

Now
the
night
prowls
round
my
heart

Promhadh pinn

Biddy Jenkinson

Carraig a bhriseann tonn.
An stuaic seo i lár m'intinne
faoi ndear an turscar thart orm.

Cos ar an Sceilg,
Cos eile ar a bruach.
Ach ní féidir an dá chois
a thabhairt i dtír
gan tú a bheith istigh rompu.

Scailp charraige
Scailp cheoigh
Scailp uaignis.

Seachain an Spiorad Naomh
nó is báirnigh is beatha duit.

“An rud is doilí le duine
ná a bhás
b'fhéidir gurb é lár a leasa é,”
arsa Cuimín
nuair a rug maighdean mhara air.

Signature Tunes

by Jaki McCarrick

Colette Bryce

The Whole and Rain-domed Universe

PICADOR POETRY, 2014

Vona Groarke X

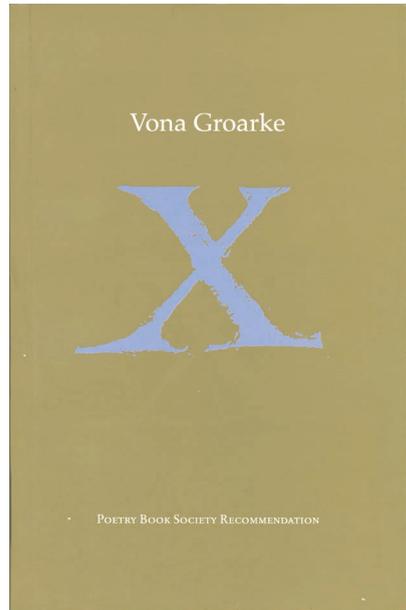
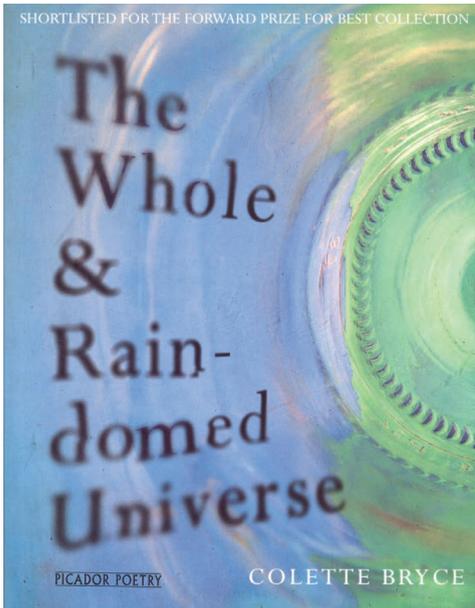
THE GALLERY PRESS, 2014

The title of Colette Bryce's latest collection, the 2014 Forward Prize shortlisted *The Whole and Rain-domed Universe*, comes from her poem, 'Derry' ('I thought that city was nothing less//than the whole and rain-domed universe'), and, indeed, this collection is, in many respects, an elegy, a sort of homage to the city in which Bryce was born and reared.

With these thirty poems, Bryce covers a relatively small amount of geographic territory, but what is here is rich and various. From the opening line of 'White', the first poem in the collection – 'I stepped from my skins and stumble in, like childhood' – the reader is taken on a tour of Bryce's Derry childhood, there being a compelling sense in the work that the speaker of each poem is Bryce herself. (That sense of biography is palpable throughout). In the second poem, 'Derry', we are brought back to the year of the Maze hunger strikes, to 1981, during which family trips across

the border involve being 'stopped at the checkpoint just too long/for fractious children, searched by a teenager/drowned in a uniform, cumbered with a gun.'

Memories of childhood games and discoveries are evoked, without sentiment, in 'Hide-and-Seek' and 'Boredom' – in which the speaker 'dawdled home/trailing a strange tune on the xylophone railings'. In the latter, such is Bryce's skill in conjuring up a 1970s childhood, one can almost get a whiff of the dusty atmosphere in her grandmother's attic, in which there was a 'crystal ball/of a snake preserved in alcohol'. The grandmother figure returns in 'Your Grandmother's House', an evocative and powerful sestina filled with yet more details of a specifically Northern Irish childhood: 'Ulster Television News/or Scene around Six: the latest murders'. And Bryce is witty here, too: 'The proof that Jesus was a Derry man?/Thirty-three, unemployed and living with his mother' (from 'Derry').



The collection moves on in time with ‘A Clan Gathering’, in which the speaker meets with extended family in a venue in Dublin in 2009. Here, despite the dark and troubled background from which many of her family have emerged, she feels as if she cannot share her new life with them:

I don’t mention my lover,
how we have to invent
for ourselves a blank, unscripted
future; her guaranteed absence
from the diagram, the great
genetic military campaign,
and no one asks,
sensing a difference.

It is a bombshell of a poem in that the previous pieces, with their Troubles settings, lead the reader to suppose that with its shared experience this family is deeply bonded, close; though clearly, over time, relationships have become complicated. We note how this new life of ‘The cypresses.// The four-by-fours in the drive’ contrasts with the close-knit working-class family of nine children who once ‘walked to school,

linked hand in hand/in twos and threes like paper dolls’.

The closing poems are frequented by a much-loved mother figure, though in ‘Signature’ and in ‘A Simple Modern Hand’ it is more specifically the mother’s signature that Bryce has alighted upon – finding in a written name as much detail and resonance as a photograph, say, or a memory.

