

You  
*planted*  
A TREE.  
I wrote  
A POEM.  
What more  
could anyone  
DO?

# The Cage

John Montague

FROM NEW COLLECTED POEMS  
(THE GALLERY PRESS, 2012)

My father, the least happy  
man I have known. His face  
retained the pallor  
of those who work underground:  
the lost years in Brooklyn  
listening to a subway  
shudder the earth.

But a traditional Irishman  
who (released from his grille  
in the Clark Street IRT)  
drank neat whiskey until  
he reached the only element  
he felt at home in  
any longer: brute oblivion.

And yet picked himself  
up, most mornings,  
to march down the street  
extending his smile  
to all sides of the good,  
(all-white) neighbourhood  
belled by St Teresa's church.

When he came back  
we walked together  
across fields of Garvaghey  
to see hawthorn on the summer  
hedges, as though  
he had never left;  
a bend in the road

which still sheltered  
primroses. But we  
did not smile in  
the shared complicity  
of a dream, for when  
weary Odysseus returns  
Telemachus should leave.

Often as I descend  
into subway or underground  
I see his bald head behind  
the bars of the small booth;  
the mark of an old car  
accident beating on his  
ghostly forehead.

---

# 21 Science and Wonder 74

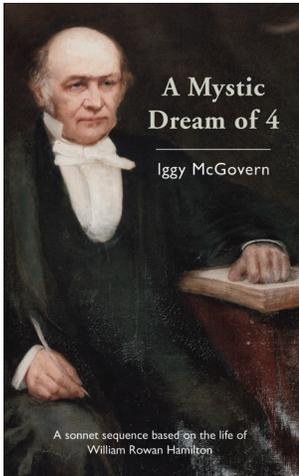
by Richard Hayes

---

## Iggy McGovern *A Mystic Dream of 4*

QUATERNIA PRESS, €11.50

---



Iggy McGovern's *A Mystic Dream of 4* is an ambitious sonnet sequence based on the life of mathematician William Rowan Hamilton. Hamilton was one of the foremost scientists of his day, was appointed the Chair of Astronomy in Dublin University (Trinity College) while in the final year of his degree, and was knighted in 1835. He was also a poet and corresponded with Wordsworth. The defining relationship in his life would seem to have been with his first love, a woman called Catherine Disney; they married other people and the relationship they carried on until her death was, McGovern tells us, 'just within the bounds of Victorian respectability and occasioned attempts at self-harm on either side'. McGovern's book takes this rightly as rich territory for the biographer – Hamilton's precocious talent for mathematics, his relationship with this lost love, his attempts at poetry, all are reflected and examined in the sonnets. The book is in four sections

(Geometry, Algebra, Metaphysics, Poetry) – named after what Hamilton referred to as the four 'parents' of one of his great mathematical discoveries, the quaternion – and each section includes one sonnet named after (and 'spoken' by) the title of the section, fourteen 'person-sonnets' (that is, sonnets spoken by people acquainted with Hamilton), and a sixteenth sonnet spoken by Death. This patterning brings to Hamilton's life something of the shape of his profession.

The book succeeds very well as biography, if the role of a biography is to compel greater interest in the subject in question: certainly Hamilton emerges as a figure of great fascination, his life 'multi-layered' as McGovern says. The second section, 'Algebra', tracing Hamilton's life from 1820 to 1835, his college days and beyond, is the most poetically and narratively compelling, and captures beautifully the flowering of Hamilton's intellect, how he dazzled teachers and peers, and comes into the company of the famous – Wordsworth, Maria Edgeworth, and, later, Coleridge. Catherine Disney appears also for the first time here, though not in person: one regrets the decision not to write poems in her voice. McGovern explains he would rather the 'dramatic intersections of her life with Hamilton's [be] told by others, notably her brothers and her husband', though one is not convinced: it may have been interesting to imagine Hamilton from the point of view of the woman (in the imagined words of Edward Disney, her brother) whose 'star/Was the bright nova in his [Hamilton's] constellation'.

Despite this, *Mystic Dream of 4* succeeds very well both as poetry and as a story of Hamilton's life. The sonnets are accomplished and the book has an impressive unity. It's a fascinating addition to the literature on Hamilton and evidence of maturation and development for Iggy McGovern as a writer.

