

# Oileán

Poems by students participating  
in the Oileán Programme 2017



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# FOREWORD

The poems in this booklet were created by students from Coláiste an Eachréidh, Athenry, Co. Galway and Sancta Maria College, Louisburgh, Co. Mayo, during a series of workshops with poets Áine Ní Ghlinn and Geraldine Mithell, as part of the Oileán Programme.

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# Mollaí Ní Fhoghlú

IMNÍ

Cá bhfuil mo chlann?  
Cá bhfuil mo shaol?  
Frásai difriúla  
Ag teacht ó gach béal

Mothaíonn sé difriúil  
Bolaíonn sé aisteach  
Ní maith liom an aimsir  
B'fhearr liom an bháisteach

Leanbh ag caoineadh  
Stiúgtha le hocras  
Níl sé geal  
Ní fheicim ach dorchadas

Pian i mo cheann  
Pian i mo chroí  
Ní mhothaím aon rud  
Ach amháin imní

# Óengus Ó Corcora

## LONG AN TSAOIL NUA

Féachaint amach san fharraige,  
Na tonntaí Gaelacha ag éalú uaim,  
Blas aisteach ar an aer,  
Blas coimhthíoch,  
Blas an tsaoil nua.

Tá radharc agam ar Nua Eabhraic,  
Leagaim súil ar an todhchaí,  
    Níl mé cinnte,  
An mbeidh mé sa bhaile anseo?  
An mbeidh mé ar mo shuaimhneas?  
Nó an mbeidh mé ag stracadh leis an saol?

# Deirdre Ní hAdhmaill

## TÓRAÍOCHT

Ag lorg faoisimh  
Ag lorg poist  
Ag lorg deise  
Gan aon cheist

Ag lorg sonais  
Ag lorg saoil  
Ag lorg saoirse  
Gan aon rial

## Seán de Faoite

### LÁ BREA LÚNASA

Lá breá Lúnasa  
Míle naoi gcéad seasca seacht  
Bhailigh an chlann le chéile  
In Aerfort na Sionnainne  
Chun slán a fhágáil le Bríd  
A bhí ocht mbliana déag d'aois

Deirfiúr mo sheanmháthar  
Nár leag cos ar thalamh na hÉireann  
Go ceann caoga bliain  
Nuair a bhailigh an chlann le chéile  
In Aerfort na Sionnainne  
Lá breá Lúnasa na bliana seo

Barróg ó chroí  
Agus chaoin siad  
Deora caoga bliain

# Leah Ní Mhuirgheasa

## TURAS NA FÁINLEOIGE

Bhuail fáinleog m'fhuinneog  
I rith na hoíche.  
Níor thug mé faoi deara í  
Go dtí an mhaidin dár gcionn.  
Ní raibh tada le feiceáil uirthi  
Seachas carbhat fada dearg.

Chabhraigh mé léi.  
Thug mé dídean di.  
Bhí sí deas cluthar faoi mo chúram.  
Cén míle rud a bhí dearmadtha aici  
Ach an scata scalltán  
A bhí fágtha ina diaidh?

# Eileen Ní Chluanáin

## GO TÓIN POILL

Fágaimid an calafort  
Barróg ghaoth an bhaile,  
Mar a bheadh scairf  
Thart timpeall ar mo mhúineál  
Réidh chun bualadh leis an ngaoth nua  
A bheidh ag scuabadh mo chuid gruaige  
Nuair a shroichimid talamh tirim.

Gluaiseann an bád ar aghaidh  
Ag luascadh siar is aniar.  
Éiríonn na tonnta taobh thiar dinn  
Ar nós eireabaill.

Muid ag taisteal ar an míol mór miotail,  
Ceol ag imeacht le sruth ón inneall,  
Í ag luascadh le rince na farraige.

Ach i lár an aigéin  
Ionsaíonn spící na gaoithe fuaire  
Ár míol mór miotail.

Ar nós na farraige déanta as aer,  
Snámhann na héin agus siúlaimid  
Inár dtaibhsí,

inár bportáin,

ag a' bun.