The last line of the final poem, ‘The Quiet Coach’ – ‘I bow my head/to the questions’ – suggests a closure (for now) to Bryce’s traverses through ‘the rain-domed universe’, and while the curious certainty of that childhood world is no more, it seems all the journeys to the past in this poetic document have still not answered the speaker’s questions.

There are vividly drawn characters here, too. From the speaker’s long-suffering mother, ‘who drew nine babies/from her body’ (‘A Clan Gathering’), and upon whose arm the speaker sees ‘blue bruises’ (‘Derry’) – to the pair of drunks in ‘Magic Eye’: ‘Like you

they lived their whole lives/in this town, their parts assured'. There are the British soldiers of 'The Brits' and the deliciously surreal 'The Analyst's Couch', and two grandmothers, paternal and maternal, the latter brought to life in the iridescent line 'a pair of bunnioned shoes/beneath a portly lady' from the poem 'The theatrical death of my maternal grandmother as revealed in a 1960s glitter globe'.

There are some remarkable images here, my favourite being from the poem 'Helicopters', in which a busy Derry sky during the Troubles resembles 'a business of flies/ around the head wound of an animal'.

Haunting the poems is another character, however, who the reader senses – without being directly told – hasn't had the chance or, perhaps, psychological strength, to transcend a shared troubled past: the speaker's sister. In the poem 'Signature' the speaker (again, clearly Bryce herself) discover that her sister – 'when we dug out her flat in Morningside into black bin bags, after the breakdown' – writes the letter B as she herself writes it, and as was taught to both of them by their mother.

These are unflinching, brutally honest poems. They have been expertly collated, too, and are placed beside each other logically and fluidly, as if chapters in a novel or memoir. It is an outstanding collection, accessible without being overly pedestrian – and is deeply evocative. Overall, the reader senses that Bryce has mined the darkest corners of her past for this material – and though revisiting the world of her childhood and teens in a very particular part of the world, blighted as it was by the Troubles, she still achieves, with every single poem, a clamouring universality.

I once attended a poetry reading given by Vona Groarke at which she declared herself to be 'no nature poet'. While Groarke's latest and sixth collection, the PBS recommended

X, is full of her trademark erudition and precision, it is also a collection which is filled with emotion – and numerous allusions to nature. In the case of X, this is the nature of the domestic sphere – the garden, referred to in the marvellous 'The Garden Sequence' and in many other poems here.

Various meanings ascribed to the punchy title of this hefty collection of forty-one poems and two long sequences are given on the publication's back cover:

X (noun) – 24th letter of the English alphabet;
signifies an unknown person or thing;
multiplication sign;
a signature substitute;
used to represent a choice or a vote;
used to represent a mistake;
a mark for treasure on a map;
a sex chromosome;
a kiss...

While the poems here explore many of these permutations, there is also another X dominating this book, and it is the X of 'ex', as in 'former' or 'without'. So much of the material in this collection explores the speaker's aloneness, often with allusions to a previous life – an 'us' – which are sometimes elliptical, sometimes blatant – as in the wonderful 'Ghost Poem':

... I find I cannot speak of love
or any of its wind-torn ghosts to you
who promised warm sheets and a
candle, lit,
but promised me in words.

In the opening poem, 'A Pocket Mirror', the poet's intentions would seem to be laid bare: she wishes to be 'true to life', and it is for that reason she steps 'along high words with immeasurable care'. The candour deepens with poems that explore further the aforementioned theme of aloneness, in which 'a life may come to rest/on the

absence of a life' (from Groarke's remarkable title poem). 'Where She Imagines the Want of Being Alone', written in couplets, is a succinct but also devastating portrait of a woman alone in a house 'with its too much time'. Memories of a former togetherness are also explored in the poems 'Storm' and 'Furrow'. It is in the middle of the collection, with the poem 'When All This Is Done, Sure', that we find the speaker has begun to move on; she accepts her situation – and the passing of love:

When the doors close
nothing is left of him

but precise, metallic silence
where his four right notes have been.

The earlier poems of the collection are striking in their willingness to reveal a palpable vulnerability and despair. I was reminded, in the first quarter of the book, of Plath's *Ariel* poems, such as the rawness and depth of the speaker's pain. In 'The Garden Sequence' Groarke confirms herself, despite her protestation, as a skilled nature poet, though it is the nature of the garden, the domestic idyll in which she has let loose her 'antic husbandry'. Even in this sequence, though, we detect the speaker's solitude, as 'Dark hours rummage through the rooms/ so my heart (that dogged, little thing)/learns to accept itself as autumnal'. The sequence becomes then something of a space in which the pastoral meets the personal.

As the private despair of the collection gives way to poise and stoicism, the themes of the poems segue beautifully into an exploration of art and colour, as in 'Monet's Palette, Musée, Marmottan' (dedicated to Peter Fallon), and the final sequence, a meditation on the work of Danish artist Vilhelm Hammershøi. It is as if after the acceptance of absence and aloneness comes the solitary life of the mind, which feels in the collection like a joyous transcendence of some kind, a return to the deep and reliable self.