---

# Dawn Wood *Ingathering*

TEMPLAR POETRY, £8.99

---

Dawn Wood is a Tyrone-born poet, currently lecturing in science in the University of Abertay, Dundee. She also works as a painter. *Ingathering* is her third collection, after *Quarry* and *Connoisseur*. It's a terrific, surprising book, the slant-ways approach to the world certainly marking Woods out as a very distinctive voice. Take 'Intro', the first poem:

Our favourite death mask – 'female idiot' –  
too small for human, surely?  
peeks her face where she is not,  
is she from life or death?

She's certainly asleep and slight  
*lived I mean below*  
two motifs and then we're in,  
since love goes on you know.



Even the punctuation and the use of italics is surprising and interesting; the poem insists on being re-read. There's nothing lazy about *Ingathering*; every line is worked on. Poems are conjured from nothing sometimes; 'Appeal' begins with the gift of goat bells from a hardware shop in Andalucía and ends:

*Count not that far that can be had –*  
give me the stamina of goats  
to outlive what I wanted,

as there are intellects  
that outgrow reason –  
oh, to pray so soundly.

The book suggests an indebtedness to Emily Dickinson but, surprisingly, the figure specifically mentioned in the book is Robert Frost, an unlikely shade here given his (seeming) preference for directness and Wood's much more oblique approach. Wood takes lines from two Frost poems, 'West-Running Brook' (in 'The Sun') and 'Birches' (in 'Judgement'), and the results are at once curious combinations of tribute, parody and something new:

And it is good  
the insurance will cover the cost of scaffolding  
to put him back where seagulls come and go  
and play in batches, learning all there is  
to learn about not launching out too soon.

It's a daring approach, entirely convincing.

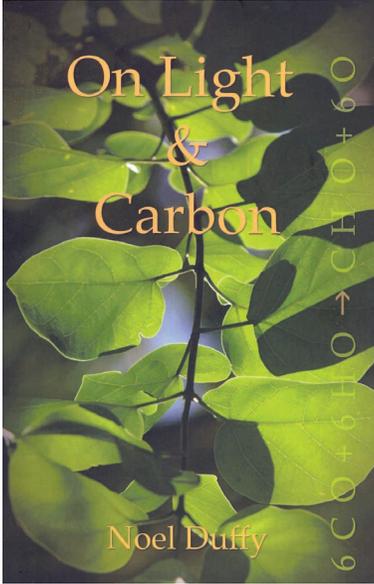
Overall, *Ingathering* is a distinguished performance, highly recommended. Worth noting too that this is a handsome book, very nicely produced by Derbyshire-based Templar Poetry.

---

# Noel Duffy *On Light and Carbon*

WARD WOOD PUBLISHING, £8.99

---



Noel Duffy in *On Light and Carbon* offers poems that, while sometimes verging on the prosaic and appearing didactic, and while sometimes forced, are always illuminating. The collection is uneven, certainly, but interesting and ambitious nonetheless. So, ‘Trinity Ball’ is rather too loose of form and line to work: ‘We hung at the edges/dressed up and self-conscious/till we were cast aside by our/more confident friends’ has little poetic charge. At the same time, the poem earns its conclusion – ‘parting with/a muttered word and clumsy embrace,/to face our season of regret in silence’ – and in the end is a rather affecting poem about lost opportunity. The collection seems to work like this, its force deriving not from individual lines and phrases but from the voice which is engaging and assured.

Central to the collection is ‘Timepieces’. The poem begins with the poet’s inheritance of his father’s watch, ‘still keeping/perfect time’ after the father has died. It then goes on to recount a friendship between the father and a man called PJ. A very well-worked section tells of how PJ and the father collected Roman coins, two of which end up with the poet, who then launches into a nicely-judged imagining of the two men pictured on the coins’ fronts, returning in the end to PJ and the father and the simple fact, dropped like a stone in a pond (or a coin in a fountain), that after the father’s death they never heard from PJ again.

There are other poems here drawing on Duffy’s interest in Science – a nice meditation, again on love, ‘Flourescence’, that takes as its starting point the natural phenomenon and ends with the face of a girl, ‘the cornflower blue of her eyes/glancing upward’. *On Light and Carbon* is a second collection and suggests there is much to come from this disarming writer of promise.

---

Richard Hayes is Head of Humanities at Waterford Institute of Technology where he also lectures in English. Also at WIT he is a lead researcher on a project on regional theatre. He has published widely on Irish poetry and Irish literature, American theatre, and cinema.

