel a bit like an ill-advised infatuation: in your heart of hearts you know it's a questionable idea, but you can't help hoping it might all turn out for the best anyway.

Crowhurst was a participant in the *Sunday Times* Golden Globe yacht race in 1968. This weekend sailor and unflagging optimist found himself in an unenviable position: deeply in debt, having mortgaged his house and business on his participation in the race, he knew he was unprepared and that his boat was unseaworthy. Knowing he wouldn't survive the Southern Ocean and unwilling to let his family and main financial backer down, he falsified his position and hung around for a couple of months in the Southern Atlantic, waiting to rejoin the race in last place once the other participants sailed back up the Atlantic en route to England. However, as a number of the other competitors dropped out or came a cropper, Crowhurst realised that his self-built trimaran, the *Teignmouth Electron*, would come in the apparent winner of the 'elapsed time' race, i.e. with the single fastest global circumnavigation. Crowhurst knew that his falsified logbooks would be subject to close scrutiny and that an even greater humiliation, and probable legal action, awaited him. His yacht was discovered on 10 July 1969, unoccupied and drifting. A logbook he left seemed to indicate that, under immense pressure, he had gone insane and committed suicide by jumping off the boat. The ship's chronometer was also missing.

It struck me that Jackson Pollock was similarly irrevocably committed: to a style that he felt was a dead-end. Snide critics calling him 'Jack the Dripper' probably didn't help, and his alcoholism and growing fame seem only to have reinforced the feeling he held that deep down, he was a fraud. His struggle with the huge canvas, *Blue Poles* is a case in point: desperate to find a way out of the tangled, formless mass of paint, he followed his wife Lee Krasner's suggestion of introducing the lines or 'poles' as a focal point, and these seem to me to act like magnets, organising the chaos behind them in the way that a magnet orders iron filings into a distinctive pattern. I had wanted to write about *Blue Poles* for a while, but poems about paintings are tricky, and the similarity I perceived between Crowhurst and Pollock offered me an opportunity, a psychological 'in.'

The first lines of the poem were written quickly, as I wanted to get in the idea of freedom itself being disabling, especially in the case of a painter who has abandoned form:

Freedom is a prison for the representative *savant*
addled on bath-tub gin and with retinas inflamed

Pollock, in the way that some artists are, had been 'taken up' as fashionable by *Time* magazine and Peggy Guggenheim, as well as critics with particular axes to grind, and his gruffness and relative lack of education must have made him seem something of a savant, simultaneously courting the attention (and in desperate need of the money) and despising it, and, in the process, himself.

The details that followed emerged from meditating on Pollock as in some sense a representative American artist – faced with a vast imagined hinterland, haunted by the sense of a landscape beyond human influence. This sense of the vastness of space is present in all of the American poets I admire: in Wallace Stevens, in Frost and most extraordinarily in Emily Dickinson. I imagined Pollock reacting similarly, casting

such desperate lariats
across space, repeatedly anticipating the fall
into disillusion, the sine wave skewered
by the oscilloscope, the mirror's hairline fracture

'Lariat' is an American English word for 'lasso' and it struck me as appropriate both to Pollock's painting technique and his machismo. A few lines down, the 'pushy midwife', the 'veiled mother' and the 'rich woman' allude to the strong women in Pollock's life with whom he had such troubled and ambivalent relations; his wife, his mother and his patroness, respectively.

There is an extreme quality to Jackson's painting, as if he was continually trying to free himself from the prison of form and the terror of influence. Such radical freedom is not possible in this life, of course, and attempts to gain it usually only end one way. The line 'tracing the drunken white line at midnight on the highway,' alludes to Pollock's habit of walking in the middle of traffic while extremely drunk, deliberately courting an accident. The final lines of the poem join the compulsion of Pollock to the compulsion of Crowhurst; still improbably, perhaps, but in a way that seemed to me psychologically meaningful:

drawing about you
such a field of force that there was nothing left to do
but plant blue poles amongst the spindrift and iron filings
and step, clutching your brass chronometer,
clean off the deck and into the sky
where a lens rose to meet you like a terrifying eye.