## Hazel Ni Bhroin

CUAIRT NA SPIDEOIGE

Titeann an fion dearg braon ar bhraon  
Ar an sneachta bán.  
Púscann tríd, ag cruthú dath nua,  
Dath dorcha

Ag stánadh orm faoi leathshúil,  
Í bán san aghaidh,  
Mar a bheadh spideog dhearg ar  
Imeall leac na fuinneoige

Ceol álainn ag gluaiseacht  
le sruth tríd na crainnte  
Ach ní mhaireann aon rud ach seal

Mo mhamó imithe  
Ach ní dhéanfaidh mé dearmad  
Go deo deo  
Ar an ngrá a mhothaigh sí  
An lá sin  
nuair a las an spideog an dorchadas

## Sadhbh Goodwin

### AN TURAS

Trasna na dtionta dul siar, dul siar  
Motháim an t-uaigneas, is motháim an cian  
Is fada an lá ó bhí mé gan phian  
Ag fágáil na ndeoir in Éirinn

D'iarr siad orm fanacht  
Ach ní rogha dom é  
D'iarr siad orm stopadh  
Ach ní thuigeann siad  
Mar nach raibh siadsan ansin  
Nuair a shlog an dorchadas siar mé  
Lámha garbh ag briseadh trí m'easnacha  
Ag alpadh an aeir ó mo scamhóga  
Ní raibh siad ansin  
Níor chuala siad mé ag screadaíl  
Focail chomh dearg leis an bhfuil  
A chuireann smál ar an gcosán  
Caithfidh mé é seo a dhéanamh  
Caithfidh mé  
Ar an eitleán motháim anam na mban uileag  
a rinne an turas seo romham  
Agus anam na mban nach raibh in ann  
I mo chroí tá Savita Halapanaver  
Taobh liom: an Bandia Áine  
Siúlaimid lámh i lámh a chéile  
Mise agus taibhsí na mílte ban Éireanneach  
Ár gcroí ag preabadh le chéile  
Caithim a meangadh mar chóta geimhridh  
Coinneoidh sé an fuacht amach

Trasna na dtionta dul siar, dul siar  
Motháim an t-uaigneas, is motháim an cian  
Is fada an lá ó bhí mé gan phian  
Ag fágáil na ndeoir in Éirinn

## Seán de Faoite

ELLIS ISLAND – OILEÁN AN DÓCHAIS

Hey You! Sea tusa! Gabh i leith anseo chugam  
Seas amach anseo – Sea, seas amach romham

Tá ceisteanna agam le cur ort anois  
Mura bhfreagraíonn tú beidh orm thú a bhris'  
A bhris' - a bhriseadh amach as an dtír  
Mar sin bí cinnte go bhfuil gach rud fíor!

Cé tú? Cén t-ainm? Céard is ainm duit?  
Brostaigh, go tapa. Tá freagra uaim anois!

Cad as? Cá háit? Céard is ainm don bhaile?!

Bhfuil clann agat? Imigh leat abhaile!

Cén fáth 'bhfuil tú anseo? Brón orm? Cén fáth?  
Ní féidir leat do shaol a chaitheamh ar an trá!

Tá faoiseamh ort? Ní go fóill.  
Tóg amach do pháipéir. Leag iad ar an mbord.  
Tá súil agam go bhfuil gach rud in ord.

Wow. Tá ionadh orm anois. Tóg leat iad!  
Tóg leat do chuid rudaí – Ligfidh mise tú tríd.

## I. NEW WORLD

### Bronagh Rogers

SO, WHAT'S LIVING IN THE STATES LIKE?

It's the last three packets of Tayto  
in the back of the cupboard from her last visit home.

It's the box of Barry's tea by the kettle  
- she'd never drink anything different.

It's her harsh Rs and soft Ts and the chorus of  
'Oh you're from Ireland? I'm Irish too, you know,'  
whenever she opens her mouth.

It's being confused as to why anyone would put gravy on a  
biscuit  
or allow someone to fight for their country  
a good five years before they can buy a pint  
(both equally preposterous in her eyes).

It's a green and red flag in her window come September  
that none of her neighbours understand.