---

---

R U N N I N G  
A W R I T E R S'  
G R O U P A - Z

by James Conway

**H**ow, typically, does a writers' group begin? In my case I approached two like-minded friends and suggested we form one. From the outset they were keen to be involved. Our aim was to provide a forum providing constructive critique for writers. From an initial core, which included one experienced writer, the group grew organically and here we are thriving over two decades later. I'd like to pass on what we've learned on our journey to anyone thinking of undertaking this same adventure. For the benefit of those unsure as to what a writers' group / workshop (actual, not online) entails, here it is in a nutshell: **Original work is presented, listened to, appreciated and critiqued. The author may then accept some, all or none of the suggestions offered.**

It would be difficult for a writers' group to exist without first considering the following practical matters.

**Venue:** a local Library; a room above a pub; an Arts Centre; Community Centre; Church Hall; Sports Club; or members' houses on a rotation-basis. Having acquired a venue, hold onto it if possible for continuity and stability.

**Insurance:** many venues have a public liability policy, but some groups take out their own which can be transferred to outside locations if the group is reading or holding workshops elsewhere.

**Schedule of Meetings:** for a workshop to be taken seriously it needs a schedule including dates, times and venues for the year ahead.

**Social Media:** having access to social media publicises the group and its activities. Also, it gives writers an opportunity to showcase occasional work in order to attract new members.

**Guidelines:** the group should agree a set of guidelines relating to procedure, behaviour, how work is critiqued and how authors should (ideally) respond.

**Facilitator:** most people prefer a structure with a facilitator instead of a talking shop where everything other than the work is discussed. Some groups rotate the position, others prefer a panel of just two or three to fill this role.

**Time Management:** essential if as many voices as possible are to be heard. Invariably, different types of writing are brought to each meeting – short poems, long poems, flash fiction, short stories, long stories, extracts from novels, plays, essays and articles. If everybody is to get an opportunity to read, time must be managed fairly. Some workshops use a clock; others use an experienced Chair, who'll allot time based on his/her judgment of how each piece is being received. Our group found it necessary to schedule a separate workshop each month for prose writers.

---

Sign-in book: to record attendees and contact details.

News/Events/Networking: time can be set aside at each meeting to keep members informed about competitions, readings and festivals.

Funding: members can be asked for a contribution towards room rental or insurance. For larger projects fundraising and grant applications may need to be made.

What writers' groups should avoid: there are various ways a writing group will not succeed – confusion over venues/dates; meeting irregularly; a weak facilitator; unfair allotment of time; a clique within the group; letting stronger personalities dominate; poor feedback; low attendance leading to dwindling numbers; and not welcoming new members.

Once practical matters have been attended to, it's time to appreciate the excitement of the group environment. The most enjoyable aspects of a workshop are the anticipation of original work, the interaction between writers, and the amazing variety of subjects and styles which surface. As a warm-up exercise, some groups / workshops provide a theme to write on at meetings. This can test a person's ability to write within a short time-frame, sharpening the ability to come to terms with a topic at the mercy of the clock, while other groups may prefer to prepare exercises (if used at all) in advance.

In our workshop a poem is read twice if it is short to medium-length. Aspects such as imagery, rhyme (end and internal), rhythm, alliteration, line breaks, poetic cohesion, possible deletions, possible rearrangements of lines/verses, metre, beats, diction, subject and overarching theme are discussed.

With stories – plot, sub-plots, narration, dialogue, point of view, characters, imagery, description, location – will all come into play. Many new to story writing will over-write and editing will be required. After feedback

the writer can react to what has been said, perhaps concentrating on points not clear in the poem or story. If there is a protracted debate on say one line or one word, time can be eaten up unnecessarily and the balance of a schedule tilted. As with poems, if members bring hard copies of their work the process becomes easier.

Criticism, as Alexander Pope observed, is an invidious task ("Ten Censure wrong for one who Writes amiss"). The ability to digest and assess creative work can be developed through time, but no judgment of merit (or lack of merit) can be absolute. Criticism should be positive and constructive, using judgement, learning, candour. The ethos of our workshop has been to welcome, respect and nurture new talent.

One of the biggest jumps we made was from workshop to publication. We were indebted to members who had expertise in this field. The launch of our first book brought the work to a broader audience. It inspired confidence particularly in those who had never been published before and encouraged them to continue writing.