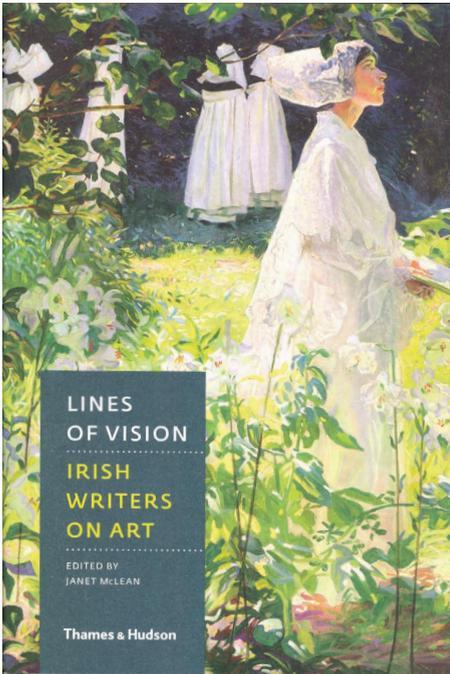
Though Groarke, unlike Bryce, is not a poet who evokes any 'place' in particular, many of the poems here – or parts of them – seem nonetheless to be strongly located in Ireland, whether via the Sweeney imagery of 'Fate' or in lines such as 'a swan in darkness/ down by the docks' from 'The Storm', or 'Hitching back roads to the passage tomb' from 'Equinox', both of which evoke the time Groarke has previously spent in Louth and Meath. Hence, a sense of place is also threaded through these poems, and is often a location for the speaker's much alluded to former (i.e. 'ex') condition of 'us'.

What strikes me most about *X* is its tone, which, overall, is heavy and dark but also brave. It is possibly the most heartfelt of Groarke's six collections to date.

Jaki McCarrick's debut short story collection, *The Scattering*, was published in 2013 by Seren Books and was shortlisted for the 2014 Edge Hill Prize. Her awards include the 2010 John Lennon Poetry Prize and the 2010 Wasafiri Prize for Short Fiction. Her play, *Belfast Girls*, will premiere in the US in May 2015.

CRAFTING CLARKE

by Enda Wyley



The time is right. There's an imaginative stirring that won't let up, is relentless in its need to be addressed and to connect with *something* – it might be an image, a fresh feeling or memory, the tug of a sentence just read or of a conversation overheard. For every poet that initial shock of inspiration is personal and different but for all, it is suddenly imperative that a pen be reached for, a notebook opened, a computer turned on. The poet has been startled into action and a poem begins to be crafted.

From now on, the poem will follow the poet everywhere. There will be no getting away from it and the myriad of decisions it demands of its maker. Where best to break a line. Which words to chose. Which words to lose, to save. What form the poem is happiest in. How a rhythm, a sound, a feeling might attach itself to an image and not let go, push the poem to its surprising end.

For me, memory and experience have always been essential prerequisites to the crafting of a poem. In the case of 'Lost Angels' – a poem I wrote especially for *Lines of Vision; Irish Writers on Art*, a book and exhibition currently on show in the National Gallery – it was a sudden jolt of memory and previous experiences that sent me off on the journey of responding to the frail magnificence of the painting of my choice.

When I was a child there was a dark room that we used to visit every Sunday. The room was in the Hugh Lane Gallery, at the top of Parnell Square. We would leave the whiteness of its grand entrance hall and enter the room's blackness. Within seconds our eyes would adjust to the colours of the stained glass within. One in particular – its blue, magical fairytale – drew us closer. It was a window made by a man called Harry Clarke. I had never heard of him before but my father explained that he was one of Ireland's finest artists and that the window's panel depicted Keats's poem 'The Eve of St Agnes' and the mysterious love of Madeline for Porphyro, her family's enemy. It is a great narrative drama, expertly executed by Clarke. As a ten year old, I was immediately hooked by its beauty and my love for Harry Clarke's work began.

Years later, Harry Clarke found me again. I was renting a flat at the back of a building on Patrick Street. Its windows faced the church of St Nicolas of Myra. At night the light of the church's window spread across my bedroom floor and I could clearly see Christ hanging from his cross, masterfully crafted by Harry Clarke. It was an eerie image that fascinated but frightened me. And yet all through that period, I slept with the blinds up, the curtains open, so that I could closely observe this window before falling asleep. The poem that came from this experience was short and crafted itself into a simple narrative of a love story set against the background of the inner city. It was a poem of repetition centred on the idea of whiteness and this internal beat dictated the neat form and soundscape of the piece. 'There is only whiteness now;/White sheets; white pillows/on a flat futon; white from a moon/over Francis Street/and Harry Clarke's stained-glass/full of a ghostly Christ hanging.'

And so, given my lifelong admiration for Harry Clarke, it seemed only natural that my immediate choice for *Lines of Vision* should be one of his six decorative angels,

painted in 1924 for St Mary's Church on Haddington Rd, Dublin. I had often visited the Irish section of the Gallery over the years and was always stilled by the delicacy of these angels – their long fingers, their thin bodies, the striking blue background and the gold highlights. I had also always been intrigued that they had been rolled up and lost behind the church's organ and only discovered again in 1968 when the National Gallery acquired and restored them, for display in the Millennium Wing. A feeling of the lostness of these angels overwhelmed me and this feeling proved essential to the crafting of the poem.

But how should I begin? I embedded a storm into the initial section to create a sense of chaos. Slates are blown from the church roof. A gargoyle falls from the bell tower. There is a flood in the sanctuary. I became a conduit for the poem. The lines asserted themselves as short. The language refined itself over several drafts and the shape of the poem ordered itself into nine four-line stanzas. Out of the mayhem of the storm came the angels, long forgotten but suddenly found. The poem urges the artist Harry Clarke to unfurl them again and watch his angels as they fly out of the church, over the city and back to his studio in North Frederick Street. An imaginative energy – that of the angels coming alive and returning to their creator Clarke – was therefore central to the making of 'Lost Angels', as was an exactness of description which pays homage to the detail of the painting and reaches an exultant conclusion. The studio door opens. The angels have come home and they sing.