The 'lens' alludes generally to the fear of scrutiny harboured by both men, but more specifically to the famous film by Hans Namuth which depicts Pollock painting onto a sheet of glass or Perspex, with the camera underneath filming upwards. The resulting feeling of exposure and of being a 'sell-out', according to his biographer, seems to have sent Pollock definitively over the edge.

I wanted the form of the poem to echo as much as possible the tension and provisional nature of Pollock's 'action painting' technique, so the indented lines are an attempt to indicate something continually, urgently pressing forwards. Similarly with the poem's rather abrupt ending, which seemed to present itself, over the course of several drafts, as the only appropriate way out. I struggled for weeks with the fact that the poem addresses the artist directly. Addressing famous people in verse can seem silly and pretentious (shades of E J Thribb) but the poem worked best, I think, with an urgent tone, and that urgency was imparted by direct address in a way that a more detached idiom couldn't manage. In the final analysis, the poem is simply a very personal response to a painting and two life narratives that moved me.

Caitriona O'Reilly has published two collections of poetry with Bloodaxe Books, *The Nowhere Birds* (2001) and *The Sea Cabinet* (2006). A third collection, *Geis*, is forthcoming in 2015.

Blue Poles

After Jackson Pollock

by Caitríona O'Reilly

'BLUE POLES' WAS COMMISSIONED BY
THE MERMAID ARTS CENTRE, BRAY, CO WICKLOW, IN 2013.

Freedom is a prison for the representative *savant*
addled on bath-tub gin and with retinas inflamed
from too long staring into the Arizona sun
or into red dirt which acknowledges no master
but the attrition of desert winds and melt-water.
Is that why you cast such desperate lariats
across space, repeatedly anticipating the fall
into disillusion, the sine wave skewered
by the oscilloscope, the mirror's hairline fracture?
The West was won and there was nowhere left to go
so you vanished into a dream of perpetual motion
knowing that once to touch the surface
was to break the spell, but that while the colours hung
on the air an instant, there was no such thing
as the pushy midwife, the veiled mother in the photograph,
the rich woman's bleated blandishments.
Tracing the drunken white line at midnight on the highway,
you were too far gone to contemplate return,
like Crowhurst aboard the *Electron*; not meaning
to go to sea, but drawing about you
such a field of force that there was nothing left to do
but plant blue poles among the spindrift and iron filings
and step, clutching your brass chronometer,
clean off the deck and into the sky
where a lens rose to meet you like a terrifying eye.

Heroic

Eavan Boland

FROM A POET'S DUBLIN
(CARCANET PRESS, 2014)
WWW.CARCANET.CO.UK

Sex and history. And skin and bone.
And the oppression of Sunday afternoon.
Bells called the faithful to devotion.

I was still at school and on my own.
And walked and walked and sheltered from
the rain.

The patriot was made of drenched stone.
His lips were still speaking. The gun
he held had just killed someone.

I looked up. And looked at him again.
He stared past me without recognition.

I moved my lips and wondered how the rain
would taste if my tongue were made of stone.
And wished it was. And whispered so that
no one
could hear it but him. *Make me a heroine.*

OBJECT LESSON

by Lorraine Comer

The National Museum of Ireland's Museum of Country Life received a phenomenal response to the poetry competition it organised earlier this year. Over two hundred students from across the country submitted poems inspired by an object in the *History of Ireland in 100 Objects* collection (see www.100objects.ie), which narrates the history of people in Ireland over 7,000 years. A large number of the 100 objects are on display in the National Museum of Ireland's four sites.

Objects that might appear unremarkable to some, like the worn, brown, emigrant's leather suitcase on display at the Museum of Country Life in Mayo, inspired many students to write poems about emigration, loss and memory. These themes were echoed in poetry composed about the wicker cradle, the nineteenth-century empty cooking pot and many other objects.