People join workshops for all sorts of reasons – to meet other writers, to learn how to critique, to gain confidence with reading in public, to hear other people's work, to make friends. A writing group succeeds if a dynamic is generated whereby each writer grows and develops within the group framework. By this definition Rathmines Writers' Workshop is most definitely a success, in existence now for over 23 years and with 24 published books to its name.

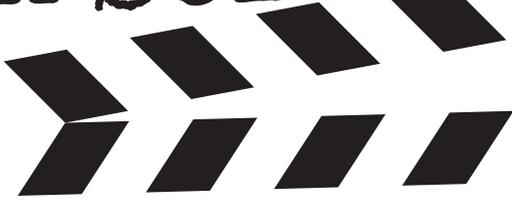
---

**James Conway** is the founder of the Rathmines Writers' Workshop. He is widely published in journals and magazines, and has broadcast his work on RTE's *Sunday Miscellany* and elsewhere. His poetry collection *Vertebrae of Journey* was published in 2010.

---

---

# A Screenwriter Calls



FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH STUDENTS enjoyed a very special lesson on Thursday 14 November last year, when screenwriter Richie Conroy paid a much anticipated visit to St Ciarán's Community School, Kells, Co. Meath. Richie is a writer on the popular series *Roy* which has been shown on TRTÉ in Ireland, CBBC in the United Kingdom, and won the 2012 Children's BAFTA Drama Award for its second series in 2012.

The session began with a discussion about the important elements of any story, which allowed the students to display the knowledge they had acquired from studying short stories in class. The students undertook many tasks on the day, one of which involved watching an episode of *Roy* entitled 'A Crushing Blow', which served as the basis for a lively workshop about the craft of storytelling and screenwriting. Students were then required to work in pairs to come up with their own pitch for *Roy* which they would then present to the rest of the class. The students devised some very imaginative scenarios which ranged from zombie invasions to encounters with long-lost siblings in far-flung places!

When it came to interrogating Richie about his chosen profession, the questions came thick and fast: **'What inspired you to become a screenwriter?'** (I've always loved film and TV and while studying the old Irish myths and sagas in College I thought that someone should really turn these into a movie. I decided to learn screenwriting once I graduated and I'm still learning)

**'What is your favourite screenplay you worked on?'** (I created a comedy called Fran with my friends and we had great fun making it. We made two series and it opened up lots of doors for me professionally)

**'When did you discover you had a talent for screenwriting?'** (Talent is often spoken about like it was something God-given. When, in actual fact, we marvel at the

talents of a famous painter or footballer or musician what we're actually marvelling at is a culmination of a lot of practice. The writer Malcolm Gladwell suggests that to be a master at anything one needs to dedicate 10,000 hours to it. And we must not forget what our elders taught us – if something is worth doing, it's worth doing well).

The workshop was also attended by Anna Boner, Poetry Ireland's Development Officer with Writers in Schools, and Maureen Kennelly, Director of Poetry Ireland. They were highly impressed by the enthusiasm and creativity of the students, and Maureen commented: 'This was a highly motivated class. They posed some really considered questions and demonstrated a very advanced understanding of this form of literature. We were struck by their spontaneity and imaginative vigour, and by the very careful attention that they gave to Richie – we look forward to many return visits to St Ciarán's.'

All in all, the students were delighted with the content of the workshop and felt Richie really connected with them in a fun and informative way. Richie was also very complimentary about the students, saying: 'It was great fun and I was very impressed by the creativity on show from the class. I have no doubt that there are some budding screenwriters in Kells!'

**Gina Reilly** English Teacher,  
St Ciarán's Community School

# Six Haiku

Francis Harvey

FROM DONEGAL HAIKU  
(DEDALUS PRESS, 2013)

Myself and my dog  
skirt a mountain to avoid  
a man and his dog.

.....

The wind and the rain.  
The wind and the rain again  
and again. Ireland.

.....

You planted a tree.  
I wrote a poem. What more  
could anyone do?

.....

Myself and two crows  
by a frozen lake, silent.  
Who will break the ice?

.....

Tell me who waits for  
the lightning to strike more than  
once in the same place.

.....

The heat in the sun.  
John scythes his first crop of grass.  
The spring in his step.

.....



