

THE GALWAY REVIEW

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In memory of Gerry Galvin, poet.

The Galway Review

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Introduction

The first issue of *The Galway Review* is filling a worldwide hunger for literary expression. Already, with over five hundreds hits per day, there is no doubt that curiosity has been aroused. While it can be enough for some writers to substantiate research or inspiration, others seek readership, feedback, recognition and a platform. *The Galway Review* is an emerging force for local and International writers. The call for submissions was answered instantly and we were hugely impressed by such variety. Without contributions from all of you, this fellowship would not exist. Thank you!

As the *Galway Review* progresses we intend to further fill the emerging needs and develop this site. It is hoped that a pattern of publication will emerge to make this a significant input to existing sites and publications. As the century enters teen years, new needs arise. We will observe any request put forward and report our future plans as they unfold. A survey sent to all of you will be carefully studied and recommendations will be taken on board, where appropriate.

As the first Guest Editor, I want to express my gratitude to the team of Consulting Editors, Adrian Frazier, Eva Bourke, John Kenny, Gerard Hanberry, Trevor Conway, and Luke Morgan; to the General Administrator, Uinseann Mac Thómais, to the Managing Editor, Ndrek Gjini, and to all of you who contributed.

We appreciate the encouragement given by the many well-wishers and especially by the Galway City Council's Arts Officer, James Harold, who godfathered this project.

We appreciate the help and support given to us by the lecturers of the MA Programme in the English Department, at the National University of Ireland, Galway, and to Irish language contributors who were very welcome.

As an independent production and publication, it is our aim to present each of you with a passport across the literary globe. The Board of Consulting Editors agrees that it will not be possible to include everyone in the book version. However, contributions will remain on the website available for continuous glimpsing. The selection task was challenging and it required immense effort to stay within a certain page limit. We reduced the biography information to gain more space! With further publications envisaged, the opportunity for future book inclusion by the contributors will remain available.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Máire Holmes
Guest Editor

Máire Holmes: MA in Writing from the National University of Ireland, Galway.

Prof. Adrian Frazier

Men and Beauty

Pat Sheeran was a writer, filmmaker, and teacher at the National University of Ireland, Galway. In September 2001 he died of a heart attack. Four years earlier, not long after I arrived in Galway on a research fellowship, I found out what his other friends already knew. He had a wild genius for sincerity. (Indeed, as Kevin Barry remarked after his passing, Pat was so “boyishly sincere” he was sometimes baffled by university bureaucracy and its forms of politesse; “he had no other way than sincerity; he flew in under your radar.”)

The evening began in this way: Pat Sheeran caught me by the arm in the crowds on Shop Street in Galway, and pulled me into a pub. The drinks were not yet drawn when he said that he was shattered; his mother had died. He had come into money and wanted to spend it as fast as possible. We should go eat the most expensive meal it was possible to eat in Galway, and drink until everything that had recently passed had been forgotten. Was I game?

I was game. As the waiter landed in front of us two saucers with a dozen oysters each, he told me about the film, “The Fifth Province.” It was set in a place both within and supplementary to the Four Provinces of Ireland, a place in which the impossible always happens. Pat Sheeran explained that through transcendental meditation he had learned to travel to this other province, striding out of his body while his body slept. There was such a gleam in his eye as Yeats possibly had when he spoke of talking with the dead.

—So where do you go when you have these out-of-the-body experiences—rooms where ladies are lonely? But then you would wish you’d brought your body with you, wouldn’t you?

For rambunctious combinations of the laddish and the elfin, Pat Sheeran had both a taste and a talent. He was good at getting out of bounds quickly and gaily, and for coming to grips with what could bring two people together in talk of what most mattered. As good a gossip as a very smart woman, Pat Sheeran soon established that we were both married, both parents of children in their twenties, both in love with the woman of our (different) dreams, both unhappy with the current orthodoxies of our profession, even with those elements that we ourselves in the past had helped to make orthodox, both trying to find a new way of writing that enabled us to allow ideas to arise out of and return to both the dailiness and depths of our personal lives.

In his 1992 opening address to the Yeats Summer School, Pat Sheeran had made much of the importance of colonization to the understanding of Irish literature. Now he said he was tired of the “post-colonial racket.” He had a theory (he always had “a theory”) that British imperialism had enriched his life as an Irish person. He would not have things different from what they’d been. He had been

left with both the English and the Irish languages. He had a great hook-up with America because of the Irish diaspora, he could take advantage of whatever was on offer in Britain just like a British person, and still he was a citizen of this little republic on the receiving end of EU transfer payments, a nation too small to do much harm to others. The bellyaching of middle-class academics—as if they were personally oppressed—annoyed him, as would any kind of bellyaching. The default setting for his mindset was joyousness.

We agreed, around the time that dessert arrived that the pleasure of literature had been left so long unmentioned many did not know where to find it or how to experience it. Literature was a text you swatted up for exams on the crimes of the bourgeois, or the men, the white men, the straight men, or the imperial British, or the capitalist Americans. The quest for justice was indeed important, but we had forgotten “to hold justice and beauty in a single thought” (Yeats). Somehow, beauty had slipped our grasp and gone missing.

“Magic” was his own gadget—a way of using language that made reality include the dead and the ghosts of all earlier beliefs. I wanted to talk about beauty. A writer like Yeats would keep changing a poem in draft without respect to consistency of meaning. Finally, the poem would click into place, and nothing could again be changed. What is it that is perceived by the artist when he or she stands back with satisfaction...Perfecto! Yet it was difficult to talk about how a poem or story finds its own form, one that accommodates us to the un-alterability of a pseudo-statement, a statement that was not necessarily equivalent to the prior opinion of the author and one that was unavailable to disconfirmation. It was much harder to talk about beauty than about meaning, utility, power, or history. I was beginning to be boring. Pat’s eyes were drifting off. Professors hate to be lectured by Professors. Indeed, so do other people.

About midnight, he took me out into the country. He pulled the car up under some oaks beside a massive front gate barring the way to a long drive. At the end of that drive, Pat explained, was the last Big House in Ireland to have been burned by the IRA. One day he would introduce me to the man who set fire to it.

—Come along, we’ll go for a walk. Have you ever, he asked, seen a faery?

No, and I did not expect to do so this night. Like a round wheel of fire, he said they were, silently whooshing over the grass, and you rarely got to see them except through the corner of your eye, and then only in haunted places like this place, sometime after midnight. Quiet dropped upon us. The place was indeed somewhat spooky. The grasses were blowing in the nightwind, and moonlight was making the hills milky and frothy-looking. The serpentine drive went over a little bridge. Up from below came the weird variety of pitches and percussions 18th century versifiers called the “purling of a little rill.” Off to the side were grey masonry outbuildings around a yard. The drive circled up a hill, and we reached the front of the burned-out house. Above it, backlit clouds streamed across the sky, and you got a strange sensation when staring up the walls that they themselves were moving and the sky was still. This was the “Pat Sheeran effect.” When you go with a seer to look for things that are not natural, they seem to be about to appear.

But the walls did not move; the clouds moved, I reminded myself, and we turned back toward the car along the other route of the circular drive.

It led down towards a lake, and at one end of the lake one could make out a black grove of trees. The strangest sound began to come from that grove. It made your small hairs stand up—a kind of squawking, very raspy, and in waves of chorus upon chorus growing. As we came up to the trees there suddenly lifted from those branches one and then several and finally a whole flock of nesting herons. It was a rookery! Those were angry mother and father birds, protecting their big chicks. One could now see the nests of sticks. Perfectly natural explanation.

On the way back to Galway, Pat Sheeran remained silent, pleased with the night's epiphany.

2

A year later, my wife Cliodhna and I had dinner with Pat Sheeran and his life-companion and co-author Nina Witoszek. Together Nina and Pat write novels, films and essays as “Nina Fitzpatrick” (a characteristic pun: *Nina fits Patrick*). They are transgendered soul-mates. He says that she is the male principle he had previously always needed—the structuring, intellectual, far-seeing, and purposeful intelligence. She says he is her Muse.

Some months earlier, Nina had had a tumor taken out of her stomach. For a while, she had been looking toward death. The four of us were talking of what death might be like, and could one really get up close to it, even pass across into it, prior to the moment of death itself. Or was it always an infinite distance from life, and wholly unimaginable? Nina and Pat were making a documentary about Irish funerary traditions, based on Nina's doctoral thesis, *Talking to the Dead*.

My belief, I admitted, is that I have died, and not once but many times. Some males have an overly active panic response. When something frightens such a man (an unstoppable rapid flow of blood does it for me), then his heart races and his breath stops. This overly active response then sets in. It sends a biochemical signal telling the heart to slow down, but it sends too powerful a signal, and instead of slowing down, the heart stops. So the bloodflow to the brain stops. The man turns greenish-white and faints. Some time later—from a few seconds to a minute—the phenomenon passes over, and the man slowly comes back to consciousness. During that spell when the heart is stopped, I believe that one is virtually dead.

On these wretched disabling occasions, I always have the same dream. I am falling down a corridor, a corridor that is not a vertical drop, but a slowly twisting angular fall. The speed of the fall is not so fast as if you had jumped off a building; it is a rapid downdrift, in which your arms swim and grab, and your feet cannot find any footing. Along the corridor are doors, and sometimes you can see into the rooms. Inside traumatic scenes are enacted by ill-assorted people from your past. You become aware that the corridor must have a bottom, and when you reach it, that will be the end of you. But every part of your body has become unbelievably heavy, as if you are in a centrifuge. Your hand weighs a ton; you strain to lift it, to hold it up in front of your face, as if to ward off evil. There is a blast of light, then

more blasts. Now you find yourself rising above the scene in which you first fainted. There you are, down below, lying in a circle of people who talk in concerned voices as they kneel around your unconscious body. Someone is coming in the door with a wet towel or glass of water, perhaps smelling salts. Then you are back inside your own still dreadfully heavy body, looking not down but up at this assembly. It is over, and you are not very sure all of a sudden where you have been or where you are now.

Much of this dream—often described in similar terms by those who have “died” on the operating table—is easily explained as an epiphenomenon of oxygen gradually being withdrawn from different parts of the brain (those that control memory, balance, vision, etc.). Still, it does raise an almost metaphysical question. Since the dreamer never reaches the bottom of the height from which he falls, does that mean that the experience of consciousness endlessly protracts itself during its final seconds?

Pat Sheeran then told a story about a time he almost died, the occasion of an unforgettable two-way talk with God. His life had had many phases. He had been a public-action anarchist, then a union organiser. He had become an expert on the botany and topography of the Burren. He had been and still was a mushroom-gatherer. And during one phase, he had been a wind-surfer. All the time he would be in Galway Bay or round the coast of Clare in the gales and big waves. Once out beyond the Flaggy Shore, the sea became so angry it tore his sail to pieces. Each wave heaved him high and threw him low, carrying him all too quickly toward the rocky headlands. If he was not drowned first, there on the shore he would surely die, smashed and bloody and full of seawater. Terrified, he called on God. I will give up anything, just save me! No answer. I'll give up drink! No answer. And cigarettes. No answer. Then the voice of God shaped itself in his mind. Will you give up Nina? No, he replied, I would rather die and go to hell. I will not give up Nina.

—So you see, he said across the dinner table to Nina, I am going to go to hell for you.

He never did tell me how he got out of that stormy sea. Perhaps it was by the same route he has by now surely gotten out of hell.

3

Subsequently, he told me that for a long time he never went to Mass. Latterly, he had experienced a desire for a return to Catholic worship. Perhaps it was hearing the banshee cry in a Tennessee hotel room the night his father (an ex-policeman) died in Navan. But Pat Sheeran could not just start showing up for the eleven o'clock mass at Galway Cathedral. He had a beef with the Bishops of Galway, for he claimed they fattened on church funds, fathered unacknowledged children on American women, or supervised the mistreatment of students in boys' schools. So Pat Sheeran located a priest in town who had returned from Africa with a wife and children. The hierarchy had ordered this priest to separate himself either from the wife or from the Church. He would do neither. He was saying pre-Vatican II Latin Mass on Sunday mornings in Le Graal, a wine bar on Dominick Street. The

majority of the congregation were, oddly, nursing mothers. I should go sometime, Pat suggested. After all, I kept talking about scholarly books on the historical Jesus.

No, Mass attendance fitted my life at no point. I was not Catholic or Christian, or even ex-Christian, just a natural-born pagan with an interest in the religious beliefs of my fellow humans. But what about a counter-proposal—we would write a book together called *Bad Catholics*. A “bad Catholic” was a rebel from either the clergy or the dogma of the Church, but whose spiritual relation to the world was through and through a Catholic one. A bad Catholic would have a Catholic sense of sex, a Catholic sense of beautiful magic, a Catholic sense of confession, and a Catholic sense of sacramental realities like purgatory, marriage, and lustration. A bad Catholic might sleep around or busy himself in the black economy but he would not eat fish on Friday. Pat Sheeran asked which of us would write what in this book—presumably, I’d do George Moore since I had written a long biography of that author. No, Moore was not a Catholic at all, good, bad, or indifferent. My part would be to write the life story of Pat Sheeran, and Pat Sheeran could take his pick of the rest...say, James Joyce, for instance, the quintessential bad Catholic. The title would be a winner. Soon people would realise that the only kind of real Catholics left are bad Catholics, and that perhaps the best Catholics of all earlier eras were bad Catholics too because they had their doubts and were not always obedient.

The project never came to anything, I think because Pat Sheeran had a Catholic sense of humility and so declined to be the hero of a story. Probably he also sniffed something morbid about me writing his life before he was done writing it and living it himself. Besides, the only books with which he would be associated would be, he explained, the works of Nina Fitzpatrick. Still, I think it would have been an excellent subject. A church in which Pat Sheeran was again made at home would be a desirable institution for any country to have.

4

A few years ago he showed me a script for a short film by Nina Fitzpatrick. I wish I still had a copy of it. It opens with a spaceship landing on the treeless moonlit stony hills of the Burren. Out of it get a crowd of aliens with metallic-looking faces and big eyes. They walk about in a sort of full-body halo. Soon they assemble in a dry stone church on the Burren, and, seen from without, the church sends rays of light through all the unmortared cracks. Inside, the aliens are being given a sermon by the local parish priest. He is delighted at the rise in Sunday attendance. He dreams of extending his mission to the stars and the million undocumented species of the universe. From having been priest to the smallest parish of Ireland, he will carry the torch to the universe, like the great Irish saints of the past!

The priest explains to his extraterrestrial congregation that God loves all creatures. Smiles appear on the faces of the aliens. They are a touchy-feely species, quick to be tickled by an idea, and quick to give the kiss of peace. Next the priest explains the Ten Commandments.

—There is one God and no other—the One who loves all creatures—and you must worship Him.

They squeal with delight; they would be glad to do so.

—Next, you shall not make graven images, or any other pictures of the Divine One.

Fine.

—Don't take the name of God in vain.

By smiles and noddings, the aliens show that they would never curse anyone.

—Next, come to Church every Sunday and don't work on that day.

Excellent! The commandments about honouring parents and avoiding murder also go down very well, and the aliens are concluding that at last in their travels through the universe they have come upon the Truth. Then the priest goes on to the Seventh Commandment:

—You shall not commit adultery.