It's the picture of her as a child on the mantle,  
clad head to toe in black and amber,  
O'Neill's football in hand.

It's loving her new life  
but knowing it'll never be like  
the lush green fields of home.

## Sam Butcher

HESITANT

As I stepped off the boat I saw buildings tower over  
me,  
I cowered in their shadows.  
The people watched.

They laughed  
and laughed again  
as if I were a comedian

but the joke was on me,  
playing at a game I didn't understand,  
being moved like a pawn,

waiting for someone to edge me on.  
I'd been sitting on the side-lines for far too long,  
each day feeling more lost and confused,

each day feeling more alone.

# Tiegan Harris

## TREES

I arrived in a foreign land  
where the view was bright and green  
I had high hopes for this place  
I hoped to achieve a dream

I planted my seed of hope  
despite my fears and opposition  
and I would water it every day  
until it took root

The first sprout appeared  
and it only grew larger from there  
within two years it grew into a tree  
and well outgrew the pot

I would climb to the top  
just to look down  
at the life  
I had created

# Conor Clarke

## GAELIC REQUIREMENTS

They are not a settled people  
until the pairs of wellies line the hall,

until there is a St Brigid's cross in  
EVERY SINGLE ROOM,

until there is a closet packed to the brim with  
second-hand coats and tattered old scarves  
in case of a literal  
rainy day,

until an art gallery of bed sheets hangs on the line  
outside.

No, they are not a settled people  
until the kettle has boiled.

## Sam Butcher

### AROUND A BLIND CORNER

Never knowing  
what lies ahead  
is daunting  
but keep walking  
and the surprise  
of what comes next  
will be worth it  
compared to the gruelling suspense  
you'd feel turning back.

Around a blind corner  
the future awaits.

# Tiegan Harris

## TURN OF THE CENTURY PILGRIMS

Welcome to the free world  
where nothing's as it seems  
tell me: can you find a cure  
when you can't see, you can't feel the disease?

Can you seek a higher truth  
when you're living on your knees?  
Where freedom grows from blood-soaked soil  
in the lands of hypocrisy.

'Cause if you can't see the chains  
tell me: what use is a key?  
It's cash, blood and oil  
in the age of the refugee.

They're trying to buy our minds,  
we ain't selling.  
Bang, bang, bang  
hear they're nailing down the coffins.

# Caoimhe McNally

## MOUTH OF THE SKY

Here,  
the starting point,  
for land behind was bleak  
and I didn't know if I was ready.

My head belongs to the clouds  
while my feet stay on the ground.  
In the distance  
Nature hums, street lights flicker.

## Ava O'Leary

### THAT LITTLE OLD TOWN

This is the town I've heard of many times  
from many people, typical little town  
where there is no point in asking  
how someone is, because we already know.

But strange...

It's like there's something missing and  
I can't figure out what. As I look up  
I see the red roses - the sweet smell  
brings me back to memories of home.

As I hear the traffic passing I stand there,  
mesmerised by the busyness of the streets.  
And all the memories of my past life  
come rushing back to me.

# Caoimhe McNally

## STALLS

Captured boats in the dock,  
bunting high and low,  
tang of fish and vegetables,  
foreign fruits unknown.

Silk, so delicate in my grasp,  
the man's booming face, burning cheeks,  
as he slams change  
into my sweaty palm.

Bargains and bickering.  
Two barking neighbours  
each selling bags,  
the second leaves in defeat.

Garlic cloves and striped garments  
hung by blurs, yellow and blues.  
The fishmonger wipes her hands off her apron,  
my mouth bursts in colour

as the evening opens,  
alive and swarming  
with couples dancing  
to mandolins in the square.

Roaring of tradition, culture,  
between its streets and market stalls.

## II. LEAVING

Tiegan Harris

ATLAS

My mind is splitting at the seams  
held together by my dreams  
every place that I have seen  
I'm always somewhere in between

To the east, I call home  
but the west, she is calling  
from the north, to the south  
always moving, never falling

Forever choosing my path  
with more hope than fear  
put your head to my chest  
and you will hear

The sound of it beating  
the sound of my freedom  
the pulse of a heart  
and its fire needs feeding.

