



Poetry
Ireland
Éigse
Éireann

TRUMPET

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plum
tree
flowering
too
in the
eye
of the
bullfinch

Life Writing

Blake Morrison

FROM SHINGLE STREET (CHATTO AND WINDUS, 2015)

You're trying to bring to life what's in your head,
a story that's discomfiting but true.
Your interest in inventing stuff's long dead.

You know that all worth saying's all been said
but strive to tell it straight and make it new.
You want to bring to life what's in your head.

The names of all the ones you took to bed,
the triumphs and disasters you lived through:
you'd like to set this down before you're dead.

You comb your troubled past from A to Z.
You drag forgotten memories into view.
Your memoir brings to life what's in your head.

But Tim, best mate at school, was really Ted,
and Tania's nut-brown eyes were turquoise-blue.
They phone you late at night and wish you dead.

The humour and affection go unread.
Your candour earns you merciless reviews.
Don't try to bring to life what's in your head.
It's safer telling lies about the dead.

Shine[★] Susan Millar DuMars

Connie Roberts *Little Witness*

ARLEN HOUSE, 2015

Madelaine Nerson Mac Namara

The Riddle of Waterfalls

BRADSHAW BOOKS, 2015

Breda Wall Ryan *In A Hare's Eye*

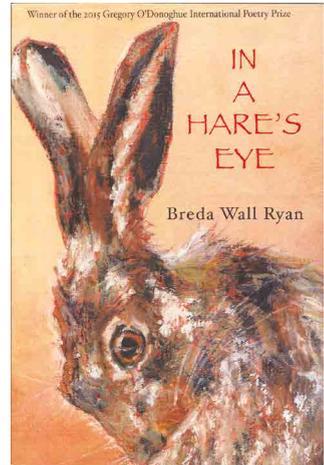
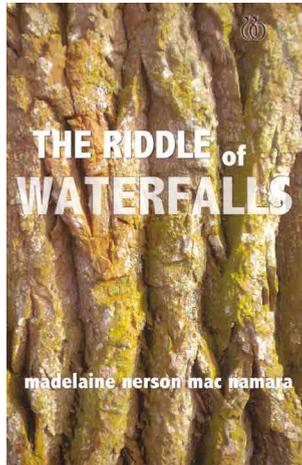
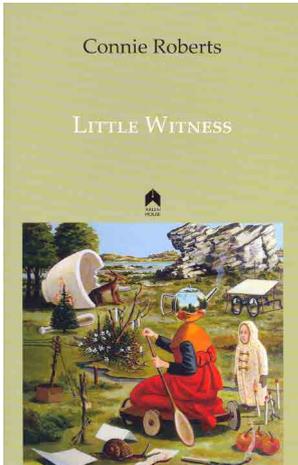
DOIRE PRESS, 2015

Why do women poets tend to publish debut collections later in life than their male counterparts? One could answer that our professional lives take on a different shape than that of men – that we take time away from careers to nurture families. I feel it's more intrinsic than that, however. Poets must be individualistic – confident enough to stand on the periphery of life and observe. Boys who do this are praised as bright, independent thinkers. Girls are told to get their head out of the clouds and muck in. We're told in a hundred ways each day to care less about how we see the world than about how the world sees us. Some of us take a long time to shake off that conditioning. Some never do. How many women have I met with drawers full of writing, never finished, never sorted, never shown to anyone? So many I've lost count.

So let's celebrate the fact that, this year, all three debut collections nominated for the Shine/Strong Award are by women. To be sure, none of the three are in the first flush of youth. Neither was I, when I first published. But they did take the pages from the drawer, did say *here I am*. Here they are.

Connie Roberts' book, *Little Witness*, conforms to our expectations of first collections in that it's intensely autobiographical. It also defies expectations by being astonishingly unified in terms of themes and images. Roberts was born into a painfully dysfunctional family and did most of her growing up in an Irish industrial school. The story these poems tell is harrowing. Roberts delivers up the details with candour and a clear-eyed lack of sentiment that make the work more powerful. You will hurt for this child.

However, the poems that lingered longest in my mind were not the ones depicting violence and deprivation. Instead, I was marked by the poems in which these things lurk, waiting, beneath a crust of fragile civility. In 'Doctor Rabbit', a summer day in rural Ireland, 1971, is described. The children play on the road, Mother smiles around a cigarette, Father takes his daughter blackberry picking. But we know this easy warmth and safety is just one side of the coin. At any moment, the coin may flip: 'Father takes the twine from Cyclops' neck, // and the dog swims in the indolent water, / his head bobbing like a buoy. I think / of the



day he tried to drown Mother / in the canal,
his hand grasping her blonde mane / as he
plunged her head up and down.' At the end
of the poem, the father dances his daughter
around the kitchen...

as mother, peering over her bowl of
berries,
waits for the other shoe to drop.

We understand from this that cruelty
hasn't scarred this girl as much as the
unpredictability of cruelty; kindness being
something one can't trust. Similarly, the
poem on page seventy-seven presents two
children playing house in a cowshed. The
poignancy of their activities ('We made a
home') is only fully felt when one takes in
the poem's title: 'Rondeau On Hearing Of
Your Suicide'.

There are four pages of notes at the end of
the book, explaining not only references but
inspirations. I have mixed feelings about
this. I'm glad I didn't read the notes until
after I had read, and formed my own
relationship with, each of the poems. In
its need to make us understand, the book
perhaps loses a bit of potency; readers enjoy
gathering implications, analysing subtext,
for themselves. Roberts should trust the
depth and strength of her own spare,
unflinching voice.

The Riddle of Waterfalls by **Madelaine
Nerson Mac Namara** also contains poems
about family history. But here, chaos comes
from outside; relations are the heroes.
'The Fort' is about the poet's Parisian
grandmother: 'Until that fine morning /
when she goes for her walk / and meets on
the way back / the courageous concierge /
posted round a corner. / He warns her to
move on. / The busy Gestapo / is emptying
her home / to the last toilet brush.' And
here is a portrait of that plucky woman's son
(from 'Mimosas'):

City bred, my father turns
passionate gardener, amazed
by his own green fingers
the nine an old war has left him.
He plants small mimosas
against a sea background.
In two years their shade
at midday is taller than me.

They stride through the book, this family
and their cohorts; resourceful, proud and so
obviously loved. The golden light that shines
off these portraits is a balm. There were just
a few places where I (a poet reared on the
confessional style) wondered whether the
depictions were too good to be true. One
case in point is at the end of 'Mimosas',
when the beloved trees are cut down. 'But
Mother claims her view / and he fells my
totems. / The only thing ever / I've had to

forgive them.’ If this is really the only thing she has had to forgive her parents for, theirs is a blessed relationship indeed!

I have some knowledge of modern French poetry (Mac Namara has roots in France as well as Ireland), and find much of it to be gently philosophical in nature; posing big questions in a light, even playful manner. This quality is present in Mac Namara’s work, and enriches it, in poems such as ‘The First Question’ (‘The first question / I remember asking: / / “How can you be sure / the sun will rise tomorrow?”’). This sparky curiosity about the world gives the book its pulse-beat. There is only a very brief bio of the poet provided, which is a shame, given that the poems bring up questions about the writer’s heritage. The book’s cover is my favourite of the three; a photo of grooved, pockmarked stone gleefully at odds with the waterfalls of the title. A juxtaposition as impish as the best of Mac Namara’s work.

If Roberts’ language is sure and transparent, and Mac Namara’s image-rich and musical, the language of **Breda Wall Ryan**, in her collection *In A Hare’s Eye*, is dense and richly textured. Long lines conjure lust, loss, hauntedness. Of the three, Ryan is least concerned with providing a narrative accounting of herself and her kin. She’s a shapeshifter, giving voice to the young people who smile at us from homemade ‘Have You Seen’ posters in ‘Missing’, and to career fishermen in ‘Inheritors’:

We’ll dawdle downriver,
find a spot to haul up in the shade,
pluck a lapful of holes from the air,
knot them together to make
nets to go fishing, come Monday.

There are also family poems, my favourite of which is ‘The Room’, a masterful handling of the dynamic between siblings in the wake of their mother’s death, as they look for clues as to the place each held in her heart. But the book opens out, from looking for messages from a mother to messages from

mothers and daughters, women, everywhere. There are persona poems and compassionate, closely-observed narrative poems about a rich variety of women: a junkie, a widow addressing St. Paul, a mysterious Cailín Rua, a woman whose two siblings have been burned for witchcraft (‘Three Sisters’): ‘Whip-graft my floating rib to a spur of the quicken tree / so my spirit endures as strong as the day I was born, / for I must destroy the destroyers of Bella, Donna and me.’

These poems come together as a sort of hymn to the female – her suffering, strength and alchemising ability. This is very accomplished work, using and transcending the trope of the autobiographical first collection. At seventy-eight pages, Ryan’s book sprawls; yet the contents are broken into only two sections. I would’ve preferred a tighter, more ordered construction. The design of the book is functional and attractive. I’m a fan of endpapers and they add a grace note here.

There is a way in which a poet’s engagement with their craft only begins *after* the first book is published. It is after we self-identify as ‘poet’ – at whatever age that happens – that we can begin to dig deep, bring to the surface our own peculiar poetic gifts. I look forward to reading what each of these three fine poets produces next.

Susan Millar DuMars has published three collections with Salmon Poetry, the most recent of which is *The God Thing* (2013). *Bone Fire* will be published by Salmon Poetry in April, 2016. She published a book of short stories, *Lights in the Distance*, with Doire Press in 2010, and is editor of the anthology *Over the Edge: The First Ten Years* (2013). Susan’s blog is: www.susanmillardumarsislucky.blogspot.ie

In A Hare’s Eye was awarded the Shine/Strong award on 13 March, 2016.