Adultery? What is that? That, explains the priest, means that you marry a person of the opposite sex and then you may kiss, hug, and sleep with no more than this one person. The aliens are in a flutter. The noise of strange converse rises in the Burren church. One of them is delegated to ask a question: what would be the result of ignoring this particular commandment? That would be terrible, answers the priest: God would no longer love you; He would be angry; He would cast you into the fiery pit. Close-up here on the face of one alien: a large blue tear forms in the corner of an eye, and then rolls down a titanium cheek. One by one the members of the congregation arise from their pews, and, as the priest begs them to stay for further explanation, they file out of the doors of the church.

The whole film is rather complicated, as it involves the hilarious troubles of a County Clare kangaroo farmer. I cannot remember the details. What I do remember is the general idea Pat Sheeran communicated of a Roman Catholicism that had been reformed by Martian sensibilities, so that all were once again welcome within it.

5

Pat and Nina were going for dinner at Dave Power's house (he is a film-producer in Galway, and he had the script about the extraterrestrials in County Clare). Pat was bright-eyed about this approaching dinner engagement. Did the chances for funding look promising? No, that was not it. It transpired that Dave Power, himself a hunk, has a beautiful wife, Therese (a reflexologist). I had to understand: everything Therese did was beautiful. To be around her was to be decentered: you fell right out of your own ego. It was all one could do to keep from staring, but one felt the need to memorize this face. As in that book by Elaine Scarry *On Beauty and Being Just*, the "homely act of staring" was an urge toward replication, a desire to copy, and become like her or to make something like her.[i] She attended to you, to everyone, with grace. You felt honoured to have been noticed in a kindly way. Pat concluded by telling me he always felt much better for a day or two after having dinner with Dave Power.

He made it clear that Therese was not something or someone he wanted. If he could have anyone, he already had that person, Nina. And playing the thief with another man's wife—Dave Power was the best of men and a friend at that—was entirely out of the question. Besides, such goings on would be the furthest thing from the mind of Therese. Fulfilment of sexual desire was not at issue. To act as beautifully in relation to the world around you as she did, and to have such an improving effect on every event that passed—those effects would be worth replicating, if one could somehow catch from her the trick of it.

Clíodhna was not sure that this form of male regard was not simply a classic case of the objectification of women. At first, I was inclined to agree, but to add—so, men objectify women, men are scopophiliacs, men are hard-wired to look at women admiringly. It is evolutionary in origin. What is to be done? But then I began to think that I was not understanding Pat Sheeran's regard for another man's beautiful wife in the correct manner. He did not objectify Therese because it was not primarily her body-image that he found to be beautiful. Consider this thought-experiment: another woman of about the same size brings a photograph of Therese to a team of cosmetic surgeons. They can do just about anything, they are that sophisticated. They go to work in the operating room, and later in the gym and the hair salon; presto! Out comes another Therese. Would Pat have found her beautiful? I don't think so. It is a case similar to the one Yeats makes for Maud Gonne in "The Folly of Being Comforted." Not her hair, which grows grey, or her face, which becomes wrinkled, but her "ways" are beautiful to him:[ii]

Because of that great nobleness of hers

The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs,

Burns but more clearly.

6

The desire to reproduce (but not to possess) is like the impulse to turn phrases or to tell stories well or to make films or, as Pat Sheeran was doing at the time, to build a house on a hill near Moycullen that people should still be glad to see on that hill in another hundred years, something beautiful. In the modern period, beauty had gotten a bad name. It came to be believed that all art should be disturbing, conceptual, outrageous, industrial, or incomprehensible. The sublime had utterly trumped the beautiful. An appealing, harmonious, pleasure-giving art was treated as a prop for the status quo; or as superficially decorative, hiding the ugly truth; or as a form of prettiness cranked out by one fashion system or another, to keep people buying and to rebuild the walls of status distinctions. Things should not be this way, for while they were, the world was getting patently uglier. You would have to be an idiot not to realise that more beauty was good, and less was bad.

But what was the beautiful, after all? I have since come to think that James Kirwan may be right in holding that beauty is not a thing at all, or even a property of things, but an experience of a thing that gives disinterested pleasure.[iii] Pat Sheeran did not want to get rich by writing a screenplay that would sell (while having no objection to blockbusting success as an unintended consequence); he did not want to get the woman from his friend for the sake of his own desire; he did not

want to put up a house that simply provided typical comfort at the lowest price. Instead, he sought (with Nina's help) to create pleasures that were intrinsically satisfying.

Much about this quest for beauty still confounds me, and I doubt that I shall ever understand it. In a *New Symposium* conducted with the dead, Pat Sheeran may be sorting the matter out with Socrates, Dante, Blake, Kant, Oscar Wilde, and God. Socrates could explain the move from the beauty of the boy to Beauty itself to the One that is the True, the Good, and the Beautiful too. Dante could show the way up the same long stairway from the beauty of Beatrice to the Beauty and Truth of God, expressed as light and the song of angels. Since the 19th century, we are more likely to halt on the stair, and falter where we firmly trod, and stretch lame hands and grope, and gather dust and chaff.[iv] "What is to be done with this newfound knowledge," a contemporary philosopher asks, "that in beauty, behind beauty, is nothing, the abyss, dust?" Is it that we still need to know God but there is no God; we still seek Truth but there are only truths; we search for the soul but we are only animals able to dream up the concept of soul; we want eternity and yet there is less time left for each of us with each day we live? Right down the line, we do not get what we most want. Yet, amazingly, in the one case of beauty, our experience of being just out of reach of the Ultimate is an experience of pleasure.

According to Kant's way of thinking, in the moment of gazing upon something that is to us beautiful, we do not feel that this beautiful thing is a thing of its cultural moment, or that its attraction springs from our own particular taste, or that reverence for it masks the contradiction at the heart of the landowning class. In the moment of apprehension of beauty, we forget all the relative and material aspects of the experience. We feel, as Kirwan observes, that we have entered into something "universal," and that others may share in that experience.

Yet people, in fact, do not all find beauty in the same things. There are communities of taste, groups of people who find pleasure in the fact of finding pleasure all together from a single source, and who find pleasure as well in talking about what is best or a little less than the best about that common source of pleasure. The communities overlap sometimes, and sometimes not at all (perhaps one cannot enjoy both Mozart and heavy metal). Beauty inspires in communities of taste a bit of missionary zeal. To feel that this is beautiful and that, by God, is not is to feel righteous. One is supposed to be just as tactful about not denouncing a friend's décor to the friend's face as about not talking down that friend's religious beliefs in the sanctuary of the friend's presence. Apart from this little sphere of tolerance and tact, people are as passionate about their convictions in matters of taste as in matters of faith.

Even if the great souls in the symposium were to agree that beauty is a feeling, not a thing; and that beauty creates an illusory belief that one is in the presence of the universal; and that in fact communities of taste are all equally unjustified in their missionary righteousness; even if all this were true, as a paid-up member of the Pat Sheeran community of taste, I have my own zeal for the good news. There are, I believe, particular grounds for what is beautiful to humans. The grounds are not,

as Socrates, Dante, and Kant suggest, in God, Truth, or Metaphysical Universals. They are (Eureka!) the following three:

1. Nature,
2. The human body,
3. What the Greeks called *techne*, or skill in making.

No natural landscape is unbeautiful. I have travelled across North America, China, Europe, and everywhere one finds oneself among other humans travelling and admiring the landscape. A rich and lively swamp in Ontario is full of beauty; so are the exotic bodily shapes of hot Mohave sand dunes. The earth may be found in an ugly state where humans have blighted it, but pretty much only there. Each tree is beautiful. So is each leaf. So is the chequered shade upon the lawn. Forms of art draw their sense of variety, shape, harmony, and texture from our experience of this planet. The seasons created by this revolving planet in its revolutions around its sun create our sense both of cyclicity and of the four-phase staged progress to an apex and down from that apex. As Northrup Frye showed in the 1960s, there is a genre, a trope, and a mode of expression for each season. There are few comedies of autumn or tragedies of springtime. The primitively-conceived four elements—water, earth, air, and fire—are constituents in the psychology of the spirit: there is a mood and personality type for each. This planet is our home; we love all its variable elements and trace in them the lineaments of beauty. When humanity saw the first pictures of the earth taken from outer space, the response was to hail its extraordinary beauty, compared with that of red Mars or even many-ringed Saturn. Those other planets were strange icy forms of beauty in the universe, but not warm, domestic, lovely, cloud-enswired, blue-oceaned home, Gaia. Everyone thinks of the earth as a female and a mother; not so with Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, or Pluto.

Second, “the Human Form Divine,” as Blake called it, is the source of many canons of beauty. Symmetry centers us. We like organic relations of parts to the whole, with a higher (the head) and lower (obedient limbs, disobedient parts too). According to Edmund Burke, as infants at the breast, we are imprinted with an idea of beautiful form. The line that is drawn from under a woman’s ear, down along the neck, over the collar-bone and plunging in the swoop of the breast is the “line of beauty.” Our concept of the sublime, he implies, is derived during same early stage of life from the remoteness, erectness, height, capacity for anger, and strength of the father. An extraterrestrial species—let us say one that looks like an opossum—might find our species an off-putting sight, but for us, even a human of ‘average’ endowment is the image of God. It is a difficult lesson in the Book of Job when the voice in the whirlwind declares that God is also the whale and the crocodile, “the doors of his face with his terrible teeth all around” (41:14). The easiest forms of beauty in which to take pleasure are the primal, narcissistic ones, those that hold up the mirror to humanity, and especially to motherhood.

Finally, we stand in awe of the person who can do what God is said to have done: make a world by means of skill and superabundant power. We like it when the handiwork shows, and we like it when the handiwork is hidden in the independent

perfections of the thing made. We like it when the creation has a history (includes the image of time past and time passing) and we like it when artifice creates a world that seems either timeless or not yet come to pass. There are so many good reasons for this satisfaction with the human capacity for creation that they cannot all be spelled out. One thing above all we use as a mark of the best kind of making. That is the kind of making that was done so well we say the thing was made to last. A person that writes a poem or a play not to please the largest number of consumers now, but to satisfy the dead and the still unborn, that is the person to whom in the end we yield up our honours. Before they died, the great writers aimed to leave, and did leave, “something so written to after times as they should not willingly let it die.”[v]

Right now, of course, for the most part those who provide the pleasures for kingdom come may get as much praise as Jesus got when he went home to his neighbours, brothers, and sisters in Galilee. They said he was a madman. He could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief (Matthew 13: 56-58). Thus was the prophet without honour in his own country. Outside Galilee, people loved a miracle—the walk on the water, the resurrections, the changing of water into wine. And they loved the miracle-worker who defied all odds. But the Palestinians evidently were also set on fire by the way Jesus had of telling old stories in new ways, such as the one about the kingdom being like a man who found a treasure in a field (not his own field), and went away and sold all that he had, so that he could buy that field; that is what the kingdom of heaven is like. Jesus was great with riddles.

—Now what is the kingdom of heaven like? You cannot guess? It is like a mustard seed.

—And how is that?

Let me tell you...

He was not an ordinary storyteller, or barefoot doctor, or defrocked priest working at the riverbank. It was hard to know what to call him. Even within his own time, people were inclined to follow him and to praise his mysterious power and the specific talent for making people see the earth as heaven on which they should live like angels.

7

A few months after Pat Sheeran died; word went out that there was to be a gathering in his honour at Le Graal one Thursday evening. The people who came on that night were remarkably in their variety. One was a lighting technician with a television crew. “I only saw him once,” the technician said. “I was on assignment to do the lights for a television interview of Nina Witozsek, to be held in the wooden house out the Moycullen way. We were all set up with all our lights downstairs when this man appeared up on the overhanging balcony. He asked us if we had everything we needed. We could make free with the refrigerator if we were hungry or thirsty. Then he disappeared into an upstairs room. The funny thing about it was that he was completely naked. I concluded that Pat Sheeran was a man very comfortable with his own body.”

There were, of course, students and professors—plenty of them. The Classics professor Brian Arkins gave a furious rendition in perfect Latin of Catullus V: “Vivamus mea Lesbia”—Let us live, my Lesbia—which totes up the scores, then hundreds, and thousands and hundreds of thousands of kisses the poet would give his beloved. There were also gardeners, house-builders, mushroom gatherers, film directors, film and theatre people of many sorts, political activists, and a reflexologist. On the whole, there were more women than men. Everyone came to praise the lively spirit of Pat Sheeran.

It is good to praise men and women, particular people who have gone a journey no one else has gone, people who have left a proof of their being in the memory of friends, or on paper, or on film, or in gifts they have given, houses they have built, children they have raised, or relationships that they have created. I am thinking especially of people who widen our sense of human possibility by adding to the world’s store of what is beautiful. It is a pleasure to praise Pat Sheeran.

[i] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Harvard UP: Cambridge).

[ii] W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Poems* (Macmillan: London, 1963), 86.

[iii] James Kirwan, *Beauty* (Manchester UP: Manchester, 2001).

[iv] Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, poem 55.

[v] John Milton, Introduction, “Reason for Church Government”; he was speaking of his work on *Paradise Lost*.

Maureen Gallagher

Patrick Kavanagh – Mystic or Realist?

In Ireland there is a tendency to burn incense before the shrine of Celtic mysticism. The poetry of Patrick Kavanagh has long been pressed into service to give credibility to these ideas. Arguments to prove that Kavanagh was a mystical poet are brought to bear in Una Agnew's 'The Mystical Imagination of Patrick Kavanagh'.

In it she argues that poetically transposed, Kavanagh accepted poverty as a key to exploring other kingdoms. His possessions might be simple and his companions few, she says, but he was 'king of banks and stones and every blooming thing'. Again and again, 'he squirms within the "agonising pincer-jaws of Heaven", yet wallows in this sanctifying dilemma'. The truth is that Kavanagh tiraded all his life against the 'rags of hunger'. When reviewing his life in a TV broadcast in 1962, he stated that he saw little virtue in poverty. On the contrary, he strongly subscribed to a life of sufficient comfort and freedom from anxiety. Poverty, he believed, caused obsession with material things and not freedom from their grasp. The poor thatched cabin romanticised in the Irish Literary movement was to Kavanagh's mind 'a lie'. He decried the effects of poverty, rightly concluding that 'the real poverty was the lack of enlightenment to get out and get under the moon.' He blamed poverty for depriving him of marriage.

When he made an audit of his life in the 50s, his one regret was that he had not 'reproduced himself':

a lonely lecher whom the fates

By a financial trick castrates. (Auditors In)

In her effort to fit him into the straightjacket of mysticism, Agnew downplays Kavanagh's satiric verse. In *The Great Hunger*, she says, Kavanagh 'expresses his despair, disillusionment and felt absence of God through the less worthy medium of angry, satirical verse'. This is stated as though satire wasn't verse, as though some of the most powerful poetry ever written wasn't satire.

Bitterness crept in only when poetry and prayer deserted him, she says..... in its throes he resorted to writing satire and doggerel, she says. But Kavanagh wrote satire all his life, and not only as a result of crises. For example, he satirises the self-congratulatory provincial Dublin mentality in *The Defeated*:

Outside this pig-sty life deteriorates,
civilisation dwindles. We are the last preserve
Of Eden in a world of savage states.

He is equally scathing of 'Dublin's pretentious poet-tasters' and 'bumptious intellectuals' denigrating them together in 'The Paddiad' as an undifferentiated mob:

All the Paddies having fun
Since Yeats handed in his gun.
Every man completely blind

To the truth about his mind.