---

# CRAZY WORLD

by Nessa O'Mahony

---

**Geraldine Mitchell** *Of Birds and Bones*

ARLEN HOUSE, €12

---

**Billy Ramsell** *The Architect's Dream of Winter*

DEDALUS PRESS, €12

---

**Alan Jude Moore** *Zinger*

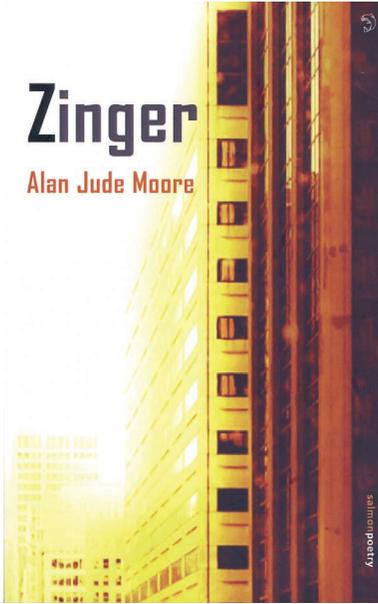
SALMON POETRY, €12

---



h e blurb on the back cover of Geraldine Mitchell's new collection states that she 'has left behind the menace of water' that was a feature of her first book, *World Without Maps*. But a liquid sensibility seems equally visible in this book, from the opening evocation of magnolia as a flotilla, 'They tack in, full rig, under cover of darkness' to the 'First drops of rain lead pellets / on the chestnut's palmate leaves' ('San Juan de Dios, Granada'), or the water welling up 'from a source so deep memory cannot tell of it' in the poem 'The Coping Stone'. Mitchell's vision doesn't spare us the harsh realities of a world where people doss in phone booths or refugees suffer from somebody else's war; the anger is restrained, and is all the more powerful for it, as the ironically titled 'Pax' displays: 'Any minute now the skim of skyfire, roar / and smoke. Children struggle out of dreams, / out of the streams of dilute blood, cleft flesh.'





---

Hughes also resonates through poems like ‘Lament for Esbjörn Svensson’ – ‘the heating creaking in the key of A, the fridge voicing / the same two notes in perpetuity’, but there’s always Ramsell’s light and rigorously 21st-century touch to bring it smack up to date. But at the root of this collection is Ramsell’s consistent belief that human connection is the only thing that will save us in a world with ‘the jazz-men gone / and all the bank machines empty’ (from the sequence ‘Jazz Weekend’).

In another life, Billy Ramsell writes educational texts for secondary students and his experiences of the educational system filters into a sequence titled ‘Section 3: The Unseen Poem (300 marks)’ with its subtitle ‘St. Petersburg’s Terrible Plumbing.’ Alan Jude Moore may have had an opinion about the state of that city’s plumbing, but he doesn’t express it in the poem ‘Che Burashka’, from his fourth collection, *Zinger*, in which the speaker searches that city for traces of the famous character from a Russian children’s story. Moore is more interested in the political and social dynamics of a place, and this collection once again demonstrates his impressively wide frame of geospatial reference; poems range from Abruzzo to Houston to Moscow with a quick trip to the Poolbeg towers-dominated skyline of his home city. But even in the local poems, there is little that is safe or familiar. In ‘The Power Station Looms over the Bay’ we are urged to ‘Rise against the shotgun blasts shattered doors and car jams / hard floored hand brake turns and police lights burning’; in the long sequence ‘Perexhod’, the scene has shifted to Lubyanka but the sense of threat is the same: ‘do not abandon us / in Lubyanka underpass / to ghost patrols of butcher boys / pulling out toenails.’ Even an airplane flight is a reminder of the constant danger we live with in the 21st century: ‘Greenland is breaking off the port side’ (from ‘Greenland’). With a sense of threat so endemic, there is little room for tenderness or even humour in these poems. One emerges from *Zinger* chastened and not a little afraid.

---

Nessa O’Mahony lives in Dublin. She has published three books of poetry; a fourth, *Her Father’s Daughter*, will be published by Salmon later this year.

---

---

# A Flock of Anxieties

## *Publishing a Second Collection* by Emily Cullen

**T**he relationship of a poet to her evolving second collection can be fraught with uncertainty. As the American critic Lisa Russ Spaar has observed: ‘Accompanying the writing, publication, notice, and shelf-life of second books of poems are a flock of anxieties, expectations, and other social, cultural, economic, and circumstantial forces that can often lead to their being overlooked and under-reviewed.’ It is this very ‘flock of anxieties’ that can leave poets – not just musicians – susceptible to ‘second album syndrome’.