Enda Wyley's fifth collection, *Borrowed Space: New and Selected Poems*, was recently published by Dedalus Press. *Lines of Vision; Irish Writers on Art* is published by Thames and Hudson and is available from The National Gallery of Ireland and from bookshops nationwide.

Lost Angels

Enda Wyley

The gargoyle falls
from the bell tower,
wind blows slates
from the roof

rain floods beams
over the sanctuary,
night fights its way
down the nave

and deep behind
St Mary's pipes
these angels
rolled in dust

and tied with
the spiders' thread –
so long forgotten
but suddenly found.

Unfurl what
you have lost –
see how they wake,
fly free, paler than swans

under Baggot Street bridge
as they head for the Green
and the Liffey's flow,
then swoop over the cursed

Children of Lir that fall
in Parnell Square,
until at last they come to rest
in North Frederick Street

the moon a halo
about their heads
hung in the blue of night,
petals of fire, the thin stems

of time caught in their fingertips.
Open your studio door,
unfurl what you have lost –
hear your angels sing.

Thanks

Billy Collins

After we went for a fast walk
on the path along the lake shore

after you brought me a vitamin
and after we swam in a pool,

me naked, you wearing only a thin tee shirt
and now that you are slicing a watermelon

on the kitchen counter with a beach
towel wrapped around your waist,

I need to thank you for giving me a break
from writing poems in which

the speaker, as we like to call him,
can do nothing line after line

and stanza after stanza
but lament his loneliness in the rain.

On Minor Poets

by David Wheatley

If poems in magazines travel on public transport and poems in slim volumes have got their own car, poems in anthologies travel by limousine. Counting Shakespeare sonnets and Keats's odes among their natural peers, here are texts of a higher order, far too good to rub spondees with lesser creations. Who has not dreamed of sharing anthology space with the likes of John Clare, Samuel Johnson, Herman Melville and Charlotte Brontë? Few people, you might think, but not when the anthology in question is *The Cambridge Book of Lesser Poets*, a delightful confection issued in 1927 as a foil to the headline-hogging acts of Palgrave and Quiller-Couch's best-selling anthologies. After all, who would be a lesser poet? Take this question to any library, however, and you will encounter shelf after shelf of dead writers for whom recognition as even a minor poet would represent a stunning victory over the condescension of posterity.

I love minor poets. Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea, Amy Levy, Charlotte Mew, Robert Fergusson, James Clarence Mangan, and Robert Garioch, are all poets I read

with admiration and reverence. None is exactly major, by which I mean that it seems to have been their destiny to be remembered for a number of anthology pieces, with the rest of their work existing, if it exists at all, for the specialist reader alone. In some cases, the proportion of read to unread work can be daunting. I have on my shelves all four volumes of the Irish Academic Press edition of Mangan's poems, which weigh in at about 1500 pages of work. Yet most people – most Irish Studies academics too, I suspect – would struggle to name more than half a dozen Mangan poems.

An Irish reader may know Mangan through exposure to 'A Vision of Connaught in the Thirteenth Century' on the old Inter Cert syllabus, but without this kind of sponsorship the minor poet (on no pub poster or postcard) may find it hard to attract new readers. Before I moved to Scotland I was unaware of the work of Robert Fergusson (1750-1774), a tragically short-lived precursor of Robert Burns. Fergusson wrote poems in correct Augustan English before achieving an explosive

breakthrough into literary Scots in poems such as 'Auld Reekie', a description of his native Edinburgh. It is one of the great poems of the eighteenth century, but no force on earth, as far as I can see, will ever propel Fergusson into the consciousness of the reading public at large.

I wouldn't want to give the impression that I am conflating major status and fame. Many justly forgotten poets have been famous in their day, from Robert Southey and Felicia Hemans to Cecil Day-Lewis and three-time Pulitzer Prize-winner Archibald McLeish.

Canonical status is not a trading floor, with stocks in Christina Rossetti rising in one corner while the market for Elizabeth Barrett Browning plummets in the other. As T S Eliot felinely observed, there is no competition among poets. We should value poets for what they are, not what we would like them to be: an exquisite minor lyric is worth any amount of misconceived epic follies. Eliot was a fine one to talk though, reserving a section in his *Collected Poems* for his 'Minor Poems', an exemplary act of false modesty, implying as it does that the rest of the book contained only major ones. In his essay 'What is minor poetry?', Eliot teases out the ways in which major or minor status go beyond the vagaries of reputation. One mark of a major poet, he decides, is when no part of the author's work does not benefit from a knowledge of everything else that author wrote: you can't fully appreciate Satan's great speeches in Milton's *Paradise Lost* without also lingering over the juvenile stirrings of 'Upon the Circumcision'. With minor poets, what Eliot wants is a sense that there is always something else awaiting discovery beyond the anthology greatest hits. This is certainly true of the minor poets I listed above, whereas with other poets, who go through peaks and troughs (James Dickey, W D Snodgrass, Denise Levertov), it is notably less so. Lovers of minor poets reserve a special affection for these overlooked poems: Mangan's 'Iceland Moss Tea' for instance, with its saga-like evocation of a 'thousand smoke-enveloped cones.'