Likewise in *Adventures In The Bohemian Jungle* he parodies the fakery establishment Art:

Countryman

You know them all.

Have I to go through all this to find

The world of Art?

Guide:

For success, yes.

They will not accept

The man not broken and remade

To the formula.

The real is too unpredictable.

Have another drink...

Another method Agnew employs to shape Kavanagh in the mystical mould is to transpose his intense sexual longing into transcendental longing. For her 'holy love' is what he expresses in *Miss Universe*:

God-Woman than of earthly origin.

O the sensual throb

Of the explosive body, the tumultuous thighs!

Adown a summer lane comes *Miss Universe*

She whom no lecher's art can rob

Though she is not virgin who is wise.

To see this poem as a sexual metaphor, she claims, is 'to miss the mystical propensities of the poet....to fail to see the entranced visionary beneath the raucous rantings of a frustrated bachelor'. The idea that Kavanagh somehow preferred the life of the ascetic to flash and blood sensuality or material comforts is nonsense. All through his writing is evidence of his desire for the better things in life:

...but I am tired

Of loving through the medium of a sonnet

I want by Man, not God to be inspired

This year O maiden of the dream-vague face

You'll come to me, a thing of Time and Space.

(In the Same Mood)

Kavanagh was savagely critical of the Church's repression of sexuality. In a scathing article entitled 'Sex and Christianity' Kavanagh recalls an occasion in the early 1930s when a young priest 'fresh from Maynooth' descended on the deck-dancing scene with orders to disperse: '...In this exciting country, the melodeons were playing and life itself was dancing, when up the road on his bicycle came a little black priest who could not have been long out of college. This little man got up on the fence and ordered us to disperse, which we did. I was ashamed of these young boys and girls, who knew so little about their own religion not to realise that this little man was acting from impulses that were pernicious'. The removal of the decks set the scene for the clergy to become strict supervisors of the dance hall

area. Originally convinced that dancing was a ‘dangerous occasion of sin’, they were now ready to control it, along with its revenue for parish funds, so that, as Kavanagh acerbically observes:

In the gap there’s a bush weighted with boulders like morality,
The fools of life bleed if they climb over. (The Great Hunger)

Agnew’s main thesis that Patrick Kavanagh is a mystic is ludicrous. She tells us that Kavanagh had experiences similar to that of St John of the Cross whose vision of God is glimpsed as through a tiny slit: ‘You have revealed Yourself to me as through the fissures in a rock’. Or like Catherine of Sienna who images God as ‘light filtering through a narrow street’. She informs us that as a way of life, he practised what spiritual writers call ‘the sacrament of the present moment’, finding God everywhere but especially ‘in the bits and pieces of everyday’, adopting a Celtic spirituality while rejecting the institutionalised church. Loving ‘even unto folly’, was a motto Kavanagh shared with no less a mystic than St Therese of Liseaux, she says, and it is quite possible, she further maintains, that Kavanagh identified with this saint, since during his stay in hospital he spent much of his time with lung patients, where St Therese, Patroness of lung disease, was frequently invoked!

Finally she says that Kavanagh’s visionary sense is the mystical experience and it is this that best explains the poetic process. Poet and mystic alike come under the transforming power of inspiration or ‘holy intoxication’; both are smitten by a flash or of invisible power touching the spiritual substance of the self.

What Agnew does is, she starts off with a schema based on the definition of a mystic and then bends over backwards to fit Kavanagh into it. To force Kavanagh into the same mould as St John of the Cross or St Therese of Liseaux is to ignore the savage material longing of escape from poverty that runs as a seam through The Great Hunger, the opposite of mystical longing.

To ignore the fact that The Great Hunger is in fact a reference to sexual hunger – throughout there are references to lonely masturbation into dead ashes – is to compound the blindness. Furthermore, again and again, she equates imagination and aesthetic elation with mysticism.

It was inevitable that some of Kavanagh’s poetry and especially his early poetry would have strong elements of reverence before the wonders of design in nature, i.e. natural mysticism. This was only to be expected from someone who didn’t even finish his primary education and for whom Darwin’s Origin of Species was beyond his horizons. But this natural mysticism was only a strand: he had no mystical attitude towards society. The satires that were an integral part of his work throughout his writing life point to a poet that was a realist not a mystic.

As Kavanagh got older he was an atheist and realist for ninety per cent of the time and capable of the most virulent attacks on the Catholic Church as for example when he writes in One Wet Summer:

As it is I praise the rain
for washing out the bank holiday with its moral risks
It is not a nice attitude but it is conditioned by circumstances

And by a childhood perverted by Christians moralists.

The volume of output of satiric verse throughout his career from *The Great Hunger* to *The Paddiad*, from *Adventures In A Bohemian Jungle* to *Bardic Dust*, to *Christmas Mummings* and countless others, testifies to his savage realism and mocks claims by Una Agnew and others to represent Patrick Kavanagh as a mystic.

Kate Smyth

On *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies* by Hilary Mantel

Wolf Hall (2009)

Winner of the Man Booker Prize in 2009, *Wolf Hall* follows the life of Thomas Cromwell, advisor to King Henry VIII. Mantel remoulds Cromwell, a man known for his violence and ruthlessness, into a caring, quick-witted, empathetic Renaissance man, despite looking “like a murderer”. This intensely detailed work of historical fiction sees Cromwell extract himself from a childhood of violent physical abuse at the hands of his alcoholic blacksmith father. Following the advice of his kindly sister Kat, who took the place of his mother after her early death, the young Cromwell escapes to France to become a soldier. Throughout the novel, the reader learns that Cromwell travelled across Europe, picking up skills as a cloth merchant, an accountant, and a lawyer, and learning French, Italian, Latin, and numerous other languages along the way. As Cardinal Wolsey’s assistant in 1527, stories about Cromwell’s origins are so mysterious and diverse that he is widely perceived as ominous and terrifying. Wolsey spreads wild stories about his protégé’s violent nature: “When he breaks the windows we just call in the glaziers and part with the cash. As for the procession of aggrieved young women ... Poor creatures, I pay them off...” The cardinal’s witty inventiveness – together with Cromwell’s striking physical presence, incomparable memory, and apparent omnipotence – help him develop a persona which serves him well after the cardinal’s fall. Described as “a man of strong build, not tall”, Cromwell “is at home in the courtroom or waterfront, bishop’s palace or inn yard. He can draft a contract, train a falcon, draw a map, stop a street fight, furnish a house and fix a jury”. His many talents and his blunt, though shrewd, manner allow him to become one of King Henry’s chief advisors.

Mantel creates a contrast between Cromwell’s public and private life. In the latter, he is a caring father and sympathetic master. Mantel predominantly refers to Cromwell as “he”, which sometimes causes confusion but ultimately draws the reader further into the action of the novel and provides a feeling of immediacy. Cromwell’s emotional side is explored in the wake of the sudden deaths of his wife and daughters, and of Cardinal Wolsey. Mantel depicts the tragedies as they would happen in real life, portraying the shock of sudden death by condensing the incidents into a few sentences. As Cromwell obtains more information, so does the reader. Cromwell’s love for Wolsey, for his wife and daughters, and for the people of his household endears him to the reader, as does his awkward relationship with his son Gregory and his naming of each of his dogs Bella (after the terrier he had as a boy in Putney).

Mantel expertly portrays the subtleties of these relationships and mirrors them against the complicated court politics. Cromwell is frank in his dealings with the king, but always with a plan in mind, always careful of Henry’s unpredictability.

Henry, who is surrounded by snivelling courtiers and eternally accommodating lords, relishes Cromwell's honesty and humour. As the novel progresses, Cromwell rises to power in concurrence with Anne Boleyn's rise to the throne. When Cromwell is first summoned to Anne's presence, she murmurs: "suddenly, everything is about you. The king does not cease to quote Master Cromwell". Anne is portrayed as powerful, intelligent, and sly. She shows no fear: "if you walked up to her and said, you are to be boiled alive, she would probably shrug: *c'est la vie*". Cromwell orchestrates her marriage to Henry in order to obtain an heir for the throne. Then, he thinks, "I can build my own prince". The title of the book, and the final chapter, signify Anne's eminent destruction and replacement by Jane Seymour of Wolf Hall, which will be facilitated by Cromwell.

Cromwell is set in contrast with the self-flagellating religious extremism of Sir Thomas More. Cromwell's relationship with More is built on respect, competition, and distrust. Their views on the church and the powers of the king become increasingly divergent, and when More falls out of favour with Henry, Cromwell simultaneously brings about, and attempts to help More avoid, his execution. The complexity and contradictoriness of Cromwell's role in More's death is expertly portrayed by Mantel. More's veiled vanity, and his view of himself as Christ-like, suggests Cromwell is the better man. While More mocks his wife, Cromwell treats his wife with respect while she is alive and misses her terribly after her death. Though Cromwell is perceived as being capable of extreme violence (and frightening enough to scare King Henry himself), he is at least partially unaware of this. Despite the disembowelling, burning, and decapitating of abbots, monks, and bishops who do not conform to Cromwell's new version of England, Mantel continually depicts him as humane, intellectual, and family-orientated. Above all, Cromwell possesses relentless resourcefulness and ingenuity: "Lock Cromwell in a deep dungeon in the morning", says Thomas More, "and when you come back that night he'll be sitting on a plush cushion eating larks' tongues, and all the gaolers will owe him money".

Bring Up the Bodies (2012)

Mantel's second novel in her trilogy exploring the life of Thomas Cromwell has less initial momentum than *Wolf Hall* (2009). Space is given to reminding the reader of characters' personalities and summarising events of the first book. Because Mantel chooses to tell rather than show, the book is not as immediately impressive as its predecessor. However, that is not to say that Mantel has lost her expertise with language or her talent for storytelling. Early on, Cromwell is described through the remembered words of his deceased father, Walter: "my boy Thomas, give him a dirty look and he'll gouge your eye out. Trip him, and he'll cut off your leg. But if you don't cut across him, he's a very gentleman. And he'll stand anybody a drink". This foreshadows the action of the novel. Cromwell engineers the fall of Queen Anne Boleyn, before she can destroy him. There is no doubt that Cromwell is a dangerous man, becoming more dangerous as his

situation at Henry's court becomes more precarious. He "quietens" Ireland "by hanging people. Not many: just the right ones. It's an art, a necessary art". At the court of King Henry VIII, he balances on the edge of a knife, and Anne Boleyn is nothing to him in comparison to his desire for self-preservation. He serves the king, but his own political aspirations compel him to unite with Anne's enemies to bring her down. While he remains caring in some respects – towards his family and household – his deadly ruthlessness is revealed up close.

Henry's new love, Jane Seymour, is an expertly crafted character. Quiet, shy, virginal; she is everything that Anne is not. But behind her silence is intelligence and discernment, and behind her demeanour of weakness is a woman who can resist the "honeyed words" of the king. Henry rejects Anne. Jane takes her place: "a space opens around her and for a moment she stands in the vacancy, like a dancer left behind when the line moves on". It does not detract from the novel that the reader already knows how Anne (and indeed Jane) will meet her end. The brilliance lies in how Mantel unravels the story. In *Bring Up the Bodies*, as the king begins to speak of the possible illegitimacy of his second marriage, the reader can perceive a repetition of the situation with Katherine and imagine the very same murmured suggestions from the king to Cardinal Wolsey: "it seems to me I was somehow dishonestly led into this marriage". The reader can feel Cromwell's exhaustion and uncertainty, though he regains control quickly and sides himself with the Seymours.

Cromwell knows that the king will one day turn on him, and all he can do is "hope the end is quick". Always they are subjects to Henry's capricious whims and moods, and never can they forget his power, for "it's like sporting with a tamed lion. You can touse its mane and pull its ears, but all the time you're thinking, those claws, those claws, those claws". Following the lead of *Wolf Hall*, *Bring Up the Bodies* won the Man Booker Prize again for Mantel in 2012. The forthcoming third novel in Mantel's trilogy will, we can presume, continue to show how sharp King Henry's – and Thomas Cromwell's – claws can be.

On Reading in Pubs

November 1970 found me living alone in a “Chambre de Bonne” on the 7th floor building on the Boulevard St. Germain in Paris. The facade of the building was elegant and suggested wealth and opulence. My entrance to the room, however, was through a back door in the courtyard having passed through a short hallway, under the suspicious eyes of the ever vigilant, ever present concierge and up seven flights of stairs. The bit of carpet that covered the steps petered out miserably on the fifth floor. It was my first time away from a happy, warm and loving home atmosphere and I reacted badly to it. My French was not good and I found it difficult to make contacts or friends. I wandered the streets of Paris, alone, almost afraid to speak in case my right to be there would be challenged or that I would be laughed at. In fact, the only place I felt a small degree of comfort was perusing the Boquinistes that stretched along the banks of the Seine or in the second hand bookshops that dotted the area around the Rue de Bac and the Rue de Seine.

Despite this intense loneliness and feeling of alienation, I resisted returning to my room, especially in the evening. However lonely it was on the streets of Paris, it was a lot lonelier after I had climbed those 88 steps and entered the cell-like room. I soon became aware of the remarkable French ability to sit for more than an hour with just one of miniscule cup of Espresso coffee, a lethal (to me) beverage unknown to Pre-Europe Ireland. You were warm, there was an artificial sense of belonging to the “Life” scurrying around you, it cut into the edge of the loneliness and you could read undisturbed to your heart’s content.

I never left my room, then, without a book. I quickly got to know the cafés where the patron’s patience and forbearance allowed me to extend my presence to two or three hours and, in these cafés I steadily read my way through the short stories of Guy de Maupassant and the 20 Rougon Maquart novels of Émile Zola. It is no surprise that Paris has always had a curious nineteenth century flavour for me.

This form of relaxation, reading in pubs, has remained with me to this day. There is nothing I love more than to find a well-lit quiet corner in a comfortable pub and, over a few pints, lose myself in the world of whatever good book I happen to be reading at that moment. To find a quiet corner is increasingly difficult as most publicans (or dare I say it with the increasing franchises that now operate in our country nowadays most pub managers) wish to fill every corner of their establishment with the loudest and most inane noise possible. Again, well lit corners are also becoming something of a rarity. As with the quiet corner, more and more governors (to give them their English title) seem to be of the opinion that any light outside the perimeters of the bar counter would not only cause him untold hardship but would insult the sensibilities of his customers. In fact, he is convinced that his pub would earn a most dubious reputation should people actually see each other (not to mind the printed word) within the outer reaches of the premises.

All these are but minor obstacles compared to the fact that the pub going Irish do not have the same attitude to the sole book reader as do the café going French. Now, newspapers would appear to have Carte Blanche. You can burst your way onto a crowded pub counter, spread out the pages of the Financial Times, the Daly Star or Penthouse and people will neatly move aside, take their drinks off the bar, bunch close and even uncomfortably closer together to allow the intruder greater privacy in his or her most scared of tasks, the perusal of the paper. The newspaper reader can actually shove a newspaper in your face and be judged not to have insulted you. In fact, should you object in any way whatsoever is to commit a grievous sacrilege! The most serious and unforgiveable of all sins, of course, is to disturb the person who is perusing the racing pages. God and Allah forbid!

The Book Reader, on the other hand is the outcast of Irish pub society. Because of this and the fact that the Reader favours the well lit corner sets he or she up as a prime target for that most awful of animals, the Pub Bore. The Book Reader to him (for alas, this creature is far more often of the male kind) is the most delectable of victims. The Reader is alone, talking to nobody, defences are down. The Pub Bore will allow the victim to settle in, and just as he or she is becoming comfortable, will move.