LIN PRAISE OF Limestone

by Dawn Wood

Peadar McArdle

*The Irish Landscape: An All-Ireland
Exploration through Science and Literature*

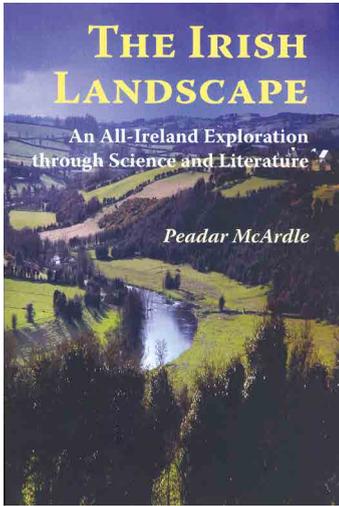
THE LIFFEY PRESS, 2014

The landscape shapes our being and our stories. Since when did it fade into the background – a neglected view from a window? McArdle’s intention in *The Irish Landscape: An All-Ireland Exploration through Science and Literature* is to take us on a grand tour of Ireland, to teach us how to fall awake to the Irish landscape. The chapters are organised by county, exploring the local geographical terrain, features and treasures. The people – often poets – connected with that county and those who have made contributions to the science of geology or to literature are also discussed. Peadar McArdle is a geologist, having gained his degree at UCD, and he served as director of the Geological Survey of Ireland from 1992 until 2010. His passion for geology has enabled him to set a hospitable remit and the result is a fascinating and entertaining catalogue of shifting connections and juxtapositions.

McArdle explains that he has arranged the chapters in broadly chronological order, starting with the more recent geological events, such as the formation of turf bogs, 10,000 years ago. This was only a moment ago, geologically speaking. The bogland

gives McArdle one reason to start with Derry and, of course, to focus on Seamus Heaney, who knew of the fascinating parallels between poetry and geology – ‘the visionary perspective and detachment of each ... distilling and communicating wisdom concerning our wonderful world’. There is something in the scale of geological time, in the magnitude of past events, that is impossible for us to grasp intellectually, yet it meets us physically in the present, in the landscape of our home counties and in treasured places. In Heaney’s ‘Bogland’, ‘the ground itself is kind, black butter’. His pieces of fossilised wood, ‘ghosts / of sap and season’, are speaking to him from 25 million years ago, and the sandstone pebble he collected as a keepsake on a Lough Foyle beach warms his hand with a touch that is more than 500 million years old. McArdle quotes from Heaney’s last interview, ‘I think that I am basically a ground person, you know, if it comes to which element ... I am sedimentary ... going down and down and finding origin there’.

McArdle’s purpose in writing *The Irish Landscape* is perfectly epitomised in this early chapter; thereafter we are led from one event to another, from one county to



another, given plenty of truly valuable geological information in a way that is entertaining and inspiring – it is a peopled landscape.

It stands to reason that the evolution and character of any landscape, its people, and their stories – ‘imaginative possessions’ – are bound together as community. It would not be within the realms of science to assert that the geology of a landscape causes particular traits in those who live there, but poets can rejoice in making such associations – John Montague recognised ‘Like dolmens round my childhood, the old people’. And along the same vein, McArdle characterises W.B. Yeats as his ‘Lyricist of Limestone’ and Louis MacNeice as his ‘Bard of Basalt’. The latter is in response to MacNeice’s reference to Antrim as ‘country of callous lava cooled to stone’. This idea is discussed at some length by McArdle as it has been by other commentators – the way in which, for MacNeice, basalt became a symbol of harsh Protestant determinism. But it was MacNeice’s love/hate relationship with Ireland that drove him to write poetry such as ‘Valediction’, his great, all-encompassing farewell, with ‘Indifference and sentimentality’, celebrating also the ‘quiet hills / The gaudily-striped Atlantic’ and admitting ‘I cannot be / Anyone else but what this land engendered me [...] But

being ordinary too I must in course discuss / What we mean to Ireland or Ireland to us’.

To return to the thread of geological time, the events that underlie the Irish landscape could be described as a tale of two oceans – the Atlantic, and the father of the Atlantic, the Iapetus Ocean, which opened as ancient continents drifted apart more than 500 million years ago. The sand and mud deposits of this former ocean gave rise to Cambrian sedimentary rocks – sandstone, slate, quartzite (e.g., at Bray Head in Wicklow). The volcanic activity that ultimately closed that ocean, during a period of mountain building, joined the NW and SE halves of Ireland. McArdle explains, ‘our rocks contain a full record of the cycle of this ocean ... it was the welding closed of its opposing margins, or tectonic plates ... that has determined Ireland’s present-day environment’. Old basalt comes from the ring of volcanoes that surrounded the ocean. Ongoing mountain-building activity ultimately closed the Iapetus; and Old Red Sandstone is derived from the weathering of those ancient Caledonian mountains. In the interim between the two oceans, ‘Ireland’ existed as a tropical marine basin, giving rise ultimately to the limestone of central Ireland (around 300 million years ago). New Red Sandstone gives evidence of a period of desert, around 280 to 200 million years ago. Then a new ocean cycle gave rise to the Atlantic – American and European plates drifted apart and a chalk sea left its deposit. Once again, volcanic lava flowed and set to form new basalt, and clay and lignite were deposited where Lough Neagh’s precursor existed.

Although McArdle’s introductory description of the sequence of events is perfectly lucid, I admit that, as a visual thinker, I needed to find a linear timeline and a colour coded map of Ireland’s geology. That was easily done – then these events slipped into place and this world of knowledge started to open.

Any reader will experience a thrill of recognition as they turn to McArdle's chapters on counties of holiday and home. Antrim is characterised by the early Atlantic – the chalk sea deposits and flint at White Park Bay, the young basalt of the Giant's Causeway. And in my home county, Tyrone, our other-worldly Sperrin Mountains glitter with evidence of the Iapetus Ocean's closure – metamorphic schists from mixtures of mud and sand, with mica, and quartz veins containing that elusive alluvial gold. This chapter is titled 'So deep this landscape lies in me' ('First Landscape, First Death', John Montague). This poet, where he views the landscape as a working environment, allows McArdle to remind us that 'sometimes a landscape is in sympathy with human activity, sometimes not, so it cannot be taken for granted'.

So, together, we have the pleasure of McArdle's company, as he walks through all Ireland's counties and shares his knowledge along the way. Ours is not the Emerald Isle, but the Limestone Isle, and we are led on a gentle pilgrimage from the Old Red Sandstone of Cork, to the quartz of Mayo's Achill Island; from the igneous granite of Donegal to the rhyolite of Wexford. Along the way we encounter rivers and falls, loughs and carries, drumlins and mountains where 'once petitioners left rosary beads [and] now thoughtlessly, many discard their scratched lottery tickets'.

One of the achievements of McArdle's project, despite its breadth of content, is its unity. Different types of enquiry – scientific and literary – happily co-exist in his writing, as well as promoting an appreciation of geological unity which long predates and will outlive any human divisions. As did Heaney, he wants to suggest 'how we might relate familiar landscapes not to the usual divisive cultures but potentially to a deeper geological understanding'.

McArdle is also serious in his intent on preserving the legacies of Ireland's

geologists and lesser-known writers. Most striking, perhaps, for the diversity of his concerns, is the humane Professor Samuel Haughton of Carlow (1821-1897), a student of granite, who also produced a 'best-practice guide for the hangman'. Also especially memorable is Professor John Joly of Offaly (1857-1933) who estimated the age of the earth to be 100 million years, but, on proposing the application of radioactivity in dating rock, was startled at his results, to the point of disbelief – Leinster Granite was around 400 million years old, and the earth, over a billion years of age. As well as his achievements in the science of geology, we read that Joly wrote a sonnet 'mournfully in sympathy' with Oldhamia, a long-extinct worm that he studied from the fossils of its traces, found at Bray Head.

Of the many writers McArdle honours, one who draws us with his music is Francis Ledwidge of Meath, the 'Blackbird of the Boyne', killed in 1917 at Ypres:

The hills are crying from the fields to me,
And calling me with music from a choir
Of waters in their woods where I can see
The bloom unfolded on the whins like fire.

The Irish Landscape is in some ways a deceptive title for such inspirational, conversational writing. The chapter headings, on the other hand, are a delight. McArdle's company makes us want to be more aware of landscape, to travel deeper, perhaps to hear the 'sermons in stones', perhaps to be at peace with ourselves in the first sunshine.

Dawn Wood was born in Omagh, Co Tyrone and moved to Dundee in 1986. After a career as a science lecturer, she now works as a hypnotherapist and an artist. Her poetry collections, published with Templar Poetry, include *Quarry* (2008), *Ingathering* (2013), and *Declaration* (2016).

Faoi Mhaighnéidín Cuisneora, Grianghraf de Mhamó mar Chailín Scoile

Doireann Ní Ghríofa

agus ag cúl an réiteora
tá gríscíní, raca agus rí uaineola
corp agus cnámha, cosa reoite –
bladh m faoi oighear.

Deir céad dlí Newton
go bhfanfaidh gach corp ag gluaiseacht
faoi threoluas mura ngníomhaíonn
fórsa seachtrach air.

Cailte: na crúbíní
a rinne poc-rince ar chliathán cnoic
trí sholas deargbhuí
an ghrian ag dul faoi.