# Hazel O'Grady

## CONSEQUENCES

This is the moment I have been dreading for months.  
I try to speak but I don't know how.  
I see a single tear roll down her cheek,  
I hate to see her sad and weak.

'This is goodbye,' I whisper, not meeting her eye.  
I embrace her, she clings and then begins to cry.  
I take her hand, it's warm and small.  
I say, 'Don't worry, I will call.'

'Here's your bag,' my daughter says,  
sadness creeping into her voice.  
'Remember, Mum, you still have a choice.'  
I look at her face, it's bright as mid-May.

I walk into the light, into the new.  
I left my daughter. In a way, I left me, too.

# Conor Clarke

## LOUDER THAN WORDS

Lucy showed me one of her drawings,  
it was of her and her friends from school.  
They are playing hopscotch.  
We exchange smiles and a kiss on the cheek.  
This is definitely going on the fridge.

Lucy showed me another of her drawings.  
It was of her and her friends from school again.  
This time they are waving good-bye to her  
as we walk away together, bag in hand.  
We exchange smiles and a kiss on the cheek.  
As I move to stick this one on the fridge  
I notice she has signed it with her tears.

Lucy showed me yet another of her drawings.  
It was of Lucy and me, flying away from an island  
covered  
in sunshine and rainbows towards an island covered in  
thunder and lightning.

This time there is no exchange of smiles.  
There is no kiss on the cheek.

I don't think I'll put this one on the fridge.

I think I'll just hug my daughter and tell her  
everything is going to be okay.

## Sam Butcher

### THE DOG

His excited eyes look at me  
from his spot under the curtain.  
I toss him a treat.  
He misses,  
as always.

While his gappy teeth gnaw on his food,  
I slip out the door.  
As I leave the house  
I hear his gentle whine.

I lament I'll never see his pinkish nose,  
or curly hair again.

# Caoimhe McNally

## TO BE IN YOUR PLACE

(A LETTER TO MY EMIGRANT BROTHER)

Your room still holds your scent,  
the cup you left five weeks old.  
Like a prisoner escaping his cell,  
it was never home in the first place.

How did you survive the slowly moving walls?  
Suffocating and dull:  
pulled and tugged your shine squeezed in-between.

A land of promise suited you to the core.  
The missing coin was spat  
from river mouth to surface,  
pattern matching to the back of every hand.

And you chose to stay.  
At first fear gnawed inside,  
of not knowing.

The sun kissed your cheek and  
the town stripped to evening,  
swarming with locals.  
Its wine tasted sharp.

Your mind steered clear.  
If only you'd taken me with you.  
But I have time still left,  
like you, to shine.

## Briáná Bruton

AMSTERDAM

The wind an opened fridge door  
(not that we had ever seen one before).  
We clung together like ice cubes in a freezer.  
In a land of straight and direct roads  
I could never have imagined the road ahead.

## Caoimhe McNally

WINTER

In the heart of Slovenia  
Gusts of wind travel like a child blowing on hot soup,  
clouds tower, wellies  
stamping in puddles on the road.  
I feel we won't see the sun for a while.

# Alexandre Barrymore

## WRETCHED SEA

It crashed, it swayed us in the raft,  
turning our stomachs over and over again,  
the hateful waves skittering across the sides.

In the corner I was seated  
with the tired, hungry and afraid,  
when through the fog a glow was seen,

then the house of light revealed.  
With that we were finally at peace,  
despite our long and tedious journey.

### III. REFUGE

Tiegan Harris

#### LEGO HOUSE

When I was younger  
I would watch my brother  
build Lego houses  
for the tiny plastic people  
he would put inside

I would laugh and  
take the houses apart  
when his back was turned  
and he would ask me  
where I expected them to live

Later on, I would feel bad  
for the small toys  
and put them in my dolls house  
until my brother and I  
rebuilt the Lego town

## Bronagh Rogers

### FERAL

A stray cat turned up in our shed  
a few weeks before Christmas.  
We were hesitant about letting her stay at first  
as we didn't know how feral she was.  
My mother took pity on the stray  
and would always leave out food for her.