Sometimes the approach is subtle: "That looks like a most interesting volume you are reading". Usually the Reader's antennae will pick up the slightly raised West Brit accent and, by totally ignoring the approach, sometimes manages to get rid of the pest. Generally though, though, he or she is not so lucky. The Pub Bore is rather inclined to be more aggressive and will even go so far, without as much as a bye your leave as snatch the offending book from the reader. "Ah Yes! I remember reading this tome when I was but fourteen". Nailed! The hapless reader is now subjected to the literary and cultural autobiography of his tormentor and is brought through a whole series of books that must be read that must be read in order to gain the superior intellectual his unwanted tormentor has so obviously gained until, in abject terror, he or she flees sometimes even leaving the precious book behind.

Recently I had an approach that not only bucked the trend, but can only be described as original. There I was, as I thought, in a safe corner nicely settled into a wonderful book with the counter and the rest of the pub to my right and so I was able to watch any unwanted approach, when all of a sudden the attack came from the right flank:

"You're into the books are you? Fair play to ye! Jay, you'll never be bored".

Tell me about it, I thought to myself.

"You know I used to read once myself too", the attack continued relentless, "it was great. Only good books now, none of your trash for me, once you started it you had to keep going until you finished it. Do you read much?"

Before I had time to answer, "There was a time when my head wasn't out of one. You'd find me reading anywhere even up on the tractor! I haven't read for years. You know one thing or another. I remember one great book though. The name on it now escapes me but it had everything in it, all about pisherogues and the like, you know the things that could happen ye!"

Curious now, (“My, my, my”, said the spider to the fly), I asked could he remember anything at all about it.

“Sure how could I? Wasn’t it near thirty year ago since I read it! I learnt great things from it though. Do you know the worst thing that could happen ye”, and he drew himself back with an air of triumph, “That ye’d be buried in another man’s grave. Shure, Jaysus! You’d never sleep aisey!”

And he left.

Conversation 1 Reading 0, Games Set and Match!

“English rebels, Irish enemies”

It was the policy of King Edward I to use Ireland's resources not for its own benefit but for his military campaigns. In his conquest of Wales in 1282, and from 1295 onwards in his occupation of Scotland, “he recklessly exploited the colony, regardless of consequence”.

In 1296, nearly three thousand Irishmen travelled to fight in Scotland at a cost of £7, 500 to the Irish exchequer. Two major expeditions of 1301 and 1303 exceeded £6,000 and £8,000 each. These royal commands denuded Ireland not only of valuable resources but also of men and material that would have been better spent consolidating colonial gains.

The Gaelic-Irish had been enjoying a resurgence, politically, territorially and culturally, since the 1250s. Finíghin Mac Carthaigh had been victorious at the battle of Callan in 1261, which re-established the territory of Deasmúma as an independent kingdom. At a stroke, much of west Munster was lost to the colony. Much of what is now Ulster and parts of north and east Connacht remained entirely Gaelic, and had never been settled in the first place.

Elsewhere on the island, lands gained over generations seemed to be regained by the Gaelic-Irish almost overnight. In Leinster, the Wicklow Mountains had remained a refuge for clans such as Ó Boirne (Byrne), Ó Tuathal (O'Toole), and the titular kings of Leinster, Mac Murchada Caomhánach (Mac Murrough Kavanagh). The clans would descend from the mountains and push back the boundaries set by the Gall. Art Mac Murchada Caomhánach, who was made King of Leinster in 1375, had a forty-two year reign, during which he received a yearly ‘black rent’ from the towns of New Ross, Waterford and Dublin, received the estates of his Anglo-Irish bride, and treated in person with King Richard II. In 1399, Art was the indirect cause of Richard losing his throne.

An especial disaster for the colony was the extinction of the great lordships. Massive estates held by a single powerful magnate became extinct in the male line. Thus the properties of dynasties such as Marshall of Leinster, de Clare of Thomond and de Lacy of Meath, were all ultimately inherited piecemeal among children, grandchildren and cousins.

The inheritors mainly lived in England, and as absentee landlords, were unable or unwilling to move to Ireland and task themselves with re-establishing the productivity of their estates. All too often, the properties were then grabbed by whoever had the strongest sword-arm.

The result was a series of deep fractures of English power in Ireland, any one of which were troubling on their own. Together, they spelled disaster. During the 14th century, the colony was to contract dramatically, till only towns and their immediate hinterlands were reckoned as reasonably secure.

The town of Athy in Leinster derives its name from a ford over the river Barrow. During the 1200s it became a prosperous market town, its population been mainly

Anglo-Irish. From 1270 occur references to a number of men who derived their surname, de Athy, from the town. One John of Athy was alive in 1270 [8] but dead by Michaelmas 1281. An apparent relative, Peter of Athy, recorded 1275-81, is described as a merchant. John had children Richard, Nicholas and William de Athy, the latter described as “sergeant to the K[ing]” in 1278. In the 1290s, William fitz Thomas de Athy was Seneschal of Kilkenny.

Others of the name included Robert, Peter, Richard, and John de Athy. The latter man is first recorded in 1284 when he was recompensed “for wheat and oats taken from him by James de Audleye, former Justiciar, for the maintenance of the Justiciar” to the value of £13 and ten shillings.

Within twenty years he was a knight, frequently in charge of garrisons of important castles scattered around Ireland. For the years 1310-12 he was constable of Limerick castle. No record of any marriages or children exists, though one William de Athy is described as his valetus (personal servant or squire) in 1320.

Sir John’s military skills would soon be put to the test. After his victory over the English at Bannockburn in 1314, King Robert the Bruce of Scotland conceived of opening a second front to over-extend the enemy. By exhausting the English of men and resources in both Ireland and Britain, he aimed to force an end to the war in Scotland.

A secondary goal was to extend Scottish rule across the North Channel, by making the leader of the expedition, his brother Edward, king of Ireland. Not for the first or last time in her history, Ireland was to become the political playground of a foreign power.

In May 1315, Prince Edward Bruce of Scotland invaded Ireland with a fleet that landed on the coast of Ulster, carrying an army of over six thousand. Bruce was joined by twelve Gaelic kings and chiefs such as Ó Neill (O’Neill), Ó Cathain (Keane) and Ó Anluain (Hanlon), attracted by the propaganda of a revival of the High-Kingship and the aggrandizement of their own personal power. In time his ranks would be further swelled by disaffected Anglo-Irish families such as de Lacy and Bisset (now rendered MacKeon).

An Irish army marched north and fought against Bruce at Connor in early September. The battle was a spectacular victory for Bruce; his opponents, Justiciar Edmund le Butler and Earl Richard Ruadh de Burgh barely escaped, with the latter’s cousin and deputy in Connacht, Sir William Liath de Burgh, captured. He was brought back to Scotland for ransom on “ships filled with booty”.

Those same ships would return with more reinforcements which would besiege nearby Carrickfergus Castle, where Sir John was constable, surrounded by thousands of hostile Scots and Irish. The town was burned around the castle. Sir John and the garrison were left with no way of retreating except by sea, and daily awaited relief to appear on the southern horizon from Dublin. However, the Irish Sea was being terrorised by the Scots pirate, Thomas Dun. None came.

Bruce spent the rest of 1315 destroying the towns of Dundalk, Kells, Trim, defeating every army sent to oppose him, inciting violence wherever he went. Gael and Gall alike were massacred unless they submitted to him. At Ardee, he burned a

church “full of men and women” from both communities. Even those who submitted had their supplies consumed by his forces, leading to desperate conditions in a land already suffering from the effects of one of the worst famines of the Middle Ages.

As a direct result of the invasion, warfare broke out in Connacht between rivals for the kingship, Fedlimid and Ruaidrí Ó Conchobair. Ruaidrí defeated Fedlimid, and “the whole province shook”. Almost every significant Anglo-Irish settlement west of the Shannon was attacked and destroyed by Ruaidrí. Only the towns of Athenry, Claregalway and Galway were unscathed, as yet.

When Earl Richard finally arrived in Loughrea, “his Gall friends came to him from every hand, hoping that he would support and succour them, and his Gael friends came into his house likewise, chief among them were Feidlim Ó Conchobair, king of Connacht, and Muirchertach Ó Briain, king of Thomond, Maelruanaid Mac Diarmata, king of the muintir Mailruanaid and Gillibert Ó Cellaig, king of the Ui Maine, who had all been expelled from the country”.

As Marshall of West Connacht, Nicholas Dubh de Linch numbered among the military leadership of the crippled colony. So too would be former Sheriff, Richard Blake and his sons Walter, John, Nicholas and Valentine. The families of Joyce and Skerrett, both steeped in military traditions, would also have donned armour and mustered out.

Gaelic families then allied with or subject to the de Burghs – Ui Mhaille, Ui Shaughnasaigh, Ui Flaithbertaigh – would have formed part of these units. The joint forces spent the entire autumn and winter fighting a defensive, and all too often, losing war against Ruaidrí Ó Conchobair.

The entire barony of Loughrea, de Burgh’s personal manor, “was plundered and burned by Tadc Ó Cellaigh”. Much of the land for miles around Dunmore was wasted, with the latter town and Aughrim both burned. De Burgh himself seems to have suffered a nervous breakdown, with the Annals of Connacht calling him “a wanderer up and down Ireland all this year, with no power or lordship”. Thus it was left to his main vassals, de Bermingham, de Cogan and de Exeter, and deputies such as de Linch and Blake, to lead the besieged colony as best they could.

But after defeating Ruaidrí at Templetogether in January 1316, Fedlimid turned against his allies and made an all-out attempt to exterminate the Connacht colony. As the direct descendant of one of the last High Kings, he received support from most of the provinces as he gathered his forces to destroy what was left of his opposition.

Several men did meet the challenge and were able to lead the colony. They included knights such as Stephen de Exeter, Miles de Cogan, William de Prendergast, John de Staunton, and other notables such as Robin Lawless and Gerald Gaynard. But all save Gaynard were killed in battle at Ballyahan near Strade, further burdening remaining lieutenants such as de Linch and his comrades. Back in Carrickfergus, Sir John and the garrison still held out, though supplies were already dangerously low. At terrible risk, they “suddenly attacked the Scots

by night, and drove them from their camp, and brought away their tents and many other things". It was only a brief respite. The Scots returned, the siege continued.

A summer of almost continuous rain destroyed the harvest. The Irish annals provide grim evidence of the combined effects of the war and famine on the population. "Many afflictions in all parts of Ireland: very many deaths, famine and many strange diseases, murders, and intolerable storms as well". In the winter there was "snow the like of which had not been seen for many a long year".

People resorted to horrific means to survive; "some are said to have taken the bodies of the dead from the graves, to have cooked the bodies in skulls, and to have eaten them; women also devoured their infants".

By one army or another entire territories were "beggared and bare from that time on, for therein was no shelter or protection in church sanctuary or lay refuge, but its cattle and corn were snatched from its alters and given to gallowglasses for the wages due to them".

At Easter, Sir Thomas de Mandeville set out from Drogheda to relieve Carrickfergus. He successfully gave battle to the Scots-Irish on Maundy Thursday, but a second encounter on Easter Sunday, 10th April, resulted in Sir Thomas's death at the castle gate. Sir John de Athy was once more alone in leadership.

After some weeks he opened negotiations with Bruce. An annalist of the time wrote that

"On St. John's Day (24th June 1316), Bruce came to Carrickfergus, he demands their surrender, as had been agreed upon between them, they asked for life and limb, and that he should send in only thirty, whom they would receive, but when these had entered they put them in chains".

Yet the Carrickfergus garrison was now so lacking in provisions that when eight of the prisoners died, the garrison are said to have eaten them.

On 7th July 1316, salvation seemed at hand with "eight ships laden at Drogheda with necessaries to be sent to those who were besieged in Carrickfergus". Unbelievably, they "were stopped by the Earl of Ulster, for the deliverance of William de Burgh, who was a prisoner with the Scots".

Matters only worsened for Sir John and his men when later the same month, "Robert Bruce landed in Ireland to aid his brother".

De Burgh's ransoming of his cousin did however have a positive effect. When Sir William Liath was set free, he made straight for Connacht – probably landing at Galway – where he assembled an army to defend the colony. Given the alarming military situation it is probable that Sir William Liath recruited every able man he could find. It is thus likely that the families of de Linch, Blake, Browne, Joyce, and Skerrett were all present at the desperate encounter that followed.

King Fedlimid had been busy "slaughtering unnumbered people ... [he] plundered the countryside from the castle of Corran [Ballymote] to the Robe [Ballinrobe], both church and lay property". At Meelick "he burned and broke down the castle".

Afterwards, he conferred with two Ui Briain contenders for the kingship of Thomond, choosing to recognise Donnchad mac Domnall as king. "He then turned back to Roscommon, intending to raze it".

However, “On hearing that William Burke had come into Connacht from Scotland”, Fedlimid “called upon his subjects to assemble an army to expel him; and the army was assembled from all the regions between Assaroe [in County Sligo] and Aughty [Galway/Clare border]”.

Fedlimid was accompanied by the kings of Thomond, Midhe, Bréifne, Ui Maine, Ui Fiachrach, Ui Diarmata, Luigne, Tethba, dozens of notable lineages “and many more of the kings’ and chieftains’ sons of Ireland”. They “assembled to him. And they all marched to Athenry”.

Lord Athenry was Richard de Bermingham, who had been wounded in January at Templetoher, fighting on Fedlimid’s behalf. He had only in 1310 obtained a murage charter to enclose a site of over one hundred acres, within which he had greatly expanded his town of Athenry. Now it looked as though the town would be strangled at birth.

Sir William Liath and his army joined de Bermingham in time to meet King Fedlimid’s horde, “and joined battle with them in front of the town” on Tuesday, 10th August 1316.

In what was one of the bloodiest battles of medieval Ireland, the royal army was signally defeated. The colonists appear to have suffered light casualties with only one, Gerard Gaynard, listed as being killed.

The Gaels, on the other hands, suffered a slaughter that the scribe of the Annals of Loch Cé struggled to describe. “Many of the men of all Ireland about that great field; many a king’s son, whom I name not ... was killed in that great rout; my heart rues the fight”. The Annals of Ulster likewise maintained that “there was not slain in this time in Ireland the amount that was slain there of sons of kings and of chiefs and of many other persons in addition”. The Annals of Loch Cé lists the dead in The Regestum of the Dominicans of Athenry record “three thousand of the Irish were killed”. In Kilkenny, friar John Clyn stated that “According to a common report a sum total of five ... thousands in all [were killed], the number decapitated was one thousand five hundred”. The heads of Fedlimid and Gilbert were mounted over the town’s main gate. Two heads piked over the town gate remains the image of the coat of arms of Athenry to this day.

Meanwhile, the soldiers in Carrickfergus castle were reduced to eating leather. Sir John eventually travelled under safe conduct to Coleraine where he negotiated surrender with Bruce. Sometime around the 12th September, “Carrickfergus ... surrendered to the Scots, life and limb being granted to whose who were in it”. Sir John led the garrison south to Dublin.