It was an article of faith for Dennis O'Driscoll that the majority of poets live to see whatever reputation they achieve decline. One writer who bucks this trend, and a perfect minor poet, was O'Driscoll's choice for his contribution to Niall MacMonagle's *Lifelines* project, Chidiock Tichborne. Though the author of two other lesser poems, Tichborne is remembered exclusively for his 'Elegy', written in the Tower of London on the eve of his execution in 1586. His resignation in the face of death is unflappable:

I sought my death and found it in my womb,
I looked for life and saw it was a shade,
I trod the earth and knew it was my tomb,
And now I die, and now I was but made;
My glass is full, and now my glass is run,
And now I live, and now my life is done.

It's hard to imagine a poem more urgently pressed up against its own posterity, or more dependent on us realising that this is it: the rest is silence. The very unfairness of it also plays its part in Tichborne's appeal, and that of minor poetry as a genre. Please, it says to posterity: I am not Dante or Milton, but won't you remember me too?

Just as the world would be a better place if everyone adopted rescue cats instead of buying pedigrees, we would be better readers of poetry if we sourced our poems not from anthologies but the shadowy zone where minor poetry lives: the metaphysical poet no one has heard of, the Latin poet who survives in two or three fragmentary lyrics, the doomed Welsh modernist who swapped poetry for God. For Tichborne, this zone was the prison cell where he stared extinction in the face. Read a minor poem today and save someone's memory from oblivion.

David Wheatley's *Contemporary British Poetry* is published by Palgrave.

Putting It On

Martina Evans

FROM BURNFORT, LAS VEGAS (ANVIL PRESS, 2014)

In the convent secondary school
Sister Benedicta – also known as *Big Ben* –
said *I was putting it on. Acting.*
I didn't know what she was talking about
until copper-haired, brown-eyed Dolores
stood up for me. *She can't help it, Sister*, Dolores said
but Dolores wasn't listened to either when she
tried to explain that I'd learned to stand like that
in National School.
I'd carried it over, unconscious of how
annoying it was for the nuns,
me with my one hand clutching the desk,
one bottle-green stockinged leg braced against
the iron rung underneath, the other
stuck out in front, ready to run.

Heritance

Colette Bryce

FROM THE WHOLE & RAIN-DOMED UNIVERSE (PICADOR POETRY, 2014)

From her? Resilience. Generosity.
A teacher's gravitas.
Irish stew. A sense
of the ridiculous. High ceilings.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be.
Operatic plotlines.
Privacy.

An artery leading to the Spanish Armada,
a galleon dashed on the rocks at Moville, a sunken
grave, *se llama Hernando*,
black hair, despair,
a rose between the teeth.
Bullets. Books.
A low-toned voice.

An Antarctic explorer in a fur-lined hood
with the face of a pugilist
and a Russian wife in Brooklyn.
Bottles, half-full,
tilting in the ottoman.
O rhesus negative.
Tact, to a point.

Uncle Joe walking out of the Dáil in '22,
sold down the river.
An historical anger.
Stand-up piano.
Pilgrim feet.
A comic turn of phrase.
An iron constitution.

{Overtures

by Richard Hayes

Jim Maguire *Music Field*

POETRY SALZBURG, 2013

Jessica Traynor *Liffey Swim*

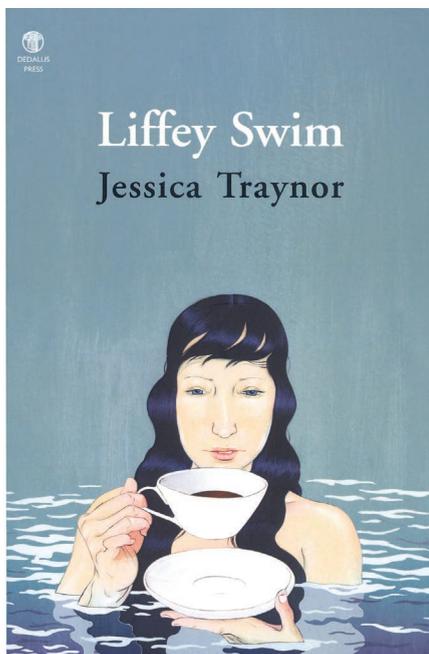
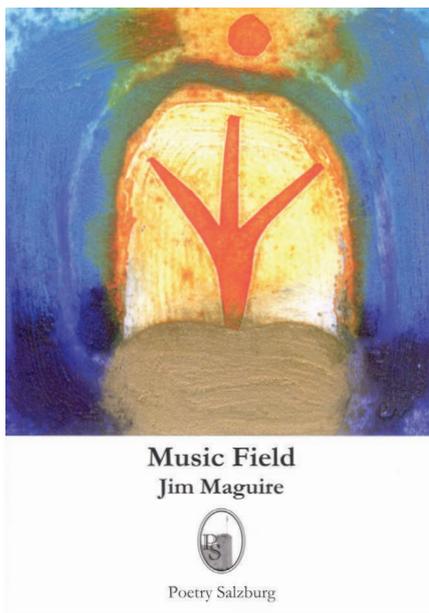
DEDALUS PRESS, 2014

It is a pleasure to read a debut collection as accomplished as *Music Field* by Jim Maguire, a Wexford-born poet and teacher. The book comprises ‘variations’ on a theme; each poem grounds itself in some different aspect of music – in the experience of music, in its performance, in music history or in the lives of composers and performers. Or even in the ‘lives’ of the inanimate instruments and other paraphernalia surrounding performance, like Glenn Gould’s chair or the piano in ‘Sinking the Piano’, the surprising poem that opens *Music Field*. ‘I would like to stay and share a joke,’ the poem begins, seeming to address a lover or a friend, only to unbalance the reader mid-way through with:

how this morning, heaving you down
the stairs
I thought for the first time of my heart
as a poor, neglected creature
and of the poignancy of men
shouldering unbearable things.