In the words of Poetry Ireland's Jane O'Hanlon, one of the adjudicators, the poetry created by the students was 'dynamic, creative, poignant and sophisticated'. Jane was struck by the imaginative way students captured the 'many layers of history and the multiple

interpretations possible from one single object or happening'. Adjudicator Maeve McNicholas of the National Museum of Ireland remarked on how so many entrants brought the objects to life and imbued them with so much meaning.

The winning entry from the primary category was from 6th-class student Emma Pender of Scoil Íde, Galway. Inspired by the 9th-century Ballinderry Sword, Emma pays homage to what is a very impressive example of a Viking sword: 'You are no normal sword, we don't just battle with you, we honour you.' She goes on to refer to its artistic features and war-like functions: 'You are no normal sword, you are decorated with Celtic designs, it didn't matter what they wore, you levelled them from on high.'

The post-primary winning entry was from 2nd-year student Alannah Blackweir from Kilkenny College who composed a haiku entitled 'Internal Hanging'. This sophisticated haiku was written in response to the Youghal lace collar, a beautifully-crafted piece of needlepoint displayed in 1906 at the Royal Dublin Society and currently on display at the Museum of Decorative Arts and History, Collins Barracks.

The huge reaction to the poetry competition demonstrates the great interest young people have in learning about the past through engagement with exhibits at the Museum, and highlights the power of objects to stimulate young people to tell their stories through poetry. A list of the entrants and their poems is available here: www.ouririshheritage.org/category/schools_poetry_competition_2014
To find out more about this poetry competition, contact Aoife O'Toole at aotoole@museum.ie

Through the Schools' Programme at the National Museum we provide young people with lots of opportunities to engage with objects, to learn from the interpretation of the collections on display, and to take from the exhibitions what they choose. For further information on the Museum's Schools' Programme got to www.museum.ie/en/list/nmi-schools-programmes.aspx#SelectedArticle

Lorraine Comer is Head of Education at The National Museum of Ireland.



Internal Hanging

Alannah Blackweir

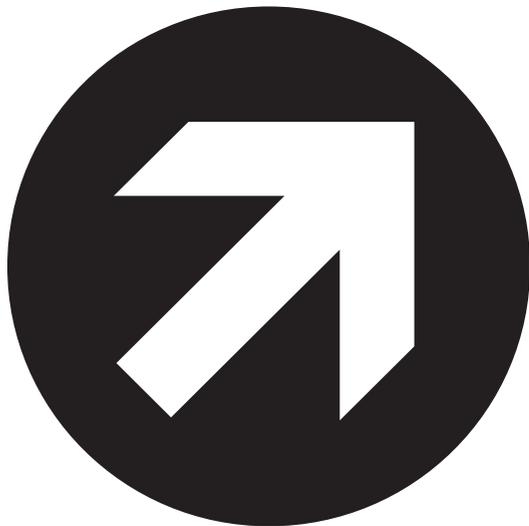
KILKENNY COLLEGE

Post-Primary and Overall Winner of the *Ireland in 100 Objects* Schools Poetry Competition organised by the Museum of Country Life, National Museum of Ireland, Co Mayo.

**Hanging gracefully,
On her neck, tormenting her,
Decorated noose.**

Wanderers:

THE POET & THE CITY

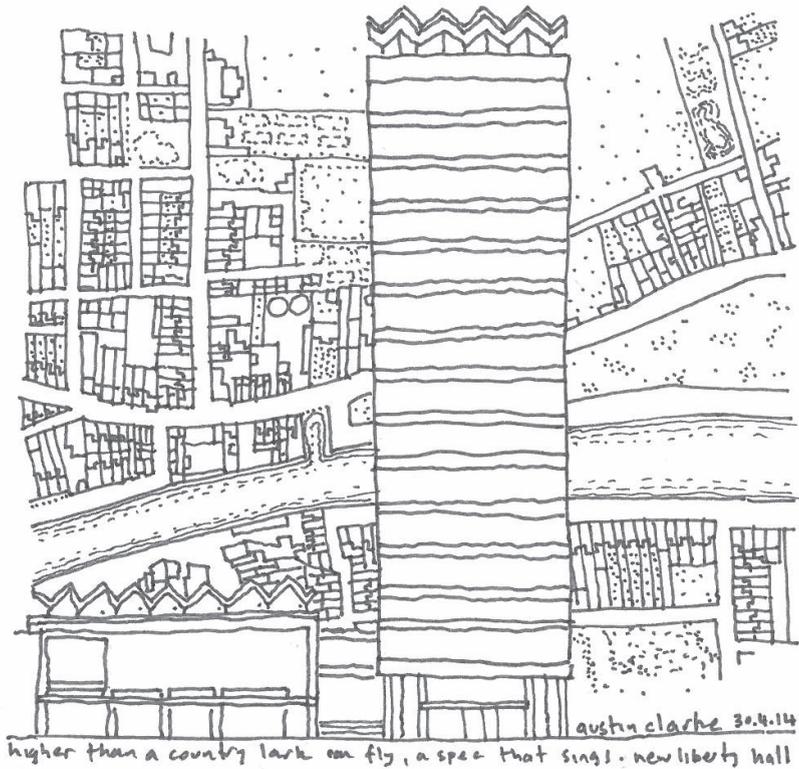


by Maurice Harmon

The issue of the individual and the city permeates *If Ever You Go*. The challenge for the poet is to merge personal experience with urban settings, making one reflect or enlarge the other through exact description or direct engagement, to bring reality to particular regions. It is a complex task. Sometimes it can be imagined in the figure of the walker moving through city locations, absorbing what he sees, relating to them, selecting details that identify his perception, infusing them with a personal significance.

Dublin life runs through my own poem 'The Undergraduate', from which two sections are included in *If Ever You Go*. It is a poem about the new experiences of a youthful persona who has an appetite for

education, romance, sexual love, and the sights and sounds of the city, its history and landscape, its artistic life. The young man's expanding and deepening awareness of the city is central to this long poem which begins with the familiar walk through St Stephen's Green as the new academic term begins. In the poem the student enters the Great Hall of UCD, now the foyer of the National Concert Hall, where he is confronted by a well-known, baleful cleric and attends a lecture by the Professor of English, a traditionalist. It is a good time to be at UCD where the students include John Montague and Thomas Kinsella and where Roger McHugh is pioneering Anglo-Irish studies. Another literary generation is about to emerge; their youthful work appears in *St Stephen's*, the College magazine.



New Liberty Hall – Austin Clarke

Kinsella and Austin Clarke are the major voices in poetry about Dublin. How they manage their individual connections is both exemplary and instructive.

Clarke was at UCD before and after the Easter Rising of 1916. Thomas MacDonagh, who was executed for his part in the Rising, lectured him in English and encouraged him as a poet. Douglas Hyde who taught him Irish became first President. Clarke attended his funeral in St Patrick's Cathedral. His poem 'Burial of an Irish President' records the occasion. At that time Catholics were not allowed to attend Protestant religious services. Showing his independence Clarke entered the Cathedral while government ministers and professors waited outside.

Outside.
 The hush of Dublin town,
 Professors of cap and gown,
 Costello, his Cabinet,
 In Government cars, hiding
 Around the corner, ready
 Tall hat in hand dreading
Our Father in English.

Clarke mocks their subservience and disrespect for a man who had been President of all the people.

The extract from Clarke's confessional poem 'Mnemosyne Lay in Dust' shows Maurice Devane on St Patrick's Day as he journeys along the Liffey to St Patrick's Hospital. His distorted perceptions indicate his mental state, his feeling of being disconnected from



Ely Place – Thomas Kinsella

reality: 'National stir and gaiety/Beyond himself'. Clarke's use of a distressed urban persona also turns up in other poems, including 'Martha Blake at 51' and 'Ancient Lights'. Subsequently, the poem enacts the traumatic and cathartic experience of being treated for mental illness at that time. At the end, restored to sanity, Maurice Devane comes back to the Dublin he knows. Clarke affirms his own decision to make the city the setting for his poetry.