There would be little time for rest. Sir John was appointed by the government as Admiral of the Irish Sea and sent off to do battle with the Scots pirate fleet led by Thomas Dun. An Irish Exchequer payment of early 1317 reads:

“The Keeping Of The Sea In The War Against The Scots: Richard de Celario, king’s clerk, appointed to pay necessary expenses for the maintenance of John de Athy, knight, and the men at arms and sailors in his company staying by order of the king for the safer keeping of the Irish Sea, to suppress the malice and rebellion

of the Scottish enemies, for these expenses, by writ of privy seal and indenture of receipt: £13 10s”.

Finally, on 2nd July, after months at sea “Sir John de Athy met at sea Thomas Don, a famous pirate, who he took prisoner; there were slain of those who were with him, about forty, but he brought his head and the heads of the rest to Dublin”.

It was an important victory, for Thomas Dun had made maritime supply of areas under English control a virtual impossibility. Nevertheless, it was not until 14th October 1318 that Bruce was defeated at Faughart in County Louth. The victor was a cousin of Lord Athenry, Sir John de Bermingham, who was created Earl of Louth for ending the war.

The Gaelic scribe of Annala Loch Cé wrote that Bruce “was the common ruin of the Gaels and Galls of Ireland...never was a better deed done for the Irish than this...For in this Bruce’s time, for three years and a half, falsehood and famine and homicide filled the country, and undoubtedly men ate each other in Ireland”.

The price of victory was high. In Connacht, entire settlements were ruined and abandoned. Refugees crowded into secure towns such as Athenry and Galway.

Others, continuing a trend established for decades, quit Ireland as a place accursed and emigrated elsewhere in the King’s dominions. Emigration would continue the rest of the century as the colony collapsed. The loss of people and property meant a fall in revenue, with enforced austerity leaving the lordship of Ireland to fund and defend itself with fewer resources.

Among the casualties were Earl Richard Ruadh de Burgh. A broken man, his fortunes never fully recovered. He died in 1326, aged sixty-seven, and was succeeded as 5th Lord of Connacht and 3rd Earl of Ulster by his underage grandson, fourteen-year old William Donn (‘brown-haired’) de Burgh.

By then, Sir John de Athy had reached the pinnacle of his career. On 7th March 1325, Sir Robert de Morlee deputed him as his “chere bachelor”, to serve, and in his name execute, the duties of the Marshalry of Ireland. Sir John de Athy was officially Ireland’s greatest knight.

De Athy remained Constable of Carrickfergus till at least Easter 1326; by August of that year he was Constable of Trim Castle. There, he was paid a wage of one shilling per day. His responsibilities included guarding “two hostages of Meyler McGohegan” until returning to Carrickfergus sometime after September. Payments to him as Constable of Carrickfergus continued till June 1328.

After this, he was Keeper or Constable of Roscommon Castle from 28th March 1331 to 28th September 1335. This was his first recorded tour of duty beyond the Shannon, perhaps connected to the de Burgh civil war then occurring in Connacht.

In 1334 he was recalled to duty as Admiral of Ireland, being described as “John de Athy, captain and admiral of the king’s fleet of all ships in all ports and other places in Ireland going in the king’s service to Scotland” at the time of King Edward III’s Scottish expedition. It was such a failure that Edward III gave up on Scotland and went off to France start the Hundred Years’ War.

Sir John was “for his expenses in connection with the arresting of ships in various ports there in 1334-35” given “as a gift: £2”. Sometime after 29th September 1341

he was awarded forty pounds and fourteen shillings “in part payment of fee” while constable of Roscommon on four occasions between 1332 and 1335.

Such gifts and payments seem to have been sorely needed by Sir John, whose personal finances resembled that of the colony itself. In a revealing document, it was stated that he was in 1339 present at the court of Mayor Henry Darcy of London and William de Carleton, clerk. Sir John “acknowledged his debt of £10 to Henry de Birchesle, to be repaid by All Saints then upcoming”. However, by 1344, de Carleton noted “he has not observed these terms. Therefore, they pray that the Chancellor will write to the Sheriff of Gloucester to compel the enforcement of payment”.

Short of travelling to Ireland, it is unlikely that they received the monies, and in any case, de Athy seems to have been unable to provide even for himself anymore. In a list of “The King’s Gifts and Grants” given between 29th September 1341 and 5th May 1343, it is recorded that “John de Athy, now grown old, deprived of his sight and impoverished, granted to him by the deputy justiciar and council in aid of his maintenance: £5”.

A final reference to him, dated between May 1343 and September 1344, reads “John de Athy, enfeebled by old age, as a gift for his good service: £5”. The old knight died somewhere on the wild Irish frontier, as distressed in person as the colony he had served.

As the resources of the colony faded, the links with England became greatly diminished, especially west of the Shannon. Left to fend for themselves, entire Anglo-Irish families became assimilated into Gaelic society. They adopted the language, laws and customs of the Gael, so that de Exeter became Mac Jordan, de Staunton became Mac Evilly, and de Burgh became Burke.

It is during these latter years that the family of Athy first becomes associated with Galway. One William son of Richard de Athy – Sir John’s valetus of 1320? – was described as of Athenry in 1342. A later William de Athy, treasurer of Connacht in 1388, was by then apparently residing in Galway town, while a John Athy was listed in an exchequer deed of April 1404 as a merchant.

Earl William Donn came into possession of his estates in 1328 but almost immediately was at loggerheads with his cousin, Walter de Burgh, son of Sir William Liath. During William Donn’s minority, Walter and his family had administered Connacht, and had become overly familiar in his power.

Open warfare between the cousins broke out in 1330 and lasted till November of the following year, when Earl William captured Walter and two of his brothers. They were imprisoned in Northburgh Castle on Inis Eoghain, where Walter was allowed to starve to death.

Now finally secure in his lordship, Earl William concentrated on extending his estates over as yet unconquered areas of the north of Ireland. 6th June 1333 found him and his companions, Sir Richard de Mandeville and Sir John de Logan, at Carrickfergus. Without warning, de Mandeville and de Logan unsheathed their swords and with their followers murdered Earl William. The conspiracy had been organised by de Mandeville’s wife, Gyles, sister of the late Walter de Burgh.

The Earl's death was a catastrophe for the Anglo-Irish colony. Within six months all Ulster west of the Bann was lost. In Connacht, the Earl's surviving uncle, Sir Edmond de Burgh of Limerick, attempted to hold Connacht for his family and the crown, but faced stern opposition from his own kindred, the descendants of Sir William Liath and the Clann Richard Burke, who had been overseers of the Earl's estates for generations.

Already highly assimilated into Gaelic culture, the two became known as the Mac William Bourkes and the Clanricard Burkes, and seized the de Burgh estates in Connacht for themselves. These three factions fought for supremacy in a war that saw "The entire of the West of Connaught ... desolated".

The war only ended in 1338 when "The son of the Earl of Ulster, i.e. Edmond, was taken prisoner by Edmond Burke, who fastened a stone to his neck and drowned him in Lough Mask. The destruction of the English of Connaught, and of his own, resulted from this deed".

As late as 1347, a John Prout was appointed coroner for the cantred of Muintir Murchada, demonstrating that the countryside about Headford still adhered to Anglo-Irish laws. But the breakdown in law and order, coupled with the Black Death of 1349 and 1361, shrank the colony to the immediate areas of Athenry and Galway.

Earl William Donn's only surviving child was an infant daughter, Elizabeth. King Henry III married her to his son, Prince Lionel, in the hope that he would someday be able to regain her estates. But the hard fact was that virtually all Ireland west of the Shannon was lost to the colony. For the next two hundred years, Connacht would remain largely outside the realm of the Anglo-Irish government.

This change of management had profound consequence for the merchants of Galway. Only by reaching accommodations with successive Clanricards were they able to continue to live by English law and custom, most of the time. The first Clanricard – successive chiefs took this title – Sir Ulick Burke, died in 1353 and was succeeded by his son, Richard Óg, who was in turn succeeded in 1387 by Ulick an Fhiona Burke. As long as each received his 'due' as lord, the town and its people would remain unmolested.

The island was divided into dozens of kingdoms and lordships in a constant state of violent competition with one another. The Anglo-Irish of the Pale was left on the defensive with a siege mentality and few resources, while the Gaelic-Irish regressed as a result of their own resurgence from kings to warlords.

The tragedy of 14th-century Ireland was that neither side could completely overcome the other. In any contest, one side must win else both shall lose. Thus, stalemate ensued.

No one authority was recognised over the entire island. All of Ireland's communities remained fractured from one another. Galway and its merchant families were on their own.

Partying

“I want to go out Gerry, I want to party.” Kathy pummeled the air with her hands in despair. “I’m fed up sitting doing nothing. I need some excitement.” He watched her coldly through a haze of smoke.

“This ... shaggin’ sitting around is killing me. For Chrissake, Gerry, it’s the longest night of the year. Everyone is out having a good time. And what are we doing? Sitting on our arses, talking rubbish.”

Gerry continued to stare. His tight lips worked slowly from side to side. He chain-lit another cigarette. “You’re the only one saying anything,” he snorted.

“Exactly,” Kathy exploded. “That’s just what I mean. And it’s damn boring.” Gerry blew a cloud of smoke over her head. A shred of tobacco stuck to his lip. He pushed it off with the tip of his tongue and spat it away. “You can go out if you want to ...”

“There’s nobody stopping me, huh? Is that what you mean?” Kathy finished the sentence for him. Instantly she knew it was a mistake. But it was too late. Like a shot he leapt to his feet and, grabbing her by the shoulder, yanked her off the sofa and pushed her into the street.

“Look! Up there,” he hissed. “See that. Big orange moon, right?” He twisted her head upwards. “Two more nights and it’ll be full. Midwinter, my arse. You haven’t a clue what it’s all about. You don’t appreciate these things.” He jerked her head. “And see that big purple cloud. Beautiful. Huh?”

“It’s grey, Gerry. It’s grey.” Tears of frustration welled up in her. He continued to speak as she twisted out of his grasp, “That’s the problem with you Kathy. You see everything as grey.”

The cigarette dangled from his bottom lip with puffs of smoke accentuating each word. “But it’s not. There’s colour everywhere. All you have to do is open your eyes. I’ve tried to – educate you. Make you see what’s around you ...”

As he rambled on, her frustration blocked him out. It was as if Gerry had melted before her eyes and was replaced by a smarmy preacher with a demonic glare in his eyes.

What is happening to him? Kathy wondered in anguish. This latest trip of his has me shattered. He sits there, ruminating, day after day, claiming to see colour everywhere. Sitting on his arse smoking his way through his Dole every week! He’d be better off back on the booze. But even that is a big issue with him since he was barred from every pub in town for head-butting anyone who dared to disagree with his crazy theories. And he won’t drink at home. More craziness. Is he too proud to go to the off-license? Or too stupid, maybe? He refuses to discuss it and he won’t let me go either. He’s a demon when he’s drinking but a fool when he isn’t. Now he’s just plain crazy.

The drone of his voice pervaded her thoughts.

“ ... grey clouds. Grey sky. Grey friends. Politically grey. Spiritually grey. I’ve tried to show you Kath, but it’s your brain. Your brain is grey. Can you not see that?”

She attempted to push past him but Gerry dug his hands into her shoulders and planted her in front of him. “Listen, Kathy ...”

She squirmed. “You’re hurting me.”

He relaxed his grip and she spun away from him. “If it’s grey it’s grey!” She spat the words at him. “I don’t care. You’re stone mad Gerry FitzGerald. I don’t have to see everything the way you bloody-well see it. I just want to go to the pub and have a bit of fun. Meet a few people. Have a few drinks. What’s the harm in that?” She waved her arm at the sky. “It’s not up there for me. Bloody great balls of fluff.” She pointed down the moonlit street towards the bright lights of town. “That’s where it’s at for me.” Then the tears came. “What the hell am I doing with you, anyway?” she sobbed, “what the hell am I doing ...”

“You know right well what you’re doing with me,” Gerry replied scathingly.

Kathy shook her head. “I don’t know. I don’t know anything anymore. I just want to meet a few friends. Have the craic. A few drinks.”

“Alcohol’s a bad vibe.”

“Oh, not that again, Gerry.”

He shook his head slowly. “You’ll never learn will you. You want to kill your brain cells, huh? You want to rot your gut with that ... swill? Fill yourself up with chemicals? You want to act the eejit. Talk all that rubbish with your bullshitty so-called friends. Not while you’re living in this house, you won’t.”

“Well then maybe ...”

“Well then maybe ... what?”

“Well then maybe I’ll just go anyway.”

“You’re a big girl now. You can go where you like. But we’ve talked about this and you know what I think.”

“I know what you think Gerry. But what about me and what I think?”

He shoed her with a wave of his hand. “Okay, okay. Go. Go ahead. But you know the consequences.”

“Damn you, Gerry.”

As she stepped away he caught her by the arm. “Kathy, look, you know what I think, right? I’ve just tried to show you. When did I ever try to stand in your way?”

He smiled crookedly. “When did I ever stop you from doing anything, huh?”

Kathy’s fists flailed the air. She wished she had the courage to actually hit him. “No, Gerry, you’ve never stopped me from doing anything. But then I’ve never actually done anything. A bit of encouragement wouldn’t have gone astray. Did that ever occur to you?”

As her voice rose to a scream curtains jerked open across the street. Silhouettes appeared briefly in windows to confirm it was only the FitzGerald’s at it again.

Gerry pulled her towards the house. “C’mon, we’ll talk about this inside.”

“No!” Kathy shrugged her arm from his grip. “You don’t make sense any more. We’re just going ’round in circles.” She pointed at the jerking curtains. “And I

don't give a damn about them either. We'll shaggin' well stand out here under your bloody purple cloud and talk about it. And whoever likes can open their mouldy curtains and watch." She turned, screaming at the houses opposite, "and it's probably more bloody interesting than what's on telly ... but then I wouldn't know, would I? That's another thing I'm not allowed to bloody-well have."

Gerry lunged at her but this time she evaded him, prancing out into the middle of the road, where she began a manic dance of rage.

Leaning back against the doorway, he watched her through slit eyes, lighting another cigarette. He flicked the match away and moved quickly towards her, attempting to hold her. But it was like trying to embrace a pneumatic drill.

"Stop, Kathy," he said softly, "C'mon now. Cool down."

The unfamiliar tenderness in his voice stopped her in mid-dance. She glared at him distrustfully.

"Come on, Kathy. Let's go back in the house." He reached out again to hold her. She backed away.

"No, Gerry. Leave me alone."

"Kath, Kath, please."

"Go away, Gerry."

Without a word he took a step back, swung his boot, and kicked the legs from under her.

With a smack her face hit the concrete and blood spurted from her nose. A silent agonized scream tore through her stunned brain. Blood dripped onto the road as she heaved herself on to her knees. Her shoulder ached and her left hip felt as if the skin had been torn off. Behind her the door slammed shut. Then she was on her feet, rushing away, cursing the pain. Damn him!

A woman's voice called softly from a darkened doorway. "Are you all right, Miss?"

Kathy ignored it. Of course I'm all right. Just a broken nose, ha, bloody ha. Thanks for your concern. Damned if I'll give the nosy old bag the satisfaction ...

She strode on regardless of the stream of blood soaking the front of her blouse.

Suddenly Gerry appeared at her side. "Come on, Kathy. Home."

She strode on, his footsteps marching in time with hers. "Kath. Home."

"No."

"Kath."

"No!"

Gerry gripped her arm to slow her down. "Okay," he said, "we'll go to the pub if that's what you want."