The terrific title poem brings home the obvious, which is that the reflections on musical performance and composition and experience here are really reflections on the power and purpose of poetry. ‘Music Field’ describes ‘Two unrelated themes/in a field, slow-circling, waiting for the trouble to begin’, which is the key, I think, to Maguire’s *modus operandi*: he excels at bringing ideas and images together and creating an unsettling harmony.

Is it the tree she’s trying to stare down or
the boy
half-hidden behind in stiff breeches and
spats,
outlandish get-up for a field, not to
mention his hair
full of flowers – poppy, marigold,
cyclamen –
a key in his head for each, all flat-majors
and a minor
for the fuzzy horizon.



What gives greatest pleasure here, what lends the poems such assurance and solidity, is the sense of the poems discovering themselves as they go. This is nowhere more evident than in the wonderful 'Before Music', a 170-or-so line poem that ranges thematically and figuratively but never loses control or equilibrium. 'Sometimes, as the pianist stepped onstage/you'd close your eyes and try to inhale/summer, kelp, animal breath/from hands,' the poem begins, and ends:

children playing in the afterglow
of the wedding party whose music still
echoed from the woods on the crest of
the hill,
the deserted organist, left
to shake off his sadness in the choir loft,
sinking his fingers deep through the sun-
stained keys, drupe smooth, juice
running down.

'Before Music' is matched here only by 'Duparc: a programme note', a curious poem that takes the facts in the life of French composer Henri Duparc and fashions a delightful narrative full of tangents and cross-currents.

No farewells or photographs,
just the salon air turning cold
and ashamed –
how one person leaving the room
can deprive the rest of a tenderness
they'd imagined as their own –
as if they'd glimpsed themselves in the buff
of his empty chair, the picture
they cut, lush-whiskered,
old-before-their-time respectables
reckoning up their lives.

In these poems in this way are discoveries and revelations. *Music Field* works in a manner that is as complex and challenging and pleasurable as the greatest of music.

Jessica Traynor's *Liffey Swim* is a very different kind of book, lacking the formal and thematic unity of Maguire's collection though with a greater singularity of voice. Many of the poems here are miniatures and the finely-wrought lyrics are as fragile as the materials from which a life is made in 'Settlement':

In measuring the future
we are measured,

allowing the flour
of days to drift

and frost our
open palms,

afraid the smallest
breath might blow away

this settlement,
this home.

There is an affecting vulnerability here that is tangible through the collection.

But there are poems here too with a harder edge. The book is divided into three sections corresponding to Dublin's three rivers – Dodder, Liffey, Tolka. The opening poems in the Tolka section describe aspects of a Dublin wasteland and also include 'An Education in Silence' which is dedicated to the women of the Stanhope Street Magdalene Laundry.

My mother doesn't write.
It's been three years. My hands
crack from the heat of the sheets
as we feed them through the mangle.
The high windows admit one square
of light, on the word *repent*,
and I am silent like the sunlight.

The final lines here perhaps sail close to cliché, but the 'admit' is right and true, like many of the poems in the book.

The poems are more powerful when they call on myth and history, as in 'Purgatory', a poem that references Henry VIII's apparent closure of a cave at Lough Derg rumoured to be a gateway to the next life:

I know no matter how sturdy this wall
Purgatory will pour forth,
crashing through the forests
towards the fat rose in its clearing,

changing and ever the same
like the thousand rhythms of rain
that beat out in this terrible place
the semblance of time.

The poems gain force towards the end as they become empowered by questions, not answers. 'Blackbird in Ballybough' wraps up the collection with the eponymous bird calling out in 'raised inflection, [the] repeated question: *Is this being?/Is this being?/Is this being?*' The poem ends with an answer that is not explicit ('then an answer comes/from beyond the railway bridge'), which is the style of these poems – they do not give up their secrets easily and insist, gently, on the reader's return to them. This is a very promising debut.

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

HEANEY

THE

TEACHER

by Andrew Jamison

**In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountains start,
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.**

FROM 'IN MEMORY OF W B YEATS' BY W H AUDEN

Teaching 'the free man how to praise' is a line that encapsulates Seamus Heaney's life and work. From the start it is clear to see that Heaney valued not just education, but having a good teacher. In his essay 'Belfast' (*Finders Keepers*, Faber and Faber, 2002), he writes about how he remembers Philip Hobsbaum, his tutor at Queen's and convener of 'The Group' with 'the special gratitude we reserve towards those who have led us towards a confidence in ourselves'. In 1962 Heaney took up a post as an English teacher himself, at St Thomas's Secondary Intermediate School in Ballymurphy. However, according to his interview in *Stepping Stones* (Faber and Faber, 2008), it was a role that he didn't enjoy all of the time: 'I was certainly unhappy... [there was] a lingering feeling that I was now a bit off course.' Yet, despite

these apprehensions, some of his most engaging essays are about education and teaching, as he writes in 'On Poetry and Professing' (in *Finders Keepers*):

I have seen talented men and women so encased in the shining armour of *moi* that they have utterly failed to connect with the group in front of them.

Heaney, renowned for his generosity of spirit, is unforgiving when it comes to the role of the teacher toward the student. He continues:

The poet who believes that excellence in the art excuses ill-manneredness or ill-preparedness in the classroom is offending the human as well as the professional imperatives.