Unlike with a first collection, where one could potentially be a ‘gifted hobbyist’, or a synthesiser of poems which have been widely work-shopped and published over a long period of time, a second book is a public expression of intent, an open coming-of-age of its author as a committed poet. There is an implicit expectation that the apprenticeship is over, or at least at an advanced stage; the collection seeks to extend the reach of the debut book and, potentially, to move to more daring, uncharted places.

It was not until the publication of their second volumes that many well-known writers, including Philip Larkin and Anna Akhmatova, came to prominence. Some second manuscripts are stellar breakthroughs, such as Sylvia Plath’s *Ariel* which was famously wrought in an outpouring shortly before her suicide, or Adrienne Rich’s bravely ambitious, *Diving into the*

*Wreck*. More often than not, they represent a general flowering of voice and sensibility; an ushering in of a writer’s style, stretching beyond the inklings of the inaugural book.

Since the publication of my own first collection, *No Vague Utopia* (Ainnir Publishing, 2003), the completion of a doctorate, my marriage, the birth of my son and the exigencies of making a living in arts management all took precedence over the hasty realisation of volume number two. In hindsight, I recognise that I was still in the throes of my apprenticeship when *No Vague Utopia* came out, buoyed by my love-blindness for language which gave me confidence in my incipient voice. Belying this confidence, however, was my reluctance to fully submit to the public label of ‘poet’. For multiple reasons, then – some practical, others more curious – my second collection, *In Between Angels and Animals* (Arlen House, 2013) was ten years in gestation.

Getting a handle on the complexity of what it means to write a second book often involves the internalisation of new knowledge. How do we cross a threshold; how do we jostle with habitual patterns of thought to break through to riskier terrain? Alongside this challenge, however, our unconscious minds need room to thrive. Making poems involves a peculiar type of agency; a poet is part active conduit, part passive receptor. Over time, loose images, impressionistic narratives, half-lines alchemise.

---

Poetry is as much about *not* knowing as it is about understanding; blindness and incompleteness are as significant a part of the creative process as observation and knowledge. The challenge exists in sustaining both our ‘negative capability’, in the Keatsian sense of being fully ‘open’, while simultaneously extending our prosodic and thematic range. This is no easy task – particularly when, as Irish poets, we have the conflicting edicts of Yeats (‘Irish poets, learn your trade’) and Kavanagh (‘the poet should not care’) resounding in our ears at tinnitus level.

There is no quick-fix solution to any of these tests, especially when it is so easy to remain ensconced in our comfort zones. Many poets are in writers’ groups which can provide vital fellowship and encouragement and, if we are lucky, even some insightful critical perspectives. But these groups can also have limited impact; for various reasons, we are frequently guilty of selective hearing which can work against us while sustaining the illusion of progress. Workshop facilitators, too, provide prompts and creative stimuli useful for generating new ideas, but often these will only take one so far. How do we access information which will nudge us toward new insights about old poems we have rewritten and revised?

In her essay entitled ‘Finding the Story’, Nessa O’Mahony notes: ‘There is frequently a narrative, a dynamic unseen by the writers themselves as they are writing individual poems, but that becomes clear when those poems are assembled into a body of work.’ Are we aware of the hidden narratives embedded in our own poems; frayed threads we could weave or upholster? The old fall-back is to pass our manuscript to someone who can give it a critical read. However, this doesn’t always guarantee fresh perspectives. What does it mean to receive, and then act on, critical feedback, even if it is difficult to hear? What are the best ways we can support poets in their early careers to come into a fuller sense of their own style?

For my own part, I decided to give my manuscript to two widely published writers with divergent perspectives; one was my ideal reader and the other a completely contrasting voice to my own. This dialectic proved fruitful as the comments from both triggered threshold knowledge that offered insight to open up my thinking. Often, what writers need is a significant amount of processing time to take on board the advice they receive from other mentor writers.

The breaking down of old paradigms as we attempt to shift the ground and raise the stakes for our second books is an exhilarating experiment. I see my own second volume as a transition between states; a concern reflected in its title, *In Between Angels and Animals* and its recognition and articulation of growth. For booklovers, as opposed to writers, the close reading of a poet’s second collection offers a chance to position the author’s developing sensibility in the context of apprenticeship and maturation. The arc I am on now as I embark on my third volume is thrilling to contemplate; there is still so much that needs to be said.