More blood splattered as Kathy shook her head in disbelief. Stopping abruptly she turned to face him. "Don't be ridiculous Gerry." Flecks of blood showered the front of his shirt through the spluttered words. He peered down at them in disgust, thumbing his nose, in a steamy silence. She froze, waiting for the blow, but it did not come. Instead his hand dropped and swung loosely at his side.

"Look at the state of you! I thought you wanted to go to the pub?"

Kathy sniffed a few times in an effort to clear her nose. “I still do,” she replied angrily. “Only you can’t.”

“Who says so, huh?” He took out a handkerchief and reached to wipe her face. She stepped away, angrily, thinking. So I’m losing a bit of blood. Well, no big deal. I’m a woman amn’t I! She made no attempt to wipe it away herself.

“First you want to go to the pub and then you don’t. As usual you’re not making any sense, Kathy.”

She attempted to laugh in his face but it came out as a snort. More blood splattered his shirt. He ignored it.

“You’re playing games again, Kath. Here, clean your face.”

She brushed aside the proffered handkerchief as if its very whiteness was a reminder of what he withheld from her. “Go away,” she said, “I don’t care. Just – go – away.”

Gerry cocked his head to one side, as if looking at a bird with a broken wing, wondering whether to take it home to nurse, or stamp on its head to end its misery. He rubbed his nose between thumb and forefinger again, shrugged and, turning abruptly, strode away.

Disgust welled up in her as she watched his belligerent retreat. Lousy swaggering bastard, that’s him all over.

Gerry turned, and seeing her still standing in the same spot, waved her on. “Get moving then,” he called, his jeering echoing down the street. “Go to your pub. See your friends. Fine. But when you come back ...” He thumbed his nose at her, sneering.

Kathy strode up the street, malice boiling through her veins. Gerry’s words pursued her. “And when you come home guess who’ll be waiting, huh? No, not your yappy friends. Who’ll be waiting to wipe up your vomit? Not your yappy friends, huh?”

Kathy carried on. But where was there to go? She could never go back. This was the last time. She’d had enough. Enough of his crazy raving. The stupid endless arguments. His fists. His tormenting. In some ways it was worse before his enforced fanatical anti-booze trip. But now he was just plain erratic – Mad.

But where was she to go? She had no friends anymore. He’d seen to that. Her family didn’t want to know her. Gerry had fixed that too. And now she was in no state to go to the pub either. She didn’t know what to do. She decided to keep walking.

To the ends of the earth if necessary. Her stubborn pride taking her through the longest night of the year. Another dismal night in her life.

But she knew she would go back. How many times in the past had his blows sent her scurrying to some bleak refuge? How many hours until her weary legs retraced her tracks to his craziness? Some dark corner of her being needed that mad sick bastard. They needed each other.

But what she could not fathom, in her present befuddled state, was – why?

A Worm's Eye View

The rich red maple trees around Montreal were glorious as they came into land. The landscape in Saskatoon by contrast was yellow, arid, and dry. Canada was ordered...blocks of apartments, followed by a block of grand old turretted houses. Cars were parked, all in same direction. Nothing seemed out of place.

Cait found her father leaning back against the hospital pillows. He was tiny. She leaned awkwardly over to hug him. It wasn't right. He usually enveloped her. He suggested she leave and come back tomorrow after resting from her journey. Tired and relieved, Cait left.

His rented apartment was a dark basement with a nylon paisley patterned carpet of red, orange and brown. The windows were narrow and high up, pavement level with the street: A worm's eye view. There were 6 foot silver oxygen cannisters. Her Dad's familiar black tiny fold away travel alarm clock stood by his bed. She picked it up and put it in her pocket. She would take it to him.

The next day, the doctors said he had a week to live. Cait had to tell him. Cait held his metal bedstead for support, relieved she didn't suck her fingers any longer – the iron taste was terrible, like sucking blood and rust.

"You have only a few days left to live, dad." Her voice sounded like it came from the corner of the room.

He looked at her with his pale blue eyes. She was relieved to note that his eyebrows were still bushy. Wildly bushy. He squeezed her hand.

"I want everything turned off. I don't want to wait."

Cait phoned her brother.

"He wants to turn everything off."

"Time you and Dad made phone calls," he said.

The black phone sat beside the hospital bed. Cait dialed her mother's London number.

When her mother answered, her voice was taut. Cait passed the receiver across to her father.

"I'm ok, love," her father said. He managed to sound normal, if tired. "Everything is fine. It's good to have Cait here. ... Look after the grandchildren. Take care, love." Nothing else to say.

Friends were out. They left goodbye messages on answer machines. No-one returned the calls.

At 4am he rattled. He was gone. She stared at him. The silence was broken by an insistent beeping. Cait listened carefully... What could be making that sound? They had disconnected him from everything. She put her hand in her pocket and felt his tiny travel alarm clock vibrating: beep beep beep. It was insistent. She turned it off and left him, taking home a box of warm ashes.

Saturday

The people where I'm from don't age well. They don't start off being unfortunate looking. They start off beautiful. But their souls are slowly being pulled and parted, a little disintegrating every year. They become hollow. They pretend everything is ok. And on the surface of it, it is ok. They are still alive. They wake up every day.

The bus heaved over the last hill and everyone started to stretch and gather their weekend bags. The sea said hello. The bus parked opposite my parent's pub. It was hushed up quiet when I came in. Brown. Dark and cool in the daytime, dark and humid in the nighttime. Johnny Dunphy sat at the bar tracing the dirt and blood embedded into the lines on his hands. He hummed an old Doris Day song under his breath. Johnny was born the year after the big snow: same as me. When we were little no one was afraid of him. We would kneel on the bar stools, doing our homework together. A kind of membrane stained his whole being: like a smoker's stained fingers except all over. Life had coated him in a residue, thickening each year while his insides crumbled away, leaving a thick-coated void.

"Here's the tough little woman. Give us another drop there would you?"

I dropped my bag beside the glass washer and poured him a pint. I could have called for my dad to do it instead, but I didn't mind Johnny Dunphy these days.

"Give us a drop of that mixture there as well would you?"

Eight years ago my dad discovered that a local herbal remedy made by the hippies up on the hill was a great tonic for the greyhounds. Mixed with a drop of Buckfast, it would give them the boost they needed to win. It didn't show up on any drug tests. I reached under the counter and pulled out a bottle. There was some watery looking picture on the sticker: a swirling cloud over a mountain. Johnny Dunphy shook a greasy twenty out of a hanky and handed it over. Three gulps and the pint was gone. He got up, rattled some phlegm lodged in his throat and went out to his car. Johnny Dunphy drove an old hearse that he claimed was ideal for the transportation of greyhounds. You need to give them room, he always says. None of these special trailers for them where they're wedged in together and only upsetting themselves with no windows to look through. They need to know where they are going he says. And they like to listen to the radio. There was no radio in the hearse so he bought an old tape deck off one of the lads down the dunes and gaffer taped it to the dashboard.

I washed my hands after handling the money. Johnny Dunphy couldn't help spreading his grease around the place.

Upstairs. Opening my bedroom door, I could smell drink that had been stagnating in a young sweaty body over night. The heat of the room trapped the smell of last night's smoked cigarettes.

Sadbh lay fitfully on top of my Fraggie Rock duvet cover in her knickers and a sequined top. A bag of chips from Fusco's next door spilled across the pillow and onto her hair. A can was nestled into her clammy armpit. She was beautiful.

“Fucks sake Sadbh!” It was the first time I had spoken that day. Sadbh smiled in her sleep and turned over, into the chips.

I went back downstairs and out the back for a fag. I checked my phone again. Nothing.

Nothing

Nothing

Nothing.

I miss you. You don't miss me.

You're too busy riding the head off Callie Ivers to fucking notice.

Callie Ivers was in the year behind me in Art College. At the end of every college year, you can walk around the degree show and point out the same old work that gets made every year. The painter who makes paintings about painting. The weird hyper guy who just wants to dick around with electricity. The angry alpha male who makes ugly sculpture about 'The System'. And then every year there is the girl that makes work about being a sexy girl. They do shouty performances with no tops on. They make collages out of tampons. They have a strange quasi-sadistic relationship with that strange lecturer who freaked everyone out when he started speaking about his 'specific sexual needs' during a lecture on Outsider art. And these girls usually pretend to be a prostitute at some point. At night Callie would hang out with the prostitutes up near the old shopping centre and 'understand them'. She would give them fags and tell them about her stupid life. She wanted to fix them but she was jealous of them too. She never got into a car: obviously she was too good for that. She would talk to them about gender studies and human rights. They didn't knife her because of all the free fags she gave them. But she pretended to her tutors and to the rest of the class that she got paid for sex. That it paid her way through college. Truth was, her father gave her everything she wanted.

I stubbed out my fag on the wall and headed down towards the strand. The waltzers weren't waltzing and the bumper cars huddled together, embarrassed.

When you grow up beside the sea, you end up being really good at the amusements. The girls in my class were always mad for the boys who arrived with the fairground, propping up the waltzers with stolen cavity blocks and world-weary smirks. These boys always had fags and they were always 19. I'm sure they have sired half of the current young population. I didn't want the amusement boys. I wanted the surfers. I wanted to drive off with them at the end of the summer to Galway or Dublin or wherever they were going, away from here.

Home.

Sadbh had woken up and had carefully arranged her hangover in her own bed. The chips were gone and replaced with a milkshake from Fuscós that she must have manipulated my mother into getting for her. She was talking on the phone while instant messaging three different people on her laptop and flicking through a magazine.

“You know Mum never left out the money for my fucking highlights? What am I supposed to do now?” Flick Flick Flick through the magazine she went.

I didn’t look around; I was trying to get the flick of my eyeliner just right.

Flick Flick Flick “There’s feckin feck all in these magazines!” She threw it across the room.

“Ring me back I’m running out of credit.”

I’m sure if I had to give Sadbh a kidney or something I would do it but Jesus Christ I hated that girl from the day she got home from the maternity ward.

Downstairs.

As the evening progressed into night, the customers had changed from the likes of Johnny Dunphy and tourists with double-barreled children to the surfers. They lolled by the fire while our men, the locals, caressed the bar, red faced in too tight GAA jerseys. Sadbh, made up and dressed, was in the middle of the surfers, laughing and getting hit in the face with dreadlocks.

The party.

I hadn’t meant to go to the party, I really didn’t. A bottle of rum taken straight from the storeroom gave me personality and wit, so I was invited. I had to be up the next morning for the anniversary mass. Oisín was there.

Nothing.

I am sick of nothing. I am in the dark. I led myself into this darkness to escape the world and now it won’t let me out.

I didn’t like to use the main bathroom because I could never stop staring at a sticky tube of anti fungal cream so I went into the en suite. Coming out, Oisín was waiting to enter.

“Hey Nuala.” Oisín always exhaled my name, expelling it softly.

“Do you want some can?” He thrust his can out to me. I looked away.

“You can’t ignore me forever Nuala.”

“I think I should though.”

He grabbed my left arm and pushed my other shoulder into the doorframe, crushing his can on my collarbone.

His breath.

“Fucking try it Oisín, just fucking try!” I looked straight at him. “I told you I don’t care. Just fucking do it.”

My breath. His fist no longer wrapped around my arm, it was now digging in under my chin, forcing me up.

“You’re a fucking crazy sick bitch. You’d prefer to be on your fucking own for the rest of your life. You’re not well Nuala. When I hold you, you stay.”

I didn’t want to speak. He could do what he wanted, he couldn’t get me. I’ve already done worse to myself.

My breath. He released and threw his can at my face. Away, down the stairs.

My body refused entry to any feelings. There had been an eviction long ago. Instead, I leech emotions from others. I shut my eyes and squeezed the coldness in my belly. It was strange to be myself. I had no idea what I actually looked like.

Cold.

I went downstairs. Callie and Sadbh were in the front hall.

Callie was gathering her things.

“Are you going home already?” Sadbh leaned into her and took a drag on Callie’s fag.

“Yeah. No. Kind of.”

She held her bag of drink in front of her braless chest and smiled up at me. They laughed and murmured. So it had been decided. Ok. Grand. She went out the front door and into Oisin’s car.

So this is what life is supposed to be. We are all trying to fight it. Some are more successful than others. I am threadbare. I am discarded.

It was time to go before I lost all sense of my soul and could not retrieve it. When I got to the dunes I saw Dunphy’s hearse beating down the road towards the bog. I phoned him.

“Well, girl.”

“Where are you going? Can I come?” I shouted into the phone, over the sound of fuck knows what he was playing on the radio.

“Grand. On the dunes?” In the same way that you can always tell if someone is smoking when they are talking to you on the phone, you can always tell if someone is on the dunes.

“Yeah. I’ve cans.” I hung up and waited. Lights appeared on the road again. I’d never been in the hearse before.

Johnny Dunphy tried to impress me with a handbrake turn but the car cut out instead. I slid in.

“Fuck Johnny what the fuck is that smell?” That rum from earlier was circling my stomach looking to come up.

Johnny pulled away onto the bog road. “Ah I was getting meat for the dogs and a bit of it must have leaked out down the seat somewhere.”

He sprayed a can of Lynx at me. He threw over a box of fags. “Here smoke a fag you won’t smell it then.”

My stomach folded over “I can’t,” I shouted over, who was it? Janet Jackson on the radio. “I can’t smoke if I’m moving I’ll vomit.”

Johnny Dunphy forced the hearse through the darkness, down the bog road. He drove straight down the middle, as our Dads taught us. No one had ever accidentally driven off the side but the fear had been instilled in us at an early age. In this place, you were safe in the middle. It only got dangerous when you went too close to the edge and stared down into the darkness. I had been traveling too close to the darkness lately. It took a living carcass like Johnny Dunphy to bring me back to the middle.

We got to the bungalow that he lived in with his parents. The hall was boiling hot and clammy. Mrs. Dunphy's commemoration plate collection was curated tastelessly around the glowing Sacred Heart picture. Did all bungalows come with an electrical outlet specifically for Sacred Heart lights? I greeted each plate in turn. The Pope (the good one, not the new one), Holy Mary, Princess Diana on her wedding day and then again after she died, JFK, Johnny Cash and Padre Pio.

"Do you want beans on toast? Or spaghetti hoops on toast?" Johnny was taking off his workman's boots. In the same way the surfers in town wore glasses they didn't need because they were in fashion, Johnny Dunphy wore work boots when he'd never had a day's work in his life.

"Beans. And tea."

"No toast?"

"Course I want toast Johnny, you can't have beans without toast." I rolled my eyes at Princess Diana.

We ended up outside, sitting on an old couch that was destined to be burned at the next bonfire. We played with the greyhound pups, drinking cans. Jonny Dunphy looked like a man that had accepted that his soul was rotting very fast. He never spoke to the other men, never went out with any girls. Not since he punched his girlfriend in the stomach so hard last year that she lost their baby. He had accepted the brown stain creeping over his organs and into his soul.

We talked about Shamie and Whitey. We used to go down the bog with them and get stoned. When we were 17 Shamie was allowed drive his Da's van in the evenings. Shamie would have girlfriends, girls from the estate who went to the convent. The girlfriend and her best friend would squeeze in the back of the van with us. Shamie would bring your wan down the bog for a shift and we'd stay in the van with the friend, who was always way more craic and always had fags.

I missed Shamie and Whitey. They never grew old enough to become sad, they never got the chance to bitterly rot their way through a life. They were better off.

I woke up with two greyhound pups nestled in behind my knees on the old couch.