Meta-thesis

Enda Coyle-Greene

FROM MAP OF THE LAST
(DEDALUS PRESS, 2013)

i

While she's waiting for the lights to change at City Hall, the storm begins; the wind speeds the river, lifts dust, yet traffic holds her captive on the pavement. Pulsating at the red-to-green, the seconds counted-out, her body's dream-stuck lag behind her ticking heels, the rush her heart's dictating to the *slow, too slow* of other people, she at last steps off the street. Descended to the car park's underworld, on her knees she tips her bag, finds keys, her ticket, and becomes Persephone, reversing fast into the dark – spinning on to where she shouldn't go, but has to, doesn't care.

ii

She knows the story of Iris, rainbow sent to a goddess with a god's request – an order really, it occurs to her on the platform, the station almost empty, a gape in the bird-flecked, seascape roof now holding those seven curved colours, the rest of the sky pale beyond the glass. Easter Monday passes, cold as Persephone who craved the warmth of red, orange, yellow – the green, blue, indigo, violet, fast-dyed by the tears of her goddess-mother; the ground beneath her quaking, she can't see the train, still miles away, the ferrous dance as track locks into track at its advance.

iii

Beyond the window's skin, a scattered white, the many weathers March defines as light, all that's left of the storm now its surface of flotsam on the river she can't hear. Up-tumbled desperately from mud, it's dragged back to an underworld that's mapped and snagged in the hollow of her cup. Silted there, are tea-leaf letters that she tilts, re-shapes to other orders, different words, the three attempts to change what she, Persephone, can only know – bare trees that never felt the rip and snap until it was too late, that never had the chance to turn about in seasons she has made, can't live without.

WRITING 'METATHESIS'— BALANCING INSTINCT AND INTENTION

by Enda Coyle-Greene

'**M**etathesis' began with a word I either didn't know or had forgotten. Words are air to writers and it's possible I'd absorbed this word in much the same way one breathes through someone else's perfume in a crowd, or inhales a fug of over-roasted coffee beans while walking past a café. I may have parked it somewhere.

Poems are given to their makers in many ways, and, like most poets, I find it difficult to write 'about' a subject when challenged to do so. A poem has to offer me a way in and early drafts usually involve me looking for a door or even a window I can prise open. Poems are never given a pre-composition intellectual work-over.

All I had was a word, 'metathesis' and a feeling that keeping that word as a working

title would affect the making or not making of the poem. I didn't look the word up in my dictionary, at least not until I had a grip on what I was trying to do. Images began to surface – vivid, cinematic, and so ephemeral that I was almost afraid to reach out for them. Looking back now at the first of many early drafts, I'm surprised at how many elements from those first scribbled pages in a notebook – the rushing river, the trees, the weather – have survived into the final version.

As a rule, I try to keep myself out of the act of composition as much as possible; any poem I've ever over-thought at the outset has ended up filed away in a drawer with a stake driven through its lifeless heart. I had no intentions for 'Metathesis' except to try and grab some of those images and take them to the page.

Stephen Spender wrote: ‘Poetry is a balancing of unconscious and conscious forces in the mind of the poet, the source of the poetry being the unconscious, the control being provided by the conscious.’ Examining those drafts now, I notice that I have numbered each handwritten line down to fourteen. This then is the point at which I must have started that balancing.

Catching a poem while it’s still out of reach is always the most terrifying part of the process. Too light a touch and it’s liable to get bogged down in abstraction, too heavy and it can be smothered. Once I move everything to the white screen, away from my handwriting, from my physical presence on the page and my imposition on the words, I pick up a trail and my instinct kicks in. That trail could be determined by the line breaks, the physical shape on the page, or by a single, ‘concrete’ image. It could be what I call the ‘axle’ word, the one around which the poem turns. It could be the rhyme, if there is one, or the form, again, if there is one.

The British poet, Paul Farley has said that ‘Engaging with form – any form – means there’s a chance that you’ll say something you weren’t going to say. Too much freedom gives you that rabbit-in-the-headlights thing.’ This is something with which I concur (and repeat so often that I am in danger of having it inscribed on my headstone). Anne Sexton and Adrienne Rich have made similar comments. I’ve found that concentrating on the mechanics, so to speak, helps to take my mind away from any intentions I might have for long enough to allow the poem to come through. But I would write in form only if the poem demanded it.

As ‘Metathesis’ developed, I put the initial draft to one side. A second part was written; this rhymed, but with the end words set far apart, and an ‘eye rhyme’ towards the start, not loudly. What became the opening section of the triptych, unrhymed apart

from the final couplet, came next. The initial draft I’d put aside ended up being the final part. I decided to experiment with rhyme patterns here to see what would happen. It surprised me by confirming ‘Metathesis’ as being the correct title for a poem concerned with the randomness of life – how a decision as seemingly quick and unfreighted with intent as simply moving one letter about in a word, for instance, can dictate the way in which a life is played out. As for knowing when a poem is finished – well, I’m with Mr Yeats when he said that, ‘The correction of prose, because it has no fixed laws, is endless, a poem comes right with a click like a closing box.’ I tend to keep going until I hear (or at least think I can hear) that ‘click’.

Even as part of a longer sequence, every poem has its own separate life while I’m working on it. Later, if it were to be placed between covers, I would hope that it should not only ‘click’ but talk to its neighbours. Like one of those vinyl records, which, in pre-download days, we listened to all the way through from first track to last – albums written to be heard that way – a poem should be able to stand alone while keeping its place in the overall flow demanded by a book. The older I get though, and the longer I’m writing, I’m finding that poems often arrive with their own unconsciously chosen place in that narrative already waiting.

But that’s another discussion altogether.

Enda Coyle-Greene’s ‘Metathesis’ featured as part of the *cross-stream: ways of writing project* (2015), curated for Fingal Libraries by Christodoulos Makris.

Her first collection, *Snow Negatives*, won the Patrick Kavanagh Award in 2006 and was published by Dedalus Press the following year. Her second collection, *Map of the Last*, also from Dedalus, was published in 2013.

Metathesis: transposition or exchange of places, *esp* between the sounds or letters of a word.
The Chambers Dictionary

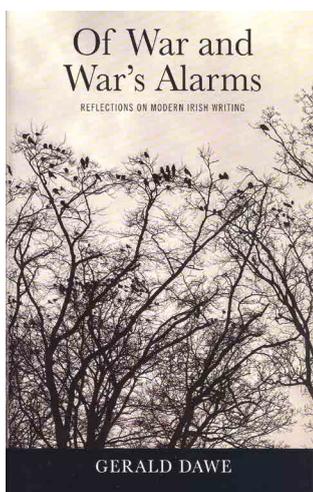
UNDERSTANDING LEDWIDGE

In this excerpt from *Of War and War's Alarms: Reflections on Modern Irish Writing*, the poet and Trinity College professor, **Gerald Dawe**, touches upon the iconic presence of Francis Ledwidge, Meath poet and soldier, who died during WW1.

Having survived (and undoubtedly been amazed and electrified by) those first terrible experiences of war, and after his slow recovery from illness, Francis Ledwidge returned to Ireland. He passed through a Dublin still in a state of shock over the Rising. This is the Dublin of Sean O'Casey's great early plays, and one can imagine Ledwidge's life from this time on in increasingly dramatic terms. His political, emotional and imaginative sympathies, as we know, were under intense and contradictory pressures. Ledwidge may well have felt that he was back at the front. Notwithstanding his shock and upset at what had happened and was happening, he returned home to Slane where he 'dropped into the Conyngham Arms at night [...] but his friends found him changed'. Most surprising of these changes was the fact that Ledwidge did not seek out Lizzie Healy, the 'second' girl in his life, Ellie Vaughney being the first. Had he looked for Lizzie, [Alice] Curtayne maintains, Ledwidge would have discovered that she had left Meath and was working and living in Dún Laoghaire (known then as Kingstown). Give or take a year or so, this is where Lizzie had moved. Lizzie Healy was, in Liam O'Meara's words, a young woman who had much in common with Ledwidge – they 'shared a love of music and literature' – and who was 'the woman he was most likely to marry had the war not continued as long as it did'. It was, O'Meara reminds his readers, 'her letters

and photographs that gave him solace for the duration of his training at Richmond Barracks'.

This all goes to point up the peculiarly contemporary relevance of Francis Ledwidge as both man and as poet. For he possessed what Seamus Heaney has described as an 'agonised consciousness', whose 'displaced hankering' reveals 'a tender-mindedness' and 'ethically unsparing attitude to the self'. Ledwidge's presence, his 'meaning', is as a man of places, such as Slane, Navan, particular townlands, distinctive landscapes: of barracks, avenues, shop-names and then farther afield to scenes in England, such as Basingstoke, and the theatres of war in Serbia and Belgium. He is a man individualised by his consistently close relationships with people: his mother, the family circle, his friends and girlfriends. There is a definition and rootedness about the man and yet a desire, courage and ambition to 'see the world' and to achieve things. There is nothing insular or introverted about him. He took Europe as his provenance while believing passionately in Irish independence. The life story as we have it to date is a representative life not just of a time but also of a people. To understand Ledwidge is to understand the complex reality of Ireland, not the political exigencies of any one particular political position or bag of cultural stereotypes. His relatively brief life tells the fascinating story of the



tensions between a traditional Irish rural past and its cultural richness – overseen by such powerful men as Ledwidge’s teacher Thomas Madden, characterised by all the imaginative and cultural resources of a deep-seated respect for learning, reading and argument and what we would now call traditional music – and, set against this, the economic hardship that went with such a life and the lack of opportunities outside of agricultural work.

There is a dignity and forbearance about Ledwidge that reveals itself in his attitude to people on an everyday basis, and their response to him. He was possessed of a common touch and a sense of propriety that both impressed those with whom he had dealings as a writer – Lord Dunsany, Katharine Tynan and others in the literary world – and the neighbours and fellow workers of his youth and young manhood, who were beguiled by his storytelling and his very special, dramatising self-awareness. There is also an almost reckless, passionate spirit out of which more of his poems may well have come if only he had survived the war. O’Meara recounts an indication of this spirit when, as a young man, Ledwidge challenges the ‘formidable Seaghan MacNamee’ in a public row in the *Drogheda Independent* about the failure of the Gaelic League to maintain a branch in Slane. The exchange of letters which O’Meara reprints

is a vignette of the temper of the times and illustrates clearly Ledwidge’s belief in doing the right thing no matter what the consequences.