---

Emily Cullen is an Irish poet, scholar and harpist currently based in Australia. She is the author of two collections of poetry: *No Vague Utopia* (Ainnir Publishing, 2003) and *In Between Angels and Animals*, published last year by Arlen House. In 2004 Emily was selected for Poetry Ireland’s ‘Introductions’ series, and in the same year she curated the Centenary Celebrations for poet Patrick Kavanagh. Emily teaches Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne.

---

---

# WHAT ONE NOTE HOLDS

## Writing the Short Poem by Mark Granier

How short can a poem be, if it is to remain a poem? There are poems with no content, only titles, such as Don Paterson's 'On Going to Meet a Zen Master in the Kyushu Mountains and Not Finding Him', and James Wright's 'In Memory of the Horse David, Who Ate One of My Poems'. But often the combination of brevity / levity falls far short of the mark set by the best comedians: Woody Allen's 'Eternal nothingness is fine if you happen to be dressed for it', or Groucho Marx's delightfully surreal: 'Outside of a dog a book is a man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read.'

Jokes and postmodern gestures aside, essentially very short poems are not that different from other kinds; they work or fail for much the same reasons longer poems do. So a short poem, like any other, isn't a poem when it is *only* a set-up for a punch line or statement that would be better served in prose. But what should one make of the following?

### Image

Old houses were scaffolding once  
and workmen whistling.

Note that line-break followed by a large indentation, an elegant way of altering the rhythm. Some would dispute that T.E. Hulme's couplet is a poem. According to James Fenton, it 'is vulnerable to the objection that it is a good line for a poem, not a good poem in itself.' I think it is a poem (and so did Larkin apparently, who included it in his Oxford anthology). For me, it manages a kind of cinematic, reverse-time-lapse effect, running history backwards, undressing all those gaunt, respectable old houses we've seen and wondered about, leaving civilisation without its facade but with a cocky, human note.

Deliberately or not, a couplet by Yvonne Cullen offers a contemporary riff:

### Riddle Me

One bird flies through a scaffolding quickly  
Where am I? Who am I really?

When very short poems work they can trigger, to borrow Tobias Wolff's phrase, 'synaptic lightning', allowing the reader to enter a space as startlingly expansive as the interior of Dr. Who's Tardis. Pound has some fine examples, such as 'And the days are not full enough':

And the days are not full enough  
And the nights are not full enough  
And life slips by like a field mouse  
Not shaking the grass

The kind of short poems that interest me are usually those with strikingly effective imagery, though there are exceptions, such as George Oppen's 'Semantic':

There is that one word  
Which one must  
Define for oneself, the word  
Us.

---

D.H. Lawrence wrote some remarkable short lyrics. The first paragraph of his introduction to his 1929 book, *Pansies*, is worth quoting from:

*These poems are called 'Pansies' because they are rather 'Pensées' than anything else. Pascal or La Bruyère wrote their 'Pensées' in prose, but it has always seemed to me that a real thought, a single thought, not an argument, can only exist easily in verse, or in some poetic form. There is a didactic element about prose thoughts which makes them repellent, slightly bullying...*

The weaker poems in *Pansies* (and in Lawrence's *Complete Poems*) are probably true enough to their time, though hardly less didactic or bullying than equivalent prose thoughts. But the best of Lawrence's short poems, just a couple of handfuls, are more than casual thoughts; these are perpetually fresh, classics of the genre. Here are two examples:

### **The White Horse**

The youth walks up to the white horse, to put its halter on  
and the horse looks at him in silence.  
They are so silent, they are in another world.

### **Sea-Weed**

Sea-weed sways and sways and swirls  
as if swaying were its form of stillness;  
and if it flushes against fierce rock  
it slips over it as shadows do, without hurting itself.

Michael Longley is well known for having written some powerful micro-lyrics, such as the following:

### **Terezin**

No room has ever been as silent as the room  
Where hundreds of violins are hung in unison.

... to which another poet, Anthony Glavin, responded with this quatrain (from his unfinished sequence 'Living In Hiroshima'):

### **Breakdown**

More silent than all those hanging violins  
The room

Where imagination's  
Strung-out like a frozen bow-arm.

Amongst Seamus Heaney's shorter lyrics are, to my mind, some of his most memorable poems, such as his take on Stephen Dedalus's 'walking into eternity' in 'The Strand':

The dotted line my father's ashplant made  
On Sandymount Strand  
Is something else the tide won't wash away.