"You have to bring me home now Johnny, it's getting bright, I'll be locked out."

Johnny was lying on the damp ground with another two pups.

"Promise you won't be slagging off me car like?"

"Promise."

I got home, no Sadbh in my bed, just me. I had made up my mind while playing with the pups that the men in this town were not for the likes of me. We were supposed to make husbands out of the boys we went to school with. They weren't ever going to leave us alone, even after they died. We didn't want each other though.

I woke up half an hour later with my Da standing over me.

"You've to go to mass," he said, relishing the bad news so early in the morning.

"WHAT?"

"MASS!" He laughed, going back down stairs. I cobbled together an outfit from the various bits of black on the floor and sprayed the fuck out of my hair with dry

shampoo. Deodorant under and over clothes. My Da gave me a bottle of water from the bar on my way out. I swapped it for a naggin of rum from the off license shelf once he went back into the kitchen.

The Church of the Holy Misery sat at the top of the strand, its steeple giving the finger to the village. Of course I was late. Johnny Dunphy was outside smoking the fuck out of a rollie.

“Come on will ye.” He gave out to me as I walked in. He followed. I strode up to the top and sat behind Whitey’s sister Hazel. Half way through I gave Johnny Dunphy the naggin. It got to the point where the priest goes, “Well this mass is in memory of Seamus Devaney and Colin White,” and I swear he saw us with the rum. Sure what does he expect?

After mass we went up to the cemetery in the hearse, listening to the GAA results. I shook hands with Shamie and Whitey’s mams and got sick behind a Cyprus tree on my way out. I made Johnny Dunphy go home and leave me to walk.

I felt glorious in my mortification that morning. I relished feeling it. It was one of the few feelings I knew what to do with. It bolstered me and I breathed in the sea air as I strode back into town.

I walked in the middle of the road.

Ronnie O’Gorman – a life with the printed word

A passion for the printed word, in both its creation and its enjoyment, was always going to the heritage of Ronnie O’Gorman; newspaper founder, columnist, bookworm, and an indefatigable supporter of the arts.

Ronnie was born in Salthill and still lives in the house where he grew up. “If Freud was still around he would no doubt say the reason I never grew up was because I still sleep in the same room where I was born,” he tells me with a laugh.

The O’Gorman family home was filled with books and Ronnie inherited his passion for reading from his father.

“My father had a bookshop and the family owned a printing house which was the major printing works in Galway from 1910,” he says. “My father was an avid reader and books lined the walls of the house. I still have that collection, which is a blessing.”

Ronnie’s love of reading was also encouraged by his English teacher, leading him to read the great classics of English literature and onwards to a lifelong love of Charles Dickens.

“Dickens is just absolutely brilliant,” he says. “His endless use of characters, his sense of fun, his wonderful language, and his crusades on behalf of the poor and of the neglected children, all that made an impression on me.”

Ronnie cites Dickens’ 1850 novel *David Copperfield*, as his favourite (although *Great Expectations* comes close). “I keep going back to it,” he says, “because the experiences of a young man in love and work don’t always work out.”

Readers of the Ronnie’s *Galway Advertiser* column, *Galway Diary*, will also be aware of the man’s abiding interest in history, particularly that of the west of Ireland. The attraction the subject held for him was similar to that which brought him to Dickens.

“I’ve always seen history as a series of stories about people, events, and places, and when you know a little about a place it makes that place so much richer and alive for you,” he declares.

Back in his school days though, Ronnie was more interested in European history than the Irish past. “Ireland was a backwater when compared to France, Germany, and Britain, the countries that hammered out the shape of Europe, and still do to this day.”

Following school Ronnie went to university in London in the 1960s to study literature and drama, with ambitions of becoming an actor, but a chance meeting in the British capital with a man involved in the emerging free newspaper business, altered the course of his life.

“He invited me to work with him at the Westminster Press,” recalls Ronnie. “He said ‘If you really want to see life get into publishing’. The publishing of free papers was immensely exciting and was sweeping through England like a forest fire. Setting up your base was very inexpensive and you could impress any

personality on the paper that you wished, but after the initial burst it settled down and free newspapers became a serious business.”

Armed with this idea Ronnie came back to Galway in 1970 with a determination to create a similar kind of paper for the city to those he saw in England. On Thursday April 16th 1970 the first edition of the *Galway Advertiser* hit the streets. The timing was good as it coincided with an unprecedented explosion of creativity in the arts in the city.

“The *Galway Advertiser* coincided with this emergence of the arts which was coming through the student body in NUI Galway, or UCG as it was then,” says Ronnie. “People like Ollie Jennings, Mike Diskin, Mick Lally, Garry Hynes, gave Galway a quality of life that was enviable. So if you wanted to re-locate to Galway it had that incredible quality. It was a case of right people, right place, and right time. Their energy was enormous and it really made Galway. The IDA did their part but it was the arts that made people want to live and work and spend their lives here – I really mean that.”

That surge in the early part of the decade would lead to the foundation of Druid in 1975, the Galway Arts Festival in 1977, the Renmore Panto in 1978, and Music for Galway in 1980.

“There was very much a conscious decision on the part of the *Galway Advertiser* to support the arts,” says Ronnie. “That was a definite ambition and I hope we have done that down through the years.”

Charles Dickens was a journalist as well as a novelist, and another role model for Ronnie during those early years in the *Galway Advertiser* was the Irish journalist John Healy, best known for chronicling the crippling social and economic effects of emigration in *No One Shouted Stop* and *Nineteen Acres*.

“He railed against the neglect of the west of Ireland and wrote magnificently about emigration from Charlestown in County Mayo,” says Ronnie. “I was deeply affected by his books.”

Ronnie was the *Galway Advertiser* editor from 1970 until retiring in 2001. He now serves as the chairperson of the Galway Advertiser Newspapers Ltd. Looking back over his time as both a journalist and an editor, he says: “I would hope that I have recognised the Galway stories and written about them. It’s been a pleasure as you have had a ringside seat at Galway’s development over the past 40 years.”

He continues to write a weekly column for the paper, *Galway Diary*, which he describes as “a purely personal indulgence. I can write whatever I want to write.”

While in his youth he may have favoured European to Irish history, the *Galway Diary*, focuses on aspects of history of Galway city and the county.

“There are great stories out there about Galway and its people and the events which took place here,” he says. “You can’t always judge something that happened in the past by the morals of today, you have to try to look back and understand what people did. You find people who are endlessly brave, inventive, and full of courage and very often it is ordinary people who effect change.”

To conclude, I ask Ronnie what he is reading at the moment. Not surprisingly he is one of those people that often reads two or three books on the go. “I’m reading my

Christmas presents,” he laughs. “I’m reading a biography of Robert Oppenheimer, the man who invented the atomic bomb, it’s called *Inside The Centre*, by Ray Monk. It’s absolutely superb. I’m also reading *Blood For Blood* by William Henry.”

Ronnie is also immersed in *The Black Count*, Tom Reiss’ biography of General Tomas-Alexander Dumas, the father of Alexander Dumas, author of *The Man In The Iron Mask*.

“He was a general in Napoleon’s army during the invasion of Italy,” says Ronnie. “He’s a fascinating individual, a black man and the first black general in French history.” As always it is the story of an ordinary person thrust into the turmoil of history that continues

to guide Ronnie both as a reader and a writer.

New Boots

I found them in New Mexico. They were in a Western store that was the pride of an otherwise unimportant smudge on the map. I was on my way back to Texas, and dusk was settling on the horizon. I pulled into the parking lot where a single truck hitched to a horse trailer remained. A tiny Mexican woman squinted at me through a pair of thick glasses as I came into the shop. The whole place smelled of leather. Saddles, belts, perfectly formed Stetsons and boxes of boots filled the place. A couple of cowboys were milling about—one trying on a camouflage jacket, the other stuffing his fingers into a new pair of work gloves.

My old boots were tired. The rubber bottoms of both heels had worn away into the wood. To be honest, there hadn't been anything particularly special about them, even when they were brand new. They were made of rough-out leather, no stitching up the sides, a basic buckskin colour, not even a brand on them. My grandfather had given them to me two years earlier. He bought them for himself in the Seventies, but they never fit right—too narrow for his own feet. He couldn't remember where he got them. They had only been worn a few times when I first pulled them on the summer I left for college. A couple years and a lot of miles later, a strip of duct tape was the only thing keeping the left heel attached to the boot.

Coming into this store to find a new pair felt like betrayal. Those boots had been good to me. They had seen summer days so hot that the street tar stuck to the soles. They knew the ice-slicked trails of the Grand Canyon, the ground frozen until we reached the banks of the Colorado River. They were on my feet the first time I set foot in Europe, the heels clicking on cobblestone. They kept the sand out when I dragged an old canoe out of the Rio Grande into Mexico. They fit well into stirrups, stained by the sweat of horses and my own. The concrete slabs of unfinished houses were no strangers to these boots; they didn't mind the sawdust or discarded nails. They weren't afraid to work.

I looked around the store. There were so many boots to choose from: square-toed, roper heel, steel-toed, cowboy heel. There were boots in just about any colour from olive to hot pink. Traditional cowhide was well represented, but there was also rattlesnake, ostrich, alligator, eel, and buffalo leather. I picked up a new, polished boot and turned it over in my hands. The stitching on the shaft formed a cartoon-like cow skull. It was so clean. I couldn't imagine these boots taking well to any amount of scuffing or red dirt. I looked at a few more pairs with the same thought. Most of my buddies have a pair of going-out boots; I've never bothered. There was something elegant about the simplicity of my own boots. They were tough and worn, but, without the duct tape, they still looked nice. The smooth soles had tapped, stomped, and slid across many a dance floor. They had had whole conversations with squeaking wooden floorboards in various honky-tonks and juke joints. They had kept the rhythm while my own hand fell up and down a set of six

strings. Once while playing a songwriter circle in Luckenbach, a white-haired cowboy had commented on them. “You don’t see rough-out leather boots like that much anymore,” he said across the campfire. “Boots today just aren’t made to last like those things are.”

The search was starting to feel hopeless. I began to think maybe I should just invest in another roll of duct tape. A soft voice tinged with a Mexican accent came from behind.

“You looking for new boots?” The woman I’d seen earlier was straightening boxes on the shelf.

“Yes ma’am, this is about the end of the road for these,” I said, pointing to my feet. “Oh, you must really love them!” She laughed at the duct tape. “What size you wear?”

I told her my size and explained that I was looking for something suitable for the dancehall and the construction site, a heel for walking, a good set of shanks, made of durable leather, and nothing stitched too fancy. She thought for a moment. We zigzagged through aisles of boxed-up boots until we came to the corner of the store. She pulled out a box from the bottom shelf.

The boots were darker than mine. The shanks stretched high from the wooden heel. The sole was made of thick, hard leather. These didn’t have the polished shine like the others, but there was an intricate, traditional design stitched in turquoise and gold along the shanks.

“These are Tony Llamas,” the woman told me. “Made of goat skin in El Paso.” She explained that goat skin is harder to scuff, retains a nice colour, and doesn’t stink so bad when it gets wet. I admitted that I was taken aback by them. “Well, try them on,” she urged.

I slipped the old boots off and set them next to me. My foot made its way slowly into the shanks of the new boot. The fit was perfect. Without me saying a word, the woman smiled and said, “I’ll ring them up for you,” as she headed for the counter.

I stared at the new boots for a moment. It was like looking down at someone else’s feet. I wiggled my toes, and took a few steps around the store. The leather was already soft; they wouldn’t require much breaking in. I studied the old pair abandoned on the floor. They were haggard, the strip of duct tape was fraying, and a few scrapes cut deep into the sides— still, the shanks hadn’t even started to sag.

I left the store with a box in my hand, the new boots inside it. I climbed into my truck. “One more trip home,” I thought, as my old boots found their way to the pedals.

A hundred years from now

“This is how it’s done nowadays,” you often hear people say, or “That’s the way now.” The words reflect complacency, not to say satisfaction, with the present status quo. As if modern man had espied all the answers, when in actual fact, our time, like any other, represents a transitory stage, soon to be a thing of the past. A hundred years from now, our successors will look at us with incredulity and forbearance, the way we regard those who went before us. It may sound something like this:

Life can’t have been easy in the early years of the twenty-first century. People were reduced to hapless victims, ruled by a ruthless commercial system that controlled everything – from world politics down to the single individual. Many of the grievous mistakes that we to this day are struggling to put right were caused by the self-seeking greed in this period. Even human life, from the cradle to the grave, was turned into a commodity. Even the most private aspect – sexuality – was hijacked to market everything from cough mixture to car insurance. Endless consumption was all people had to look forward to. On their day off, families no longer went to church – but were packed off to a shopping centre. The motor-cars they were encouraged to use polluted the atmosphere worse even than the mountains of horse manure clogging up city streets a century or so earlier.

The so called new technology also caused problems, since they hadn’t yet learnt how to handle it. An array of electronic aids enabled them to be in constant communication with each other, deflecting them from the rewards of solitary reflection and profound sentiment. Mass media indulged in base gossip, and for cheap entertainment, unsuspecting individuals willing to expose themselves willy-nilly for a chance of instant fame, were cynically exploited by television companies. In the naively wide open cyber space, sick, dangerous and destructive elements had the field to themselves. It was a good while before proper structures were put in place to protect the most vulnerable members of the society.

Powerful business interests took advantage of lofty ideals, such as the freedom of expression, to further its own ends, dismissing outright brain research suggesting a direct link between the orgies of virtual violence, blood and cruelty flooding the market and the increase in violent crime and decreasing sensibility amongst the young people it targeted. There was little incentive to recognize the human brain as a delicate and receptive organ, easily influenced and conditioned. Now of course we know that, in order to thrive, a developing brain needs to be nurtured and protected, like a tender plant. If it is fed with poison, poison is what it will give off. Many people living at this time seem to have been lost, lonely and deeply unhappy – if nothing else, judging by the vast quantities of alcohol, narcotics and prescription drugs they consumed. Considering the social environment they’d created for themselves, it would be a wonder if any of them got any enjoyment out of life...

Oh well... this, of course, is conjecture, much of it in jest. But I must admit, I'm concerned to see the general complacency, or satisfaction, with life as it is today. For if we persuade ourselves that all is well in the world we live in – how will we ever make it better?

Visits

..... There he is now. I can see him, but he can't see me. The baldy head on him. The belly and all. He must be fifty now. I remember him and he only a boy. The buck teeth on him. The freckles and the little blue shorts pulled up around him. The pudgy red cheeks. Margaret doted on him. She thought the sun shone out of him somewhere down below, but the sun shines out of no man. I couldn't fault Margaret. She took me in, didn't she? A medal I'll give her. Don't mind me Margaret.

Look at him, leaning over the counter. He's saying me name to the blondie wan, with her hair pulled back and the fake smile. Maura, that's right. He's me nephew, that's right. Margaret's son and only. That's right. I suppose the blondie wan wants a medal too.

Let him turn this way and see if he can see me. He has no glasses yet. He probably has them for reading. Make him look like the right school teacher. Shur, isn't that what he is? Oh, Margaret was so proud of him. Yeh, yeh, I know. I was proud of him too.

There he is now, turning. I'll let him come on a bit before I go to him. There. Now. The oul' stick first, then the legs. Like a crab I am. The stick is only for show. Mar dhea. Keep your head up girl. Don't waver.

'Well boy. You came to see your aul' aunt. We'll go along here to the lift. Up to the room. You're on your own? Now boy. Round here. Don't mind them. They're half-doped up.'