Like another young Irish poet who died in a European theatre of war – Charles Donnelly, in Spain in 1937 – Ledwidge’s political and trade-union commitments place him as one of the central voices of an emerging Ireland: Catholic yet liberal, nationalist yet non-sectarian, Irish yet fully alert to the world beyond the island’s shores. He was part of that modernising progressive force in the early decades of the last century even while most of his poems looked back to an Irish idyll, a pastoral of romantic longing, impersonating Gaelic rhythms and mythology (as Thomas MacDonagh, among others, had recommended in his classic study *Literature in Ireland*). In this sense it is true to say that Francis Ledwidge embodies, in Seamus Heaney’s words, the ‘conflicting elements in the Irish inheritance.’ This is what makes him such a critically important figure in the debates about cultural identity. The First World War represented the shock of the new as much as the horror of the human carnage. It is possible that, like other Irish men and women who experienced similar conditions to those on the front, had Ledwidge survived it, his own poetry would have adjusted to the radically changed inner world of his personal life. Thomas MacGreevy comes to mind as a possible comparison. It is also worthy of note that, around the time of Ledwidge’s tragic death, one of the great English war poets, Siegfried Sassoon, based in Limerick, and recovering from ‘shell shock’ and the internal army disciplining of his controversial anti-war and anti-imperial views, was writing some of *his* finest poems. Would Ledwidge have gone that route? Who can tell?

Gerald Dawe, *Of War and War’s Alarms: Reflections on Modern Irish Writing* (Cork University Press, 2015)

Some Older American Poets

(Borders Bookstore, White Plains, NY)

Frank Ormsby

FROM GOAT'S MILK: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS (BLOODAXE BOOKS, 2015)

Tired of the accomplished young men
and the accomplished young women,
their neat cerebral arcs and sphinctral circles,
their impeccable chic, their sudden precocious surge,
their claims to be named front-runner,
I have turned to the ageing poets – the marathon men,
the marathon women – the ones who breasted the tape
and simply ran on, establishing their own distance.
Home after another funeral they walk by the pond
with a sense of trees thinning and cold in the air,
yet thrill to the dog's passionate slapstick,
his candid arse-up in the debris of last year's storms.
You sprightly mortals, you rowdies at death's door,
for whom the last moment is not too late to begin!
I can't get enough of you, bright-eyed and poetry mad
in the fields next to the cemetery, where you drop to your knees
before the first flower in the world, where you lift your heads
to that bare cry among the brambles, the original bird.

Feedback

Shirley McClure

FROM STONE DRESS
(ARLEN HOUSE, 2015)

The reader who texted to say
she'd read the whole book at one sitting.

The reader who admitted
she only liked the sexy ones.

The man who simply said,
the thing is, my dad died too.

The reader who had lost a breast,
and was surprised to hear it spoken of.

The listener who confessed:
your work does nothing for me

on the page;
the listener who left.

The editor who emailed:
please send more.

The old friend who confides
at every public reading,

over the glass
of Lidl Chardonnay

*God, I'm glad I never asked you out –
I'd hate to be in any of those poems.*

IMAGINING IRELAND

by Celia Keenan

Once Upon a Place

compiled by **Eoin Colfer** illustrated by **PJ Lynch**

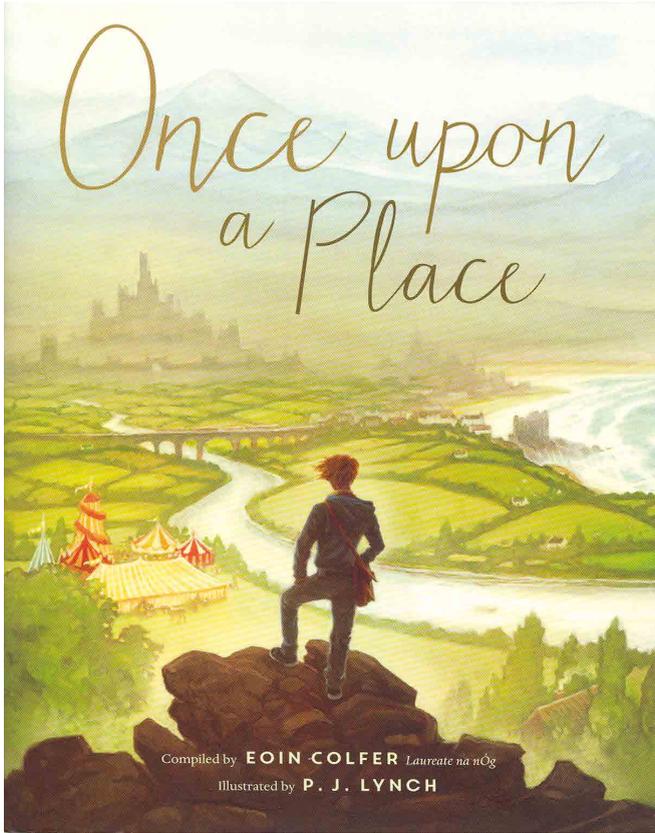
LITTLE ISLAND, 2015

This anthology of original poems and stories will rapidly and deservedly become a collector's book. Anyone who cares about beauty of book design, of illustration, of production – particularly but not only in the Irish context – will want to have a copy. It is a landmark publication ranking with the beautiful poetry anthology *Something Beginning With P*, edited by Seamus Cashman for the O'Brien Press some years ago.

The volume is the brainchild of current Laureate na nÓg (Irish Children's Laureate) **Eoin Colfer**, who made the idea of place an important feature of his time as Laureate, bringing children's literature in the form of readings and events to children in many parts of Ireland. It is part of the Laureate na nÓg project. There is a charming and playful, waggish introduction by Colfer in which the child reader is kept firmly in mind, and invited to enter the world of Place as a magic world that is at least as worthy as that of Time in the traditional fairy-tale beginning.

The places evoked in the collection are real and imaginary, but Ireland is the principal locus. Stories and poems evoke Dublin, north and south, Wicklow, Wexford, Kells, Kerry, Kilkenny, Portlaoise, Galway, Navan, the Boyne River, a little stream in Stillorgan, islands, lakes, the sea; rural idylls and gritty urban scapes, the natural and the built world, an old abbey, castles, a country house, a council house, a cabin in the woods, a hideout in a park, a bus shelter. Other countries are of course evoked too; the hot dry African home of children in direct provision, or the Japanese home of a boy ghost.

The six poems include the work of poets well-known for their poetry for adults as well as for children. A celebration of interconnectedness of people and place is their common theme. However, darker themes of fear and loss underpin even the lightest of them. Enda Wyley's poem 'The Cabin in the Woods' consists of eight perfect little verses, rich in assonance evoking the magic of the country, the forest, for city children. Dogs, foxes, horses inhabit this world of freedom, best encapsulated



in ‘dirty fingernails’ and ‘bare feet’. Like the very best poetry this does not give all the answers or fill in all the gaps. There is room for thought and for wonder. Pat Boran’s ‘Bus Stop’ evokes a changed place, an urban Portlaoise. An uneasy chance bus-stop encounter between a young and an older person disturbs isolation and offers hope. Seamus Cashman’s delightful ‘Embedded in my Brain’ celebrates the unity of all things in an ecstatic song of the sea. Music, light, beauty and the harmony of all things are discovered after a fall.

... It is an earth song in us all,
 an ancient kin, an ancient call to dance
 and sing
 beside a winter sea where you and I are we.

Geraldine Mills’s ‘Snail Pals’ is a joyful, deceptively simple lyric in which a snail tells

of a delightful excursion through a vibrant Galway landscape with a little girl, Lia. The lovely musical variety of the language, imagery, rhyme, and assonance are capable of transforming everything, even murderous history, into delight for the child reader.

Mark Granier’s title, ‘The Dirty River, Stillorgan’ both reveals and conceals. The dirty urban river of the title becomes just as much a site for freedom, adventure and transformation as do more romantic pastoral waters; ‘our own / mucky stretch of the Amazon’. And yet the dark and painful adult world is very close by, the stone ‘walls of St. John of God’s asylum’. Kate Newmann’s ‘How to Feed a Stranger’s Donkey’ is a beautifully-structured poem in which the wilder fiercer nature of a donkey is conjured up in a precise and

unsentimental way: ‘its vast slobbery gums, / could bite right through the core’. The pain of sibling rivalry is simultaneously evoked.

The eleven stories are by well-known children’s writers and by writers who are better known for their work for adults. Though the volume’s title prioritises place as the locus for the action of story, time is hot on the heels of place in many of the stories. Thus Roddy Doyle in an extraordinary time-slip evokes the changes in the Kilbarrack-Clontarf area of Dublin over a period of about thirty years. Siobhán Parkinson does something comparable with her evocation of Bray. Jim Sheridan’s haunted and haunting tale carries the burden of time in the shape of a boy ghost, and Oisín McGann in another ghostly tale evokes the Boyne landscape and its changes over a timescale of about a thousand years. Place is never free of time. One of the strengths of the anthology format, loosely organised around the centrality of place, is that it enabled the writers to experiment, to play around with ideas of storytelling. They are offered a greater freedom than for example an individual novel would normally offer. Parkinson’s story, ‘Abseiling or the Dancing Engineers’ is arguably the most fanciful and playful story in the volume, a thing of air and light and sea and sand and hill and lighthouse and eagle and spiders. It is also a thing of witty and playful dialogue about the business of storytelling itself. That ‘stories are not for believing’ is twice asserted. This story is for the sheer delight of its language, and fairy-tale poetry. Here stories can be taken up by different narrators, they can pause while the teller is thinking, they make their own rules. Colfer’s story, ‘The Ram King’, though very different in tone and character and time and place, takes a similar pleasure in stretching the boundaries of what a story can do and in turning a story of myth, murder, mayhem and derring-do into a witty playful feminist fable. Derek Landy’s ‘The World’s Greatest Teen Detective’ is exactly the ripping yarn his readers have come to expect.