---

Longley once told Paul Muldoon that he wanted to write ‘wee poems that move people.’ ‘Believe it or not,’ Muldoon responded, ‘I do too.’ ‘Cradle Song For Asher’ (Muldoon’s son) certainly achieves this:

When they cut your birth cord yesterday  
it was I who drifted away.

Now I hear your name (in Hebrew, ‘blest’)  
as yet another release of ballast

and see, beyond your wicker  
gondola, camp-fires, cities, whole continents flicker.

I have not yet mentioned the haiku, which deserves an essay to itself. It’s a form at least as popular as the sonnet and has been reinvigorated by Michael Hartnett, Paddy Bushe, Gabriel Rosenstock and countless other contemporary poets who continue to be obsessed with making less more. The ‘traditional’ syllabic 5/7/5 haiku may be rejected by many practitioners now but it’s an interesting shape to work with, a little signpost-shaped box with a gear-shift or ‘cutting word’ similar to the sonnet’s ‘turn’ or volta. George Szirtes has written (and tweeted) many haiku and other short poems. Twitter is another interestingly-shaped box which Conor O’Callaghan has also made use of, writing one tweet-sized poem a week for a year and publishing the sequence, as ‘The Pearl Works’, in his latest collection, *The Sun King*.

To finish, here are two of my own micro-poems, the first from my 2010 collection *Fade Street* and the second from my forthcoming, *Haunt*:

### **Night, Wind, Dead Leaves**

rattle and hiss, the sound so high  
it is almost a whistle,

their bodying sigh  
the air of something more palpable

than passing by.

### **The Rice Lady**

While The Rice Lady can write  
your name on a grain of rice,  
every bullet  
has Everyone’s name on it.

---

Mark Granier’s has published three collections of poetry, *Airborne* (Salmon, 2001) *The Sky Road* (Salmon, 2007) and *Fade Street* (Salt, 2010). His awards include the New Writer Poetry Prize, the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize, three Arts Council Bursaries and a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship. He currently teaches creative writing in University College Dublin and The Irish Writers’ Centre. His new collection, *Haunt*, is forthcoming in 2015.

---

# Línte

## Dairena Ní Chinnéide

Luigh lom ar an líne  
ár nguthanna ar shreang  
ag ceangal cruinne  
tharchuradóra na dtost;

crannaibh na fáistine  
breac ar gach re gort,  
crannaibh na beatha, an chinn –  
línte croí is cinniúna;

glaó' coiligh ar théada,  
ola is tinnis gan urlabhra  
ar ghréasán na nguthanna  
ag fóirithint ar an ngaoth;

línte fuinnimh sídhe  
ag cuisliú fé thalamh,  
lorg ár línte romhainn  
guthán an chrainn ionainn;

clathacha satailíte,  
saoirse gan teorainn chéille  
na gnaipí is na scáileán  
ag ceilt snaidhm ár n-uaignis;

línte theorann  
trasnaíl anamacha  
ó phríosún na cistine  
go gort na cumarsáide;

na sé líne: sex aetates mundi  
ár nguthanna ag fanacht  
le faoiseamh an tsaoil romhainn  
go labhraímid gan chrann lena chéile.

*Edited by* Paul Lenehan  
*Designed by* Gareth Jones  
WWW.GAZJONESDESIGN.COM

PRINT EDITION: ISSN 2009-7263  
ONLINE EDITION: ISSN 2009-7271



**Poetry Ireland**

32 Kildare St, Dublin 2, Ireland  
T +353 (0)1 678 9815  
F +353 (0)1 678 9782  
info@poetryireland.ie  
**www.poetryireland.ie**

*Director*

Maureen Kennelly  
director@poetryireland.ie

*General Manager*

Ayoma Bowe  
management@poetryireland.ie

*Education Officer*

Jane O'Hanlon  
T +353 (0)1 678 9001  
janeohanlon@poetryireland.ie

*Writers in Schools Development Officer*

Anna Boner  
T +353 (0)1 678 9022  
writersinschools@poetryireland.ie

*Development Education Project*

Moira Cardiff  
education@poetryireland.ie

*Publications Officer*

Paul Lenehan  
publications@poetryireland.ie

*Media Resources*

Peter Salisbury  
media@poetryireland.ie