Heaney has left a great body of work which not only teaches us how to praise, but also goes a long way in teaching us how to teach. Yet, if some of his most engaging essays are about education some of his best poems, while never didactic, are lessons in themselves.

This idea of Heaney as a teacher is palpable throughout his *oeuvre*, from the beginning right up to his latest versions of Robert Henryson's fables (recently televised as *Five Fables* on the BBC) and to the last poem in *Human Chain* (2010), 'A Kite for Aibhín', in which he is teaching his grandchild how to fly a kite. There is more than an echo here to the poem I want to focus on, 'A Kite for Michael and Christopher', from *Station Island* (1984).

I love this poem because of its range. At first, it portrays Heaney in childlike awe of the kite, and its 'flitter of blown chaff'. This is before presenting him as a watchful student who had 'seen it grey and slippy in the making'. Then he becomes a kite maker himself as he ...

 tied the bows of newspaper
 along its six-foot tail

... before becoming an observer, seeing it with a grown detachment: 'But now it was far up like a small black lark'. The voice of experience deepens as he challenges his friend's notion of how

 the human soul
 is about the weight of a snipe

This is before, at last, becoming the teacher directing his sons with the imperatives 'Stand in here' and 'take the strain' which gives a sense of gentle authority. In the space of five stanzas Heaney artfully progresses from child to teacher.

This idea of range also extends to the register in the poem. The repetition of 'I'd' in the second stanza conveys a childlike

sense of excitement, just as the repetition of 'now' in the third stanza builds a sense of time passing and the elevation of the kite. The register lifts in the fourth stanza and becomes more abstract with the repetition of 'soul', and words with religious connotations such as 'ascends', 'assumed' and 'heavens'. In the final stanza, the register is brought under control with the use of imperatives such as 'take' (which is repeated), 'feel' and 'stand'. Heaney controls the tone of the poem, at the limit of where the colloquial meets the spiritual, in the way that he is controlling the kite itself. After Heaney's passing this poem is especially poignant. It portrays Heaney as student, father and teacher acknowledging that eventually the kite 'plunges down into the wood' as he is aware of the next generation taking the reins, readying them for the 'long-tailed pull of grief'. In the end, however, he is acknowledging the ephemeral, but also the importance of passing things on, equipping the next generation with the wherewithal to keep the kite flying, the importance, in short, of teaching, despite it being, in his own words (from *Finders Keepers*), 'as much of a mystery as it is a technique'.

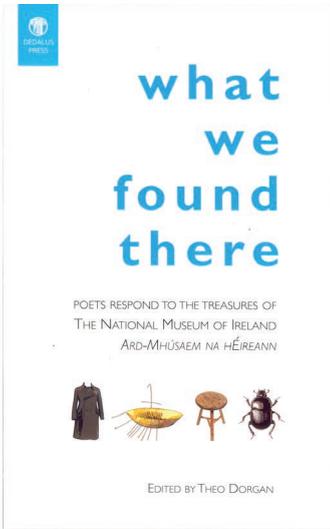
Andrew Jamison's first collection of poetry, *Happy Hour*, was published by The Gallery Press in 2012. Born in Co Down, he currently teaches English at Bristol Grammar School.

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Findings

by Florence Impens

Ed. by Theo Dorgan *What We Found There: Poets Respond to the Treasures of the National Museum of Ireland* DEDALUS PRESS, 2013



What *We Found There*, edited by Theo Dorgan, is a concise anthology of newly-commissioned work, in which more than forty poets ‘respond to an object in the [National] Museum [of Ireland]’s collections that spoke to them, that had come to inhere in memory, something that had in some sense or another acquired in their memories and imaginations a talismanic weight’. All given the same brief, the poets were free to choose one object preserved in any of the Museums, and they delight us with the diversity of their imaginations and the eclecticism of their choices, resulting in poems which, each in their own way, indirectly pay homage to the wealth of Ireland’s cultural heritage. While some revert to ekphrasis, many others reflect on the idea of the museum itself, or use their object as the starting point of a personal

meditation. Much of this reader’s pleasure in discovering the volume derived from hearing echoes and differences in the way poets approached the work, even when writing about the same artefact, such as Michael Longley in ‘The Brighter Boat’, and Colm Breathnach in ‘Long’, a poem in Irish translated by the author himself as ‘A Ship’.

The collection is indeed bilingual, although all the poems in Irish are followed by an English version, and the notion of inclusiveness is at the heart of Dorgan’s editorial selection, which strikes a welcome balance between well- and lesser-known poets, men and women, English- and Irish-language writers. Under the guise of what may at first seem to be a specialist anthology with a somewhat narrow focus, *What We Found There* reveals itself as a surprisingly rich and inventive collection giving us a vivid snapshot of the contemporary Irish poetic scene, whose diversity it powerfully captures. Hopefully, it will prompt readers both to revisit the museums they have frequented over the years, and to (re)discover poets with whom they may not be very familiar. An enjoyable volume, it deserves to find its place on the bookshelves of anyone with an interest in contemporary poetry, as well as in Ireland’s cultural past.