The theme of childhood loss because of separation of or from parents is common to a number of the stories, and hope is offered in a variety of ways. In John Connolly’s ‘The Bear’ and Sarah Webb’s ‘The Library Cat’, a father has left his wife and children and childhood grief is palpable. In Connolly’s story the bear visits two lonely brothers. The boundaries between reality and imagination are blurred. The bear becomes indistinguishable from the absent father and a hope of reconciliation is offered. Webb’s story stays firmly grounded in the real world. Consolation and hope come in the form of a series of encounters with a cat and her kittens when Tim’s Dad separates from Tim and his mother, who are forced to move house without Tim’s beloved pet cat, Tiger. Tim’s engagement with a feral Dalkey library cat and her kittens help him to reconnect with the world, to care for other creatures, to offer and find love and hope. This gentle, simply-told tale with a warm sense of place is one of the few stories here that should appeal to the younger reader.

In Jane Mitchell’s ‘There and Here’ the absence of a father creates a new kind of challenge. Tana’s older brother is forced to become a man before his time when he comes to Ireland from Africa as a refugee with his mother, sister Tana and baby sister Gracie. He is now responsible for his family until his father can manage to join them. The responsibility lies heavily on him. His younger sister Tana also suffers as she copes with his bossiness and resents traditional restraints on her liberty. They both find a genuine refuge in Dublin’s beautiful Phoenix Park. The superb characterisation and focus on roles is a striking feature of this story: the sadness of the mother who can no longer cook traditional food for her children and who expresses her maternal love only in the painstaking braiding of Tana’s hair; the sadness of a boy who must be a man now and of his sister, narrator Tana, who is torn between traditional girlhood and the new freedoms that Ireland offers.

As in traditional fairy tales there are stories here to chill, to unsettle, stories of the uncanny. Death by water hovers over Roddy Doyle's 'The Pumping Station' and over Oisín McGann's masterful and eerie river journey 'Stream Time', a Viking funeral in which the narrator, the ghost of a dead Viking girl, accompanies her own corpse on its funeral boat-journey through time and place before reaching her final resting place in the sea. Jim Sheridan's 'Number 13' is for me the most terrifying story. It is about the ghost of a boy who has taken vengeful possession of a man and literally rides on his back for all his adult life; a kind of demon, a punishment for a youthful transgression. There is no escape from this child, no easy answers, a life is blighted. Paula Leyden's 'Beautiful Dawn' is a gentle almost tender ghost story set near the River Nore in Kilkenny. It is very evocative and the ghost, that of a Japanese boy who died accidentally, seems to offer a kind of friendship to the central character, thirteen-year-old Kitty. In Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick's 'Gren's Ghost' we have a not-ghost story. This superb and subtle story is about two boys, sixth class primary level. One, Gren, is the most popular, adventurous boy in the class. The other, the narrator, Finbar, is careful, thoughtful, something of a loner. He is challenged by Gren to visit a ruined abbey near Kells in Co Meath. The boys are both beautifully-realised characters. The story has many of the elements of stories about bullying but it transcends them or looks at them with a fresh eye. The practical joke of simulating and photographing a ghost is executed successfully. A subtle kind of friendship is established between the boys. It will not be acknowledged publicly but it is real. Finbar the nerd becomes Finn the hero. Respect, above all self-respect, is established.

There are times in this anthology when the question of the intended reader raises problems. Some poems and stories seem to be addressed to an imagined adult reader. Many pieces seem best suited to

older child and YA readers. A very few seemed appropriate for younger children. But whatever unevenness there is in the volume is more than compensated for in **PJ Lynch's** superb and generous illustrations. They are the glue that holds the whole collection together. The wonderful wrap-around cover illustration conjures the world of traditional fairy tale and simultaneously the precise modern Irish landscapes. There the boy adventurer who surveys the world and invites the reader in is at once a prince of long-ago and a contemporary boy in trainers. Detail after detail from the stories and poems are magically there, in harmony. It is an irresistible invitation. Throughout the book Lynch's extraordinary charcoal drawings do just about everything that illustration could possibly do; they add to meaning, to feeling. They create atmosphere, suspense. They keep the reader turning the page. There are beautiful human portraits, in which the subjects seem actually to live, full of affection and intimacy, which are also encapsulated in a simple pair of hands. There are superb precise material images, such as a camera, feather, a piece of cake, and wonderful animal images, ram, donkey, bear, frog, cat, among which my own favourite is a beautiful little snail. Along with these there are landscapes that reflect great emotional range, anger, jealousy, fear, terror, mystery, peace. The power and variety of black, white and shades of grey is amply demonstrated. The design of the book is also superb. The varied ways in which text and images interact with each other on pages and double pages contribute to the sense of a unified achievement, a work of art.

Celia Keenan is a former director of the postgraduate programme in Children's Literature, and of the Centre for the Study of Irish Children's Literature and Culture, at St Patrick's College Drumcondra. She writes extensively about children's literature.

Gleam

i.m. Alex Higgins

Patrick Moran

FROM BEARINGS
(SALMON POETRY, 2015)

Even when he'd shrunken
to a waifish figure,
hustling for a pittance –

his shots wobbling in jaws,
his attempted snookers
no longer surely judged –

the glories of his prime
lurked in memory's hold:
fugitive, stowaway ...

There, in the arena's
altar hush. Eyes defiant,
vodka-lit, he swaggers

towards the baize, impatient
to ram in the balls.
Disdaining caution,

he deploys spin and screw
and stun to keep a wavering
break alive: the testing brown;

a sweet cut on the blue;
that awkward pink rolled down
the table's length. Leaving

the final sunken black;
his edgy gleam; the white
still on the speckless green.

Butchers

C.K. Williams

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE APRIL 2011 ISSUE OF POETRY MAGAZINE

1

Thank goodness we were able to wipe the Neanderthals out, beastly things,
from our mountains, our tundra – that way we had all the meat we might need.

Thus the butcher can display under our very eyes his hands on the block,
and never refer to the rooms hidden behind where dissections are effected,

where flesh is reduced to its shivering atoms and remade for our delectation
as cubes, cylinders, barely material puddles of admixed horror and blood.

Rembrandt knew of all this – isn't his flayed beef carcass really a caveman?
It's Christ also, of course, but much more a troglodyte such as we no longer are.

Vanished those species – begone! – those tribes, those peoples, those nations –
Myrmidon, Ottoman, Olmec, Huron, and Kush: gone, gone, and goodbye.

2

But back to the chamber of torture, to Rembrandt, who was telling us surely
that hoisted with such cables and hung from such hooks we too would reveal

within us intricate layerings of color and pain: alive the brush is with pain,
aglow with the cruelties of crimson, the cooled, oblivious ivory of our innards.

Fling out the hooves of your hands! Open your breast, pluck out like an Aztec
your heart howling its Cro-Magnon cries that compel to battles of riddance!

Our own planet at last, where purged of wilderness, homesickness, prowling,
we're no longer compelled to devour our enemies' brains, thanks to our butcher,

who inhabits this palace, this senate, this sentried, barbed-wire enclosure
where dare enter none but subservient breeze; bent, broken blossom; dry rain.

C.K. WILLIAMS

(1936—2015): an appreciation

by Michael O'Loughlin

To say that I first came across Charles Kenneth Williams' work while browsing in a bookshop is to declare myself antediluvian, but it was in the admirable American Bookshop on Amsterdam's Kalverstraat, sometime in the late 1980s, that I first picked up the slim volume entitled *Tar*. My M.O. at the time was to leaf through the many books of poetry displayed there, and if anything caught my eye, buy it. From the first few lines I was captured by *Tar*. The initial hook was not just the long-limbed lines which filled up the page, in stark contrast to the *poésie blanche* I was slightly in thrall to at the time, but also the length of the poems, which usually ranged to 2 or 3 pages, poems crammed with the life of the street, and the life of the mind. At that time I had more or less given up reading contemporary English-language poetry, as it seemed to be dominated by the cult of what was called the 'well-made poem', that is, the poem as a tidy and discrete crafted artefact, a concept which held little interest for me, though it is enjoying a curious afterlife in the present day ideal of the poet as a kind of whimsical artisan. It was reading C.K. which brought me back to the possibilities of the single

poem as a thing in itself, the single poem as a tool for engaging with the world.

Of course, as an old Raven Arts Press hand, I was also drawn to the locale of the poems, the urban squalor, the search for meaning in the mean streets, the late night gas stations on the empty highways, the abandoned lots in crumbling cities. But it was more than that: what struck me most about the poems was their sheer ambition. Not ambition for the poem, or even ambition in the normal sense of the word, but the poem's ambition for itself, as if each poem started off with the determination to become *the* poem, the ultimate poem, the poem that would, finally, reconcile it all on some plane of being, that would in some way, repair and restore the broken world. This was poetry in the sign of Borges' notion that 'literature is almost revelation', the poet bloodily interrogating reality, or rather, his own perceptions of reality (because C.K. was nothing if not an ontological poet), knowing redemption and revelation would always remain just out of reach, but the poem exhausting itself in the attempt, with Yeats, Rilke and Marina Tsvetaeva cheering from the sidelines.



from left to right: Judith Mok, Michael O'Loughlin, Paul Auster, Michaël Zeeman and C.K. Williams. Rotterdam, 1987

I was also fascinated by his peculiarly American gift of taking common, everyday language and charging it with meaning. The words of a black prostitute in a seedy backstreet apartment become an almost Biblical covenant and entreaty: 'Take care of us', four heart-stopping monosyllables, as powerful as Frost's 'He saw all spoiled.' He was still accomplishing this feat in later books like *The Singing*, where a meditation on an auto-defenestration ends with a pair of simple words, 'This happened', which assume an aura of horrified witness.