She spent hours in the shed that winter,  
trying to make that cat comfortable.  
When I asked her why she bothered, she said  
'Well it seems like the right thing to do, doesn't it?'  
She wanted to befriend the cat, sure,  
but mainly she wanted her to have a home.

I don't know why there's any debate  
over us taking in refugees - it seems like  
the right thing to do, doesn't it?

# Hazel O'Grady

## BIRD

A rogue bird flew into our lives.  
When he hurt his small, grey wing  
He couldn't fly.  
There was not much we could do,

Gave him all our love  
In that single day.  
Now I ask,  
Would you do this for a human too?

# Tiegan Harris

## THE SOUND OF VIOLENCE

We cut our teeth on sadness  
our sorrows hunt us down  
we fought the nights so sleepless  
made beds on cold hard ground

I see a kingdom  
of closed minds and shallow hearts  
a place to call mine  
but I don't know where to start

This is the sound of violence  
these are the songs of war  
despite everything we fear  
we're clawing at your walls.

## Briáná Bruton

### PARCELS

We emerged from a new form of postbox,  
each of us accompanied by a short explanation.  
Tagged, then wrapped in the warmest of clothes,  
no term too strong to describe our desperate need of  
salvation.

We stood like parcels abandoned on a doorstep,  
clustered together in an arranged pattern:  
small to the front and tall to the back,  
close enough for a glimpse but far enough to be  
forgotten.

I expected to hear the soft sound of my mother's  
tongue,  
my ears begged to differ.  
Their tone harsh and words quickly spoken,  
perhaps it was their dialect I couldn't understand.

The novelty of the parcels began to wear,  
many did not wish to have more than one.  
Out of pity the small, young and fragile were chosen.  
I was not among those that shone.

# Ava O'Leary

## EMIGRATION

Now he rocks and  
stares out the window  
as terrible memories  
still haunt him today.

Thinking of the millions of  
families who are torn apart,  
forced to leave behind  
the life they loved, hungry

to know what challenge  
each day will bring,  
never knowing  
the road ahead.

## Hazel O'Grady

### THE BOAT OF CHANCE

The ship sways beneath me,  
I put my hands on the thin metal rail.  
Deep blue sea, is all I can see,  
flapping in the wind is the white sail.

The air is mingled with salt and fish.  
I only have one wish:  
to arrive in Greece,  
all in one piece.

# Tiegan Harris

## FAMILIARITY

He would smile and repeat himself  
teaching me dialect of Ilsan-gu  
I was listening  
watching  
learning

A curious stranger indeed  
caring enough to help me  
I was intrigued  
captivated  
reminded

His soft features, friendly eyes  
made me think back to my home  
I was understood  
respected  
accepted.

## Sam Butcher

WATER

“Bienvenue!”

I smiled and nodded at the man who was speaking in tongues.

“Comment tu t’appelles?”

The man looked kind, but sounded deluded.

“I would like a drink,” I said to the man in clearest Arabic.

His eyes lit up and he said in a language I could understand,

“Ah yes, of course! You’re fresh off the boat, aren’t you?”

He ran to a nearby pump and filled a cup with water.

He handed it to me.

As I drank the cool liquid nestled between my two gloved hands,

it refreshed me like my newfound freedom.

# Caoimhe McNally

## HOME

I stand taking shelter,  
exiled here under heavy skies,  
towering clouds and their glistening anger,

the city spitting its victims out.  
Consumed by the rain,  
all those who could not escape.

I stood under a bewitched sky,  
where bombs and bullets dipped and dived,  
they screamed through air,  
not a care for who they maimed.

They crushed concrete walls and  
buried whole  
all those could not escape.

Markets closed, schools silenced.  
Only a faint scent of jasmine left,  
and the sweetness of honeyed figs.

Only now, I am safe.

# Tiegan Harris

## INTERSTELLAR

She wore a red silk gown  
belonging to the silkworms of Shanghai  
where the scent of xiao long bao  
wafted through bustling streets

Her shoes, rich black leather  
were the product of the cattle  
in the poppy scattered meadows  
of a town called Castelluccio

Like her Rastafarian ancestors  
her hair was long and styled in dreadlocks  
the thick dark strands  
representing her freedom and strength.