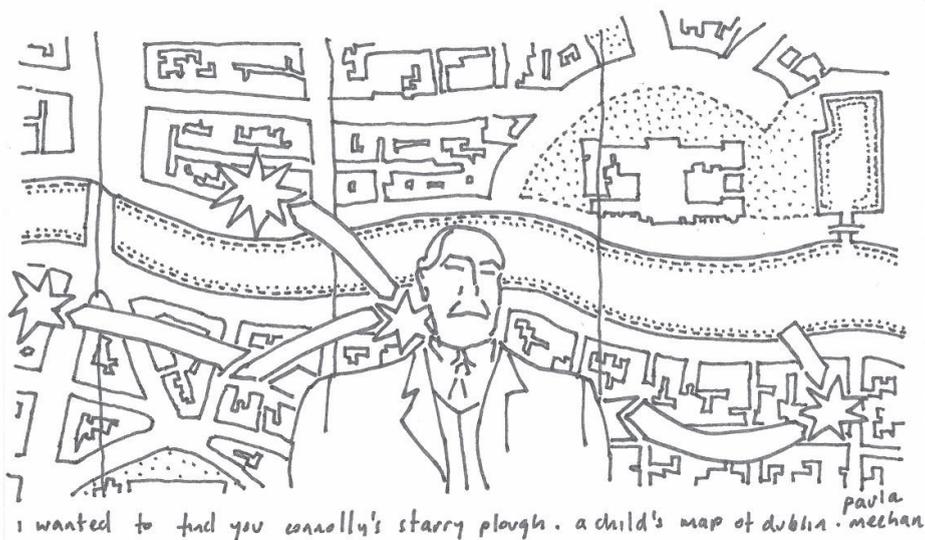
In Thomas Kinsella the gap between the human figure and the city narrows. The consciousness that experiences blends with and is reflected in its surroundings. The registering consciousness in Kinsella's work becomes mature, layered, focused and modern. In '38 Phoenix Street', in which he

returns to childhood memories, he invests ordinary details, incidents and people with particular significance, extracting significance from recovered data. He subtly creates a palpable sense of life – pulsing, quivering, lifting, glistening, wriggling:

The lamp-wick, with a tiny head
of red fire, wriggled in its pool.
The shadows flickered: the Heart beat!

In '38 Phoenix Street' life rises from the ashes of the past.

In 'To the Pen Shop' Kinsella walks through the city centre. Factual details in the forefront of the poem are used to evoke personal and artistic associations. A bus leads his mind westward along Dame Street



A Child's Map of Dublin – Paula Meehan

towards his boyhood home and its many evocations in his poetry and further west to the Atlantic and beyond. He turns south towards Wicklow and Finistère and their associations: from meeting Eleanor who became his wife and muse, to echoes from his poem 'Finistère' in which megalithic makers from Brittany journey to the Boyne Valley and create another megalithic civilisation. He turns east towards Liverpool and places of origin beyond Jerusalem. The whole poem is about origins: geographical, historical, personal and literary. By going for refills to the pen shop as he has often done in the past, Kinsella is entering his own work and reaffirming, as his master, James Joyce – Joyce who, even in exile, always wrote out of the everyday reality of Dublin.

Maurice Harmon, poet and academic, lives in Dublin. His latest collection of poems, *Loose Connections*, was published in 2012 by Salmon Poetry. He is currently writing essays on contemporary Irish poets.

These sketches, inspired by *If Ever You Go: A Map of Dublin in Poetry and Song* (Dedalus Press, 2014) are by John Dorman. To see the full set of sketches, go to www.dorman.ie and follow the link from [sketches to If Ever You Go](#).

All the Meteors

Dermot Healy

(1947 – 2014)

FROM THE REED BED

(THE GALLERY PRESS, 2001)

Yesterday there were
things to be done.
Now, nothing.
It closes in.

All the meteors
have landed.
Six swans cruise
through the dark

and though I can sense
their cold-webbed feet,
the ruffled water
of the dark flood,

the whole thing is a blur.
I'm pinned
down here in a wind
from the south

among the wooden poor
of Ecuador,
the hee-hawing ass,
a dog,

a limping cat,
and whatever in the wide world
awaits me
after that.

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