Not long after reading *Tar*, I was asked to do a public interview and reading with C.K. at an evening of American Literature in Rotterdam, and finally got to meet him in the flesh.

Ambitious and serious as he was in poetry, off-stage he was warm and disarmingly candid, with a tough New Jersey humour, as I found out when we later ended up in a Rotterdam wine cellar. When I asked how he had managed to make a living as a poet while living in Paris (a popular topic of conversation among poets at all times), he replied that his brother had supported him a lot. What does your brother do, I asked? Charlie replied, deadpan: 'He's known as

the Vibrator King of New Jersey.' On that evening I also learned that he had attended the same college as Philip Roth, and in addition claimed to have had carnal knowledge of the real life character on which Brenda Patimkin, unforgettable heroine of Roth's novella *Goodbye, Columbus*, was based. It is gossip like this which makes the literary life bearable.

In 1991, Richard Kearney asked me to contribute to a special issue of *The Irish Review* marking Dublin's year as European Capital of Culture, and I responded with an essay about Paul Celan and his notion of 'the Meridian'. C.K. had a poem in the same issue, and shortly after its publication, to my intense gratification, he called me up to discuss my essay, though I was a little miffed by his surprise at an Irish poet being so interested in such matters. He invited me to meet up again next time I was in Paris. I was there often enough, for my wife's concerts, or meetings with film producers I was working with, or even just to change trains while heading down to the south of France.

Arriving in Paris I called him, and we established a pattern of meeting up for a drink in the afternoon whenever I was in town, usually in one of those strangely

anonymous, large corner cafés around the Bastille and Châtelet. I found him disconcertingly different to his Irish contemporaries, as he talked openly and at length about matters which they tended to confine to dark, gnomic mutterings in their cups. His ambition in his work was matched by a healthy hunger for recognition. At this stage he was, as they say, widely acclaimed, particularly in England and Ireland, but had not yet won the big book prizes, or landed the plum job in academe. He was openly angry and hurt about this. He attributed his failure to get the glittering prizes partly to the malign influence of a very powerful critic who was no fan of his poetry. He thought this was due to the highly-political work he had published in the 1960s, and his agitation against the Vietnam War. This particular critic didn't like 'political poetry', especially of the Left sort, and had decided to put Charlie in this box and keep him there. It's a common enough phenomenon in every poet's life, of course, but Charlie was unusually open about what is perhaps the poet's most secret, and most painful wound: the feelings of helplessness and anger when people who should appreciate your work do not. But he persevered, and eventually the prizes and the job in Princeton would come his way.

The mood of our talks, however, was usually a lot less serious. I particularly remember an hilarious account of Jorie Graham's regal procession through the literary salons of Paris on a recent visit. He also had a great store of rabbi jokes, one of which, involving three rabbis, twin teenage blondes, and the philosophy of Martin Buber, became one of my favourites. He was well informed about poetry in Ireland, and particularly liked the work of Ciaran Carson and Harry Clifton, also resident in Paris at the time. He loved my wife's singing, and always came to her concerts. I can still see him in my mind's eye at one of her concerts in the Théâtre du Châtelet, a programme of Russian Romantic songs, his lanky frame folded and perched on a rickety gilded chair, listening with

the utmost attention, applauding with the wildest enthusiasm.

I didn't see him often after I moved back to Dublin in the late 1990s, and the last time was in Cúirt in Galway in 2007. He seemed in poorish health, but gave a mesmerising reading on the Town Hall stage, and afterwards, we had dinner in Nimmo's. Walking there through the streets of Galway, the South African writer, Breyten Breytenbach, remarked how C.K.'s reading style, his sing-song intonation and accumulating rhythm, had something rabbinical to it, or cantor-like. It is true that in his later, often sombre work, the Jewish experience, especially that of his nineteenth-century Eastern European family, had become increasingly a concern of his, and the shade of Paul Celan is often invoked. Bizarrely, with admirable dedication but questionable results, a couple of years ago the actor James Franco made a movie called *The Colour Of Time*, based on the poems in *Tar*, and starring himself as C.K., with Mila Kunis and Jessica Chastain. It will not have been lost on C.K. that Mila Kunis, playing his first muse, was born Milena Markovna Kunis in the town of Czernowitz, just a few streets away from the birthplace of Paul Celan.

What I really know, of course, I'll never know again.

Beautiful memory, most precious and most treacherous sister: what temples must we build for you.

And even then, how belatedly you open to us; even then, with what exuberance you cross us.

– from 'Combat', by C.K. Williams

Michael O'Loughlin was born in Dublin in 1958. Among his collections of poetry are *Another Nation: New and Selected Poems* (1996), and *In This Life* (2011). A *Collected Poems* will be published later this year.

POETRY BELFAST

FEBRUARY 2016

by Stephen Connolly

Turning right at the bottom of Botanic Avenue onto Donegall Pass last week I was surprised to find a four-storey red brick building I felt I had never seen before. Three of its four third-floor windows were bricked over and its large front door was covered with a thick iron sheet. It didn't immediately occur to me that the building was the recently-closed PSNI station: until the previous week the building's façade had been obscured by extensive fortifications. A tall grey concrete wall topped with a wire mesh cage of equal height dotted with surveillance cameras and inset with a corrugated iron sangar had been in place the last time I'd walked past. The word *sangar*, derived from the Persian for 'stone' and first used by the British Army in India to describe a temporary structure used as an observation post built from the ground up where trench-digging was not a viable option, was adopted into the lexicon of Northern Ireland and its first public appearance was in a supplement accompanying the *Sunday Times*: as time passed, these 'temporary' structures came to be 'semi-permanent', but this moment

on a Wednesday afternoon reminded me that changes to this kind of architecture can produce a revelatory flourish in almost no time at all.

The opposite can also be true. A few days before this I visited the half-demolished Orpheus Building on York Street, a five-storey five-bay red brick building, completed in 1932 for the Belfast Co-operative Society, which spent its life as a department store and ballroom, before it became part of the Belfast School of Art. I had gone to help a friend move a cast iron column and the remains of a volute that had been at the top of one of the building's seventeen giant order Ionic pilasters. This cast iron column, formerly an internal pillar, is destined for a visual art festival later in the year; the volute was a bonus. In May of 1972 a bomb on York Street that caused ten million pounds of damage to the other, adjacent Co-op building, left the Orpheus unscathed, but a planning decision made in 2014 condemned it to the breaker's pendulum.

The Sunflower Bar, a much smaller building from 1895 that stands on the corner of Union Street and Kent Street, is less than two hundred yards from the site of the Orpheus and is currently under threat of demolition from the city's planners. Its predecessor, The Avenue, which was bombed in 1973 and was the scene of an indiscriminate gun attack in 1988, was surrounded by a wire mesh in the mid-1970s. Walking from school on the Cliftonville Road into the city centre, I passed it as The Tavern with security cameras pointing in three directions around and under a steel security cage. Its long, dark windows were uninviting and not unlike the windows of the sangar on Donegall Pass. The Sunflower has retained its security cage – no longer functional and painted a dark green rather than The Tavern's gloss black – as an ornament from its past.

*

In May 2011, Rachel Brown and Brighdín Farren, a pair of artists/curators based in Belfast, opened The Galley Café on board the *MV Confiance* – a Dutch barge that sailed into Belfast Lough in 2006 and is permanently moored on the Lagan adjacent to Lanyon Place – that they described as being 'built as a performative, active response to the dysfunctions in post-peace-process, post-crash Belfast and an artist-led experiment in shifting a city centre'. Rachel and Brighdín had a history of programming exhibitions that foreground civic engagement: *Exchange Mechanism* (Belfast Exposed, 2010) opened a conventional gallery space into an arena for the exchange of ideas, for public debate and for collaborations between artists from various cities and countries working in a variety of media. The café was an extension of this impulse for the exchanging of ideas and it quickly became a locus for artists, writers and musicians.

Manuela Moser and I were Galley regulars and when the opportunity came up for a poetry reading series, *The Lifeboat* was born. We had spent many nights on the barge in the company of young poets who were studying along with us in the Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's and were convinced that *The Lifeboat*, named with a nod to the poem by Michael Longley in his 2011 collection *A Hundred Doors* and to the bar of the same name – established in 1921 and demolished in 2008 – that had played host to chaotic club nights by David Holmes, could run for at least a few years, such was the quality and vitality of the poetry being written. We aimed to pair poets who had yet to publish a book with poets with a history of publication and the first six readings – the café closed in September 2013 and we made a move to the Sunflower Bar – featured, among others, Leontia Flynn, Sinéad Morrissey and Ciaran Carson; some of the unpublished poets included Stephen Sexton, Sophie Collins and Andy Eaton. Our first readings on the boat were accompanied by the production of short pamphlets featuring poems by the (generally) younger poets that we sold for £1.

The plan from the start was to give equal attention to both poets at each reading. Culture Northern Ireland's review of the second reading suggested that there was 'something [...] convivial and appealing about hearing poetry in the context of good food and drink, part of the everyday pleasures, not set apart like a precious ornament that no-one must touch'. An argument could be made that the wider poetry culture in Northern Ireland is itself 'part of the everyday pleasures' and that Manuela and I were simply there to invite the poets, set up the microphone and print the poems.

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In a discussion of Northern Irish poetry since the ceasefires in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry*, Miriam Gamble picks up on one facet of Leontia Flynn's early poetry, pointing out a recurring trope of a poet being unsure of their poetic and civic vocation. It's what Gamble refers to as 'the aesthetics of transition', one that is:

ghosting the vacuous point at which separate cultures collide and, ultimately, swap control of the vehicle. As Colin Graham suggests, the last ten to fifteen years have marked 'a transitional phase in Belfast's physical and social being': 'the new and the old are juxtaposed', both architecturally and ideologically. As Flynn puts it, 'Belfast is finished and Belfast is under construction.'