Expensive jewellery decorated her body  
glittering diamonds set in rings of gold  
that had been given to her  
by her lover when he returned from Dubai

Her eyes, dark and deep  
twinkled like constellations  
this woman wore the world  
but had become the universe.

## IV. HOME

Tiegan Harris

BLUE

The years I spent with my sisters  
were the best few of my life  
I then had to graduate,  
memories, laughter, love left behind.

I returned to my home in England  
but it no longer felt like home.  
My heart belongs with my sisters  
where the waves are beautiful and blue.

Years pass and I grow distant  
from my mother and my sisters  
but by that time  
I found something equally beautiful and blue

The eyes of my lover  
remind me of home  
and keep me content  
till the day I return.

Ava O'Leary

GRANDFATHER'S HOUSE

As children we would see who could climb  
the highest tree and run through the long grass  
just as the sun was setting over the hill, always  
coming back when we smelt grandmother's stew,  
with bruises on our knees and colourful flowers  
in our hair - these are the memories we share.

## Briáná Bruton

### THE MAN I CALL MY FATHER

Here he laid his feet in the soil.  
Already I feel closer to him,  
yet he lies seven foot deep elsewhere.  
Still his loss will forever remain like the loss of a limb.

Buried in the catalyst of growth,  
Nature pure like blood.  
He was right, 'blood is thicker than water'  
though water is always nearby and blood is harder to  
draw.

The storm of his departure uprooted his family from  
my life,  
gone are the days when I could approach them for a  
favour.  
Each leaf forgotten as it flutters from a supported branch  
to a lonely ground,  
reminding me of all the fallen family, friends and that  
once-seen stranger.

I have returned to plant my seeds to bloom for eternity.  
May they prosper to love and persist together.  
Although he is not here to share our dream  
I can tell him above, when I see the man I call my father.

## Patrick Grady

### FORGOTTEN

Down at the end of a long pebbly road,  
that's where I found the field that hadn't been sowed.

Walking through a small, narrow door,  
that's when I heard that terrifying roar.

The teapot was sat still on the hob,  
cold as ice, cobwebs gathered around the house,

that's when I found the rotten dead mouse.  
Wellies left outside, filled up with rain,

that's when I found the photo of 'the man and his  
cane'.

## Ava O'Leary

### BUSTER

Coming 'home' to the flat after a long day is great  
but is completely different to arriving home.

Coming home after a long day was opening the door  
always to be greeted by my big dog Buster.

His bear-like paws run down the hallway, jump up  
against my legs, his shiny coat so soft

like my favourite childhood teddy, happiness  
in his eyes, panting with excitement.

Hugging Buster felt like hugging home

# Hazel O'Grady

## CRUMBS OF HOME

Boiling cup of Barry's tea,  
good family evenings.

Worn Mayo jersey crumpled on the floor,  
days when he played for his team.

A can of Guinness lay empty,  
those nights out with friends.

A pack of cheese and onion Tayto, half-eaten,  
hard times when only a crisp sandwich would do.

Crumbs of home will always remain.  
The Irish no country can tame.

# Patrick Grady

## COMING HOME

Such a strong word 'Home' is.  
Is it even my home after all these years away?  
The smell of mashed potato,  
the bog and the colour green  
come to mind when I think of 'Home'.

Seeing my family is my home,  
putting on the fire when it starts to get cold,  
laughing with my family while snuggled up on the  
couch  
always triggers happy memories of home.  
And after all these years, I still know today that  
as soon as I step off that plane  
I'll be home.

## Poems exploring emigration and the diaspora.

In 2017, students from Coláiste an Eachréidh, Athenry, Co. Galway and Sancta Maria College, Louisburgh, Co. Mayo were given the opportunity to work alongside poets Áine Ní Ghlinn and Geraldine Mitchell through the Oileán Programme.

The Oileán Programme was made possible by the Irish American Partnership in honour of Anne Anderson, the 17th Ambassador of Ireland to the United States, and delivered by Poetry Ireland through Writers in Schools.