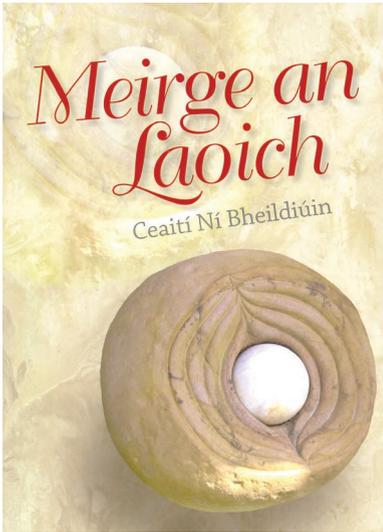
Florence Impens is currently working as a NEH Fellow at the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame. She has published reviews and articles on Irish literature, and is preparing her first monograph on classical reception in contemporary Irish poetry.

TRANSFORMER

by Doireann Ní Ghríofa

Ceaití Ní Bheildiúin *Meirge an Laoich*

COISCÉIM, 2013



A teacher, poet and visual artist, Ceaití Ní Bheildiúin is one of the most innovative voices in contemporary Irish-language poetry, fusing a unique poetic perspective with a characteristic clarity of language. *Meirge an Laoich* is her third collection of poems; thematically it grapples with notions of transformation and time, while returning repeatedly to her signature motifs – those of city, of stone, of the paths that run through our lives. Each deft return to a motif allows the reader to consider it afresh: the stones of a narrow staircase in ‘An Turas’ lead to a giant of stone in ‘An Geata’, a stone skull in ‘Mo Phlaosc’, a stone infant in ‘Leabh Cloiche’, and so on.

No excess embellishments are evident here, allowing the poet to present her work to the reader in a clear light. In the poem ‘Tine’, the poet uses fire to explore the legacy of loss, in language that is as precise as a knife:

Dónn am.
Tine fhíochmhar.

Líonn an tine
mo chraiceann tirim

ag loscadh na feola díom
mo chnámha á lomadh.

Transformation is perhaps the dominant theme that runs through this collection, whether in the process of transformation that occurs from wet dough to a loaf of bread (‘An tArán’), from tadpole to frog (‘Altram’), or from nut to root (‘Cnó’). There’s also a sense of capturing more oblique transformations, as in the poet’s imagining of a brother transformed to a heron (‘Ar Thóir na Breasaíle’), the transformation of an absent lover to a lingering scent (‘Boladh na Cré’), or the growth of a tree planted in grief (‘Cuirim Crann’).

Ní Bheildíuín draws frequently on the many personae of local folklore. We encounter Cailleach Chom an Lochaigh, Bóchna, and the pre-Celtic god Mogh Ruith, among others. She also draws characters from other cultures into her work: in the poem ‘Frog’, (an *ars poetica* of sorts) she references the Egyptian queen Heqet, and in the poem ‘Mac Tíre Baineann’, the poet uses the image of a mother wolf nurturing her brood to communicate the commonality of world myths:

Táilaim bainne ar m’ál:
Maóis, Muireann,
Romulus, Remus,
Sanichar, Shamdeo,
is naíonáin fós gan ainm.

It is impossible to read the poem ‘Máthair na Murúch’ without thinking of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill’s celebrated ‘Murúcha’/‘Mermaids’ sequence. This sense of harking back to myth while also nodding to poetic forbears is also evident in Ní Bheildíuín’s translation of a section of *Beowulf*, based on Heaney’s English translation – a translation of a translation.

Ní Bheildíuín reaches beyond the ventriloquism of personae in the poem ‘Taoide’, when she gives voice to a tide that lifts treasure from the ocean floor – shells, stones, bones – in order to arrange them on the beach:

ag bailiú chugam
sliogáin snoite, seoda gloine, clocha
is cnámha

ag cruthú taispeántais nua leo
ar mo chiumhais chúrach.

This poem may be read as an effective meditation on the tidal process whereby the poet / artist dredges for inspiration in the depths of the subconscious.

In the poem ‘*Memorae* – Caoineadh Ann Lovett’, Ní Bheildíuín explores the tragic

death of Ann Lovett (also addressed in Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill’s ‘Thar mo Chionn’ and Paula Meehan’s ‘The Statue of the Virgin at Granard’, and elsewhere). The use of repetition (‘*Codail, a chroí, codail!*’) is extremely effective in creating a poem that is a memorable, vivid and moving testament to its subject and her legacy.

Often, words themselves become magical in Ní Bheildíuín’s hands, when she uses a transformative alchemy to cast them on one page as a necklace of words (‘Rufaf’), on the next as a cloak (‘Éist leis an gCóta’), thus suggesting the curious power that words can cast over us.

A conjurer of language, Ní Bheildíuín can be mischievous, clever and funny, and *Meirge an Laoich* reflects an impressive development in her poetic growth.

Doireann Ní Ghríofa is a bilingual poet (www.doireannnighríofa.com). Among her awards are the Ireland Chair of Poetry Bursary 2014–2015 and the Wigtown Award for Gaelic Poetry in translation. Her work in Irish is published by Coiscéim, and a first collection of poems in English is forthcoming in 2015 from Dedalus Press.

XL

for Irene

Michael Smith

(1942 – 2014)

FROM TIMES AND LOCATIONS (THE DOLMEN PRESS, 1972)

Now the night prowls round my heart
like a great feline:
I cannot tell fear from loneliness.

The air thickens with ghosts familiar and strange.
Your father's footstep creaks the loose stairboard.
A picture suddenly tilts on the wall.

Our human losses of these past two years
have left their wrecks
whose bare ribs protrude in this low tide.

A prayer comes to my lips from childhood
but cannot be said:
our lost mariners are unreported yet.

I say the word love into the mocking stillness
of the night that I'm afraid of
only less than losing you.

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