Negotiation and renegotiation of aesthetic concerns have marked almost all poetry written in this part of the world since the 1960s triumvirate of Heaney, Longley and Mahon. Michael Longley, in his first lecture as Ireland Chair of Poetry, wrote that 'no sooner had the Tight-Assed Trio begun to work out how things might be done, than a brilliant new generation came along hell bent on deconstructing [their] best efforts – Paul Muldoon, Medbh McGuckian, Ciaran Carson, Frank Ormsby, Tom Paulin.'

Some of the concerns, modes and methods prominent in the work of Carson, Muldoon and McGuckian in particular have become unstated hallmarks of some of the best poetry written and published in England in the last ten years. Carson's inter- and intra-lingual translation work, Muldoon's echo-chambers of signification that foreground uncertainty and Medbh McGuckian's extensive use of pre-existing text resonate with similar concerns and methods in recent poetry published in English that questions authority in the English lyric tradition. The fragmentation of identity and language – and the impulse for playful poetic reconstruction – that is inextricably linked to life post-Web 2.0, for example, that finds a home in what Sam Riviere has called 'post-Flarf', has been a prominent feature in the poetry of Medbh McGuckian since the mid-1980s. It's worth remembering that Thomas Kinsella described 'Northern poetry' as 'largely a journalistic entity' and that anyone writing poetry in Northern Ireland, or anyone who is from Northern Ireland, will have their own take on how this history might play out in their own writing, but it's also worth noting that mischief and irreverence are a cornerstone of what is there to be handed on.

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In December 2015, Sinéad Morrissey invited me for lunch and said that she had a proposal: it turned out to be an invitation to co-edit an anthology of recent poetry from Northern Ireland for Blackstaff Press. The time felt right for it and I was immediately on board. I had been an admirer of books published by Blackstaff – Jonathan Bardon's *Belfast: An Illustrated History* is a hugely important book, as is their facsimile edition of George Benn's 1877 *A History of the Town of Belfast* in two volumes – and I was keen to work with them. *Poets from the North of Ireland*, edited by Frank Ormsby, was published by Blackstaff Press in 1979 and brought together many writers who were already shaping, or would go on to shape, contemporary Anglophone poetry, including MacNeice, Heaney, Longley, Muldoon, etc. It is a remarkable book, but, as a cursory glance at the contents page will show, not a book without faults: no women were

included in the first edition and in the second, updated edition in 1990, Medbh McGuckian was the only woman to be anthologised.

We decided that we would include only poets who had not published a full collection before 2006 and it became immediately apparent that there was a rich and various body of work being written by poets in or from Northern Ireland. There were Eric Gregory Award winners like Eoghan Walls, Miriam Gamble, Michael McKimm and Padraig Regan, whose work we admired; there were poets who had published first collections, like Adam Crothers, Erin Halliday and Caoilinn Hughes (who studied in Belfast for four years), and poets who had published pamphlets, like Stephen Sexton, and poets whose work had been published in leading journals. In December and January I read at least one thousand poems by poets from here and the task of selecting around 200 pages was simultaneously a joy and unenviable: we could have filled the book three times over.

Being born in Northern Ireland gave automatic eligibility, but we decided that we would also include poets who had lived here for a minimum of three years. There were poets like Paul Maddern, originally from Bermuda, and Emma Must, originally from London, whose work Sinéad and I had admired for some time and whose poems go some way in showing that Northern Ireland's peace has allowed a more varied imaginary landscape that goes far beyond the crass stereotypes of the country as parochial, insular and inward-looking. Emma Must's refulgent poem, 'Belfast Pastoral', closes our book:

Summer has come early. Our Golden Age is now.
As I walk to Tomb Street to fetch a book from Amazon
in a cardigan as yellow as the dockyard cranes,
everything is golden: No Parking At Any Time
painted on a garage door, Urban Clearway signs,
grit containers angry at their own obsolescence.
There's more besides: the fries in a KFC Bucket Meal,
The Money Shop, the *Way* on the end of *Sub*.

The parks are full. The Botanic Gardens over-brims
with a festival of legs and arms, everybody
sunning themselves on spread-out coats.
We lick Twisters and, more of a mouthful,
Rowntrees Fruit Pastille Lollies. We talk poems.
And this is no longer the city you've read about.

The Future Always Makes Me So Thirsty: New Poets from the North of Ireland, edited by Sinéad Morrissey and Stephen Connolly, will be published by Blackstaff Press in May 2016.

Stephen Connolly is from Belfast, where he is currently writing a PhD in the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry. His poetry is published in *Poetry* (Chicago), *The Irish Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, and elsewhere.

SEARCHING THE·RUINS

by Michael S. Begnal

Trevor Joyce *Rome's Wreck*

CUSP BOOKS, 2014

Christodoulos Makris

The Architecture of Chance

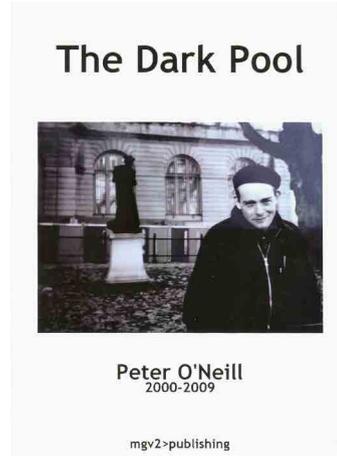
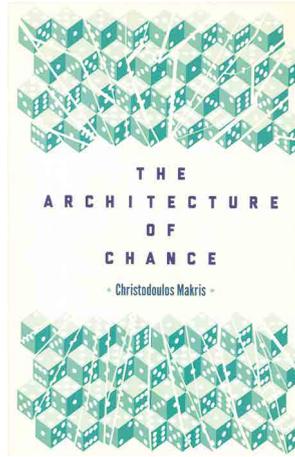
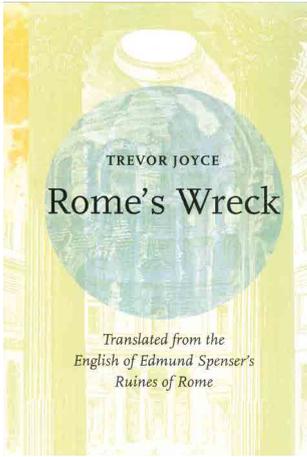
WURM PRESS, 2015

Peter O'Neill *The Dark Pool*

MGV2>PUBLISHING, 2013

Trevor Joyce's booklet *Rome's Wreck* is a translation of Edmund Spenser's sonnet sequence *Ruines of Rome* (1591), which itself is a translation of Joachim du Bellay's *Les Antiquités de Rome* (1558). Both Spenser and Bellay in their respective versions of this sequence sought to reclaim, by decrying its ruin, the 'glory that was Rome' as a model for their own nationalist poetic projects. Spenser is, of course, a particularly reviled figure in Ireland to this day, for his involvement in the Siege of Smerwick massacre, his prominent role in the Munster Plantation, and his treatise *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596), in which he

advocated for the eradication of the Irish language and culture and for a scorched-earth policy as a means of subjugating the country. Thus, though it is not overtly stated here, there is something inherently subversive about translating Spenser's Elizabethan English into something more modern and Irish. Having said that, Joyce's *Rome's Wreck* follows Spenser fairly closely in subject matter, exploring cultural continuities, the effects of time, and the poet's ability (or inability) to outlast the ages through his or her verse. Sonnet XXIX (among others) adds to these themes the inevitability of the fall of empire:



... See now what change:
Rome quick, the world's first grace was
known,
Rome cold, is all the great world's tomb.

Where Spenser's early-twentieth-century editor WL Renwick refers to the 'noisy style' of the *Ruines*, Joyce renders his own *Wreck* deliberately noisier, preferring an unrhymed (or at times slant-rhymed) iambic tetrameter line to Spenser's true-rhymed pentameter. This results in poetry that is both tauter and more strident at the same time, and, with the frequent employment of assonance and alliteration, and the occasional use of colloquial diction ('Hey, you', 'tricked out', 'out of sync'), makes for quite an exhilarating reading experience.

In rare moments, Joyce's strict adherence to the iambic measure results in the rhythm feeling forced, as in line 10 from sonnet XII: 'formed out of the hills of Rome, glared'. However, if it were not for such an exact, rigorous syllable count throughout, one interesting effect might be overlooked. This occurs in the final sonnet (XXXII), where line 11 is intentionally missing a foot:

days when the live voice breaks.

It is the only trimeter line in the whole of the sequence.

Indeed, this missing foot is itself the dramatic enactment of the poet's voice finally failing in the face of the inevitability of death (both of the individual and of all civilisations), and is thus a clever example of the kind of experimentation with form that Joyce is elsewhere known for engaging in.

And it is here in this final sonnet that Joyce overtly diverges from Spenser in meaning. While Spenser (and Bellay before him) had deliberately tied himself to his nation, seeking to instil it with the 'honour' of ancient Rome ('That thou art first, which of thy nation song / Th'olde honour of the people gowned long'), Joyce puts his faith only in poetry itself, concluding, 'Pen's mark / lives on, but not the mouth that sang'. Yet, the fact that this phrase is a translation of the Gaelic seanfhocal 'Maireann lorg an phinn, ach ní mhaireann an béal a chan' (given on the enclosed card that serves as the book's dedication) re-emphasises Joyce's anti-imperialist theme, further turning Spenser's original project on its head.

Where Joyce's primary formal restriction is his use of iambic tetrameter, **Christodoulos Makris**, in his second collection, *The Architecture of Chance*, employs all manner of controlling devices. In this sense, he is truly 'experimental', following one exigency or the other where it might lead, in a

manner similar perhaps to Dada, Oulipo or the more recent Flarf poets. Some might assert that such strategies are rarefied or merely academic exercises, but Makris' work is deeply engaged with the world, at times outright political. Two poems in particular deal with xenophobia. 'xxxxx' is a found poem, in the form of a letter from a publisher stating that 'we can only (at this time at least) consider work by Irish authors', and asking Makris to 'clarify/confirm your nationality'. On the facing page is 'Territorial', which depicts the immigrant condition thusly:

non-citizens

with no authorized
entry code or a healthcare

plan, constantly dodging
security.

Makris' use of enjambment here further suggests a sense of disjointedness or alienation. Elsewhere in the collection, 'From Something to Nothing' makes an ironic comment on the International Monetary Fund and economic exploitation by taking the IMF's 'About' statement on its website and running it through eight different languages on GoogleTranslate, four times apiece. The ultimate result in English is that the phrase 'promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world' has turned into 'ensure ... sustainable economic growth and poverty in the world', highlighting what some see as the IMF's true function.

Continuing this wry socioeconomic critique, 'Prime Time' is (according to the author's notes that appear at the back of the book) 'a live transcription of all advertising broadcast on Ireland's state TV channel RTÉ1' during a five-hour stretch in 2014. The effect is something like a written version of action-painting, as the poet attempts to capture in words the gist of

every advert that flashes across his screen: 'now you can experience the extraordinary from faster phone incredible for over six more can you afford free the inspiration irelands revolution gathered . . .', etc. The lack of punctuation and logical syntax in this piece mimics the dizzying barrage of media marketing we are subject to. At times, however, Makris actually approaches the lyric mode, as in 'Two Nudes' ('She sleeps. / She is ethereal, escapes / from photographs / in filmy layers. A wisp / swathed in snow'), and in such a varied collection as *The Architecture of Chance*, there is likely something for everyone. The risk is that, in jumping from a poem made of HTML code to a cut-up of signage displayed in the Skerries public library, from a treatment of the comments section of the *Dublin Metro Herald* to a text composed of snippets of overheard conversation, that things simply will not cohere and that the experiment will be a failure. In fact, this turns out not to be the case, and Makris' book manages to be continually engaging, often surprising, and frequently funny.

In contrast to the ironic humour that Makris deploys, **Peter O'Neill** in his third collection, *The Dark Pool*, is nothing if not serious. The foreword by Brigitte Le Juez sets the tone and suggests what O'Neill is aiming for:

Indeed, his poems demonstrate at every turn his knowledge and love of the literary tradition (from Virgil) whose heir he is, although he subverts it, ruthlessly sometimes, in the style of his forefathers (especially Rimbaud and Beckett, to whom he pays homage, and Baudelaire whom he translates here).

This is a lot to live up to, but O'Neill mostly makes good on the hype, producing a very solid collection culled from a broader swathe of his work (as the date range '2000–2009' on the cover indicates). *The Dark Pool* is divided into three parts, one focusing on more-or-less contemporary Dublin (thus

the title), one on French poetry and poets (O'Neill lived in France for a number of years and gives us not only 'transversions' from the French, but a handful of original pieces in that language), and one on Classical subjects (or, the influence of the ancient world on the present, at least in the mind of the poet).

A number of poems in the 'Dark Pool' section are particularly arresting. The opener, 'The Drinker', does some interesting things with perspective, where the brim of a wine glass contains 'a miniature world' reflected on the liquid surface. Here, the language is deliberate and controlled, lending a minimalist, philosophical quality to this brief meditation on subjectivity. Indeed, many of these poems are set in Dublin pubs and deal with that milieu. For O'Neill, however, similarly to James Liddy perhaps, the pub is also the place where 'We are always, despite ourselves, in the realm of the divine' ('The Ninnies'). 'Dame Street Blues' contains some sharp imagery and metaphorical language: 'The flowers outside the florist explode like rockets.' 'Grand Canal Bank Blues' is an update of Kavanagh's famous sonnet, while in 'The Spire' the advent of the titular monument provokes apocalyptic visions in the poem's speaker. O'Neill constructs his speaker's persona to be something like Mangan's in 'The Nameless One', a wanderer, furtively observing the sights and scenes, inwardly on the verge of either explosion or collapse.

The closing section of *The Dark Pool* is 'After Virgil', which contains the noteworthy poem 'Homage to James Douglas Morrison'. Jim Morrison seems to be a polarising or even dismissible figure nowadays, seen as sophomoric perhaps – but O'Neill argues for his importance, retrospectively, as an inspiration or lifeline during the dreary, still-clerical Irish 1980s: 'This Bacchic splendour lends some warmth to your days, / your teenage mind crucified by the Sundays spent upon your knees.' This is something that for him carries forward

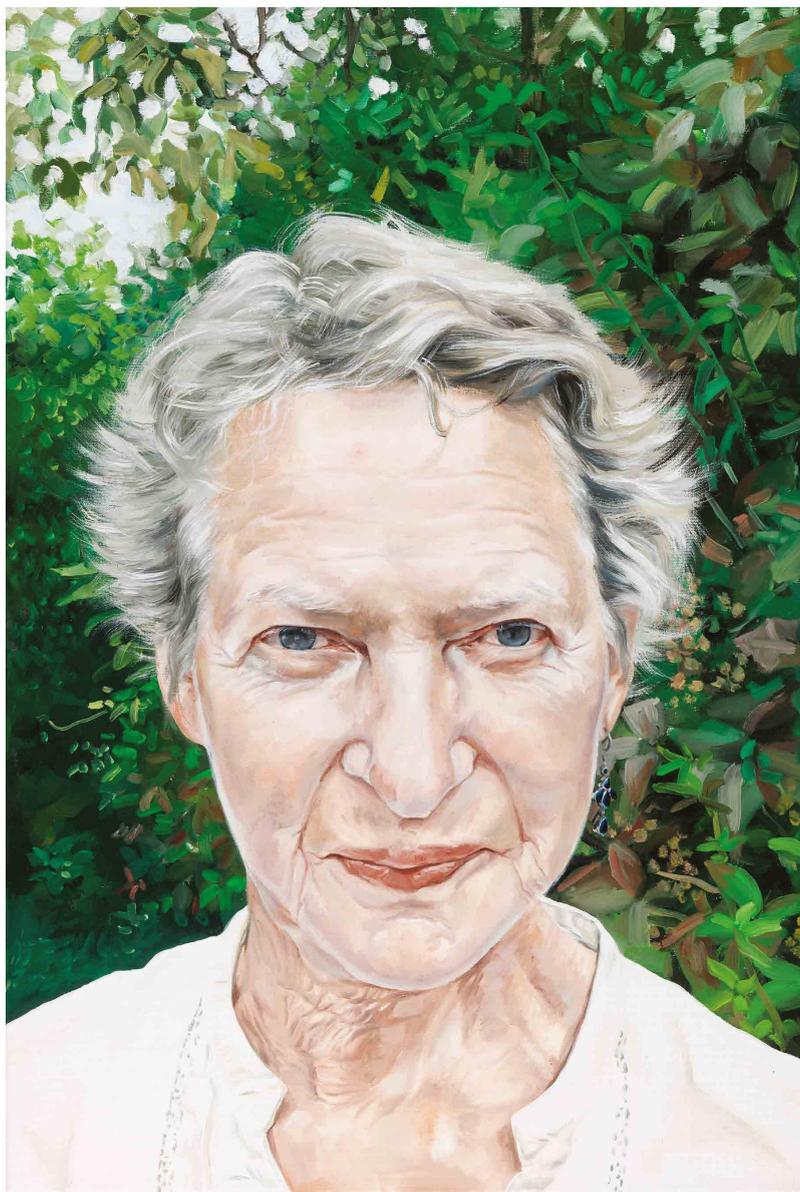
into adult life and which dovetails with his interest in Classical themes ('with him you enter into a Greek world'). If there were any question about where O'Neill still stands, he ends the poem with the lines, 'So, rather take with me the collected works of Jim Morrison / than the magnum opus of any Nobel-Prize winning academician.' This is a bold statement, but O'Neill's sincerity is undeniable.

The collection's penultimate, even touching, poem is dedicated to O'Neill's mother, and, where some of his other material tends toward a more ornate, even 'Morrisonian' feel, this one recalls the tenor of the opener – restrained, contemplative. There is a range of work on display here, and despite the occasional capricious word or oversight in copyediting, *The Dark Pool* is a self-confident collection, on the one hand knowingly playing on the poetic modes of its author's influences while at the same time attesting to O'Neill's unique achievements.

Michael S. Begnal's collections *Ancestor Worship* (2007) and *Future Blues* (2012) are published by Salmon Poetry. His latest, a chapbook entitled *The Muddy Banks*, is out this May from Ghost City Press.

WINNER, HENNESSY PORTRAIT PRIZE 2015

The Hennessy Portrait Prize was launched in March 2014. Open to artists in all disciplines, the aim of the competition is to showcase and encourage interest in contemporary portraiture, and to raise the profile of the National Portrait Collection at the National Gallery of Ireland.



Anne Ryder by Vera Klute

OIL ON CANVAS, 60 X 40 CM

THANKS TO THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF IRELAND

Ekphrastic Haiku

Gabriel Rosenstock

A HAIKU IN IRISH AND ENGLISH
IN RESPONSE TO A WORK OF ART
BY OHARA KOSON (1877 – 1945)
WITH A VERSION IN JAPANESE
BY MARIKO SUMIKURA (KYOTO)
AND IN SCOTS BY JOHN
MCDONALD (EDINBURGH)



crann plumaí –
faoi bhláth leis i súil
an chorcráin choille

梅が枝や
うそひめの目に
咲きにけり

ploom tree –
floerin in bullie's ee
an aw

plum tree –
flowering too in the eye
of the bullfinch

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