Here's me woman now to pester me. I hope she's not going in the lift with us.

'I got that tablet. I did Nurse.'

And I threw it in the bin. I'm only coddling. I never threw it in the bin. I slugged it down like many a pill before. I don't know what the half of them are for.

'Here's the lift now boy. Go on in, will ya? I'll push the buttons. I have the code.'

The doors slide over. The lift woman tells us we're going up. Don't we know that? I still haven't figured out is she behind the mirror or is she above us in the ceiling. Night, noon and morning she's here with her 'Second floor, going down. First floor, going up.' Up. Up. Up. Going up and up and round the bend.

He's looking at me in the mirror. I used to be taller than him, right up to the time he was nearly a man, when he visited me in London. He had more hair then. He's a bit bockety now. Listen to me. Don't believe that mirror. Making a dwarf out of me. A dwarf with a stick and crooked hands and a bag between me legs and a pipe up inside me. He probably knows about that. No shame in it. Better than having me weeing on the floor.

'Here we are now. We'll lave me woman in peace with her going up and going down. Out that way. Round be the nurses' station. All corners. It's all corners here. No corridors.'

I remember he came down the long corridor in Tooting Bec and I met him full square in the middle that time. Sunlight from the high windows fell on the cardinal red tiles. There were daffodils and tulips outside, nodding at each other. I walked him back the corridor, the way I came. My bed was on the left, near the back, between the nut-case who slashed her wrists and the empty bed. Bad and all as I was, I never done meself any harm. I gave him the chair and I sat on me bed. We talked about home and Margaret and him coming back from Asia. Asia, mind you. He asked me how I was and I said ‘grand’ and neither of us let on that we knew I was in that ward because I was off me head.

‘Over here boy. Another corner. I’m Number 12. See it there. Now boy. Come in will ya. Sit down over there. Yeh, there.’

It’ll be the same chat as before, only Margaret is dead now, so he can’t tell me about her. And Kathleen’s dead too. And Mama. And me father. They think I know nothing, but I know who’s gone before me. I can do nothing about that, only wait me turn. In this place.

‘That’s right. Two beds. She’s down in the lounge with her friends. I have no time for them. I’m not used to living with other people. I shouldn’t have to if I don’t want to. They tell me I fell a few times. I don’t know did I. Me wrist? Oh, the bone is sticking out a bit. Things stick out and fall off every day. Ah no, I never fell in here.’

He’s after spotting the garden. A bit of a yard it is, with tubs and a geranium, with two shades of green leaves and a pink flower. I had a suit in one of them greens long ‘go. The lighter one. The jacket was cut in tight at the waist and the skirt was straight and close. They loved me when I walked down Barrack Street in that. Jealousy you see. I had what none of them had. I had escaped.

‘Come on then. We’ll go into the garden. If you could call it that.’

Round the corner, down the lift – ‘Going down. Ground floor.’ – Out and round another corner and him saying ‘is that the TV room?’ and ‘the dining room’s big and airy’ and me nodding and mmm-ing back at him, ignoring everyone staring at us, with their mouths open and their ‘who’s that with Maura?’ eyes on them.

‘Me son, isn’t it? Can’t you see it’s me son? And I’ve a daughter too, younger than him. She’s a doctor in Paddington. In the General. Oh, he’s a surgeon in the Chelsea. Ah, shur, I lived all me life in London.’

I might think that but I’m not going to say it to them. The fella with the two legs gone, sitting in the wheelchair outside the mock post office. The wan with the crooked back and the snail’s slither going into the dining room. The wan with the tubes in and out of her and she lay out like a model, the red ruby lips like ripe plums.

‘Ah, London was always my place really.’

And before we get to the door out to the garden, I’m back in the big city again and I push the bar on the door with me kinked wrist and Martin pushes the door of The Bridge Tavern and we both go in.

‘A couple of half wans Maura, to fight the cold and we’ll see then.’

Martin. A man too late and a time too late. The pub is quiet, only ghosts from last night hovering in the dusty air. Their forms will be back later. We're just the first. Martin nods and the whiskey glasses land on the counter. No money yet. We're good for another few rounds. Martin gulps his whiskey and his scrawny Adam's Apple lurches up and down, taking it in. He's scrawny all over, with only the bit of a pot belly to say he's more than a rack of bones. I was scrawny meself then, scrawny in the head, me brain rattling empty and mists filling up the spaces. He's after seeing the geranium in the corner of the garden.

'Lovely, yeh. It's a wonder none of the aul wans pick it and take it to their rooms. Oh, yeh. Packed it be's. Big gangs of us out here partying in the sun. Barbucues we had last year. Dancing and all.'

With Martin singing 'When it's Moonlight in Mayo' and his scrawny arm across me shoulders and me half-dopey. We never went back to the flat. Why would you, when there's money and ghosts coming to life again and songs? Martin's songs.

'Sit down there boy. Don't mind the plants. They'll be here long after we go.'

He doesn't believe me about the dancing. I don't blame him. He's looking at the sky. I tell him about the planes that go over. One of the men says there's an airport out by the Back Strand. He's pulling me leg. I can tell you he won't be pulling me real leg, don't mind his talk about airports.

'Did you fly over yourself? Or did you come on the train?'

The train and the boat and the train again and the final chug-chug into Paddington and London and freedom and the time of me life.

'I have no regrets, you know. Some of them do be talking a bit like that here. "If you had your life over again would you change anything?" I'd not change one bit of it, I tell them. They don't know how to take me.'

A flash of memory comes to me.

'Do you remember when you visited me in the flat on the Kilburn High Road?'

He smiles and shakes his head. He remembers nothing. He visits for Margaret, his mother, not for him. Not for me. A duty thing. He surprised me that day. Just turned up out of the blue. Travelling again. Staying with a woman in Swiss Cottage. A woman! What does Margaret make of that? She thinks he's a saint.

Come in, I say. Sit down I say. Martin is still under the blankets on the sofa-bed. The only chairs are at the table right behind me. He hears me cursing, scraping the match, trying to get the gas going.

'When did you come over? Go way. I tell you boy, you're a big fella. Africa is it now? A priest you are, is it? A teacher? No. A kind of manager. Volunteers you manage? Margaret must be mad, you going off again.'

I look at him, a message from me sister. What can I tell him? He looks around the flat. The gas hisses into life under the kettle. I rattle it on the iron ring and he looks back at me.

'Do they drink tea in Africa? I'd say they do. Shur, they drink tea everywhere.'

He eyes Martin on the bed. What is it to him that I have a man on the bed and that his pot belly and his whiskey breath and his songs of old Mayo keep me warm in the cold days in Kilburn? I tell Martin nothing and he tells me less, though he chats away. God love him. He escaped too.

The whistle from the kettle stirs Martin but no part of him appears out of the blankets. A turn and a grunt, a yawn and then more sleep. If this nephew wasn't here, I'd crawl back under the blankets with Martin.

'You'll get plenty sun in Africa boy. It's sunny outside, is it? Ah, I'm not really up yet. No rush. Night shift, you see. No, don't be sorry. You're here now. How's your mother?'

Dead now, Margaret. Like the plant there in the tub. He's mad poking and moving the plants around. And going on about them.

'That ones' bate. Lave that over there. I know the leaves are turning. I can see them from here. Will you sit back down, will ya?'

I can tell him anything now. They're all dead.

'Sit down. I'll let you take that aul pink geranium, you're that mad about it. You were never much of a singer, were you? Not like your mother. A great singer, she was. Would you? Ah no, not now. They'd say we were drunk. Sit on a while and maybe a plane might go over.'

Lachrimae Christi

It looked dead. After a quick glance to make sure no one was looking, Vera Joyce leaned into the skip, fished out the spindly plant. The shrub, leafless and with only two out-stretched branches, resembled a crucifix. After she'd examined it, Vera tested each tip in turn: one snapped clean away, the other bent. Where there's life, she muttered, slipping it into a large shopping bag.

Arriving home, Vera filled a bucket from a tap in the yard, left the plant to soak while she went inside to fix herself a sandwich. She dispensed with cooking whenever Jim was away on Council business. Today, he was in Dublin and she wasn't expecting him back until late. At the thought of her husband, something hard settled in Vera's chest. To escape it, she went outdoors, tramping the half-acre in search of somewhere suitable for her 'find'; settling eventually on a shady spot behind the clothesline. Taking the dripping plant she lowered it into the ground, firming the earth around the exposed roots. She talked to the plant while she worked, reassuring it, then sat back on her heels as her own recent discovery that Christ had been crucified on a dump surfaced. She'd heard it on a radio programme just before Easter and the revelation had horrified her, disturbing a childhood image of Calvary as a steep hill, towering above the city of Jerusalem, the location conferring a kind of celestial grandeur befitting who He was. To treat someone like rubbish seemed to Vera the worst thing you could do to them.

Vera persevered, feeding the new arrival special plant food the way you give treats to a sick child to coax it back to health. Paying back a debt, she told herself, saving the plant the way gardening had saved her. It had saved her. Whether digging, weeding or sowing Vera had found peace in the backbreaking work, a respite from the daily struggle. She was aware her neighbours talked, regarding the endless hours she spent in the garden as a sort of pride that shouldn't be cultivated, worse still, a neglect of more important things like socialising, gossip. Vera let their opinions wash over her. Without the garden she'd have withered. Next to her children, it was all she lived for. Not that they were children any longer. One by one, Michael first, then Marion and last of all Paul, the middle child, had spread their wings until now, like swallows, they returned only in summer.

Vera crossed the lawn with a tray of bedding. Kneeling on a fertiliser bag, she began transferring the seedlings one by one, using an old knitting needle to make holes, a trick she'd come up with herself. If she'd known Jim was an alcoholic would she have married him? Probably. When you're young, all you think it takes to change someone is will power. Then as time wore on she'd begun to regard his behaviour as a sort of punishment for marrying him in the first place. It wasn't that she and Jim hadn't hit it off, they'd been very fond of one another, but their relationship had lacked passion. Sometimes, as Vera lay in bed waiting for him to return, praying he'd be sober, she'd ruminate on how much her father's

sudden death and the prospect of being left to care for her mother had influenced her. The irony was, her fears had been groundless. A second flowering was the best way to describe her mother's transformation on finding herself a widow. Of course, that had only been apparent in hindsight. Removing the heavy gardening gloves, Vera felt the sift of soil through her fingers. Death, birth, renewal. Would her own chance ever come, she wondered, or was it all to be sublimated here?

It was only after she'd left Kerry and moved to Galway to live among rock, that Vera realised she'd grown up with flowers. Not the cultivated sort, but wild untamed ones: monbretia or fuchsia, the one she loved most, red and rampant along winding boreens, an excess of colour, sinful almost. Fuchsia, profusion – the words had become linked in her mind. During those early years in exile, the scarlet fuchsia had blazed, throwing light on her childhood: the memory of the flowerlets transformed into ballerinas, long stamens pirouetting like slender, graceful legs. As necklaces or bangles they'd been imbued with the power to render her drab life magical and stuck to her ears with cello tape, they had become the exotic earrings gypsies wore. Her mother, on the other hand, had feared the flowers, wouldn't allow them in the house: 'You'll have enough tears in your life,' she'd warn, shooing Vera out. "Lachrimae Christi," she called them: "Tears of Christ". Not beautiful at all, unlucky. Puzzled by her mother's words, a younger Vera had searched out an image of Christ crucified and seen how the red and purple matched the blooded tears streaming down His bruised face.

The first time Jim hit her was after a Council meeting. At the time they'd been married nine years, Michael was seven, Marion just a few months old. The night it happened he'd come home the worse for wear – a decision about the siting of some apartments had gone against him – and Vera had made the mistake of saying something in defence of the objectors. The blow loosened a tooth. Later, Jim had cried, blaming it on the frustrations of the meeting, his bottled-up anger needing release. The next time it happened, several days were allowed to elapse before he apologised. Gradually a pattern emerged, meetings, drinking, and beatings. Mostly, he knocked her about but if she happened to fall, he'd use his feet, tell her she was asking for it. For years, Vera covered up the assaults, inventing accidents, convincing herself she was keeping it from the children, until the evening Michael, just turned thirteen, had burst in.

'Run Mam,' he'd screamed, wrestling his father against a wall. The beatings stopped for a while, but the atmosphere in the house turned sour. When her eldest opted to go to boarding school, the sadness Vera felt had been tinged with relief.

Vera filled a watering can from a barrel of rainwater. The weather had turned unseasonably hot and she was careful to water her 'baby' each evening. A smile broke on her face as she noticed several dimpled green shoots unfurling, feeling their way into life. Inspecting the plant closely, she noticed the shoots had sprouted, not from the old branches, but from the base, as if the shrub had had to reach inside itself, discover anew how to grow. Seeing this, her heart quickened

and she stood up, wanting to tell someone, to share her joy. *Lachrimae Christi*, she reminded herself, retreating indoors.

Hearing Jim's key, Vera glanced at the clock. The meeting must have finished early or maybe he hadn't gone to the pub? The glimmer of hope died as the kitchen door opened and her husband fell in, cursing softly, his eyes unfocused. He didn't notice her and Vera watched him the way she might a stranger. The expression on his face surprised her, cringing, fearful, as if all his enemies were in the room ready to pounce. Her heart softened and she wondered about all the things she didn't know about him; all the things he didn't know about himself. As she opened her mouth to speak, he jumped, startled, his eyes rolling in his head. When they came to the fore, they were full of something dark, hateful. 'Witch,' he spat, throwing a punch. It caught Vera on the hop – over time the beatings had petered out, although not the threat of them – but she managed to dodge it, get past him. He caught up with her in the hall, his hands clutching at her skirt, like a child clinging to its mother. She kept going, dragging him outside where they danced round each other until with a sudden twist she freed herself. She made for the gable end, night air chaffing her bare legs. Slurred threats, the scuff of his feet as he stumbled in her wake broke the silence. She halted by the clothesline, shrinking as he drew near. She saw him cock his head, listen as you would for an animal. She stepped backwards and a cracking sound beneath her feet alerted him. He grabbed at the pole used to prop the line, lurched. Vera fled, losing herself in darkness. A bat whirred by her head. A cow moaned drunkenly in an adjoining field. Small animals rooted in the undergrowth. He called her name. Called again. 'Who cares,' he shouted finally, 'who fekin' cares.' Moments later, the front door slammed. Ashamed, Vera pictured herself: a middle-aged woman hiding in her own garden. Crying.

A finger of light woke Vera. For a moment, she was mystified to find herself in the shed. As memories of the previous night surfaced, she sat up, stretching to relieve the ache in her bones. Picking up the old gardening coat she'd used as a blanket she wrapped it round her, went outside. Above her the emerging sky flushed pink. Grass wet her ankles. Birds sang. She retraced her steps, weighed down by the thought of the limbo days she'd have to live through until their mutual resentment wore itself out, hers in the garden, his wheeler-dealing. Passing the clothesline, she bent to retrieve the pole. 'Oh no!' she cried. 'No!' The cry dying in her throat, Vera sank to the ground, buried her face in the trampled shoots. She waited for tears but none came. She felt dry. Dry and hollow as if she'd been sucked clean.

The look on her face silenced Jim as she walked into the house. Mechanically, she made tea, took a cup to the bedroom. When she put it to her lips it tasted bitter. Lying down, she covered her head with the duvet. When he came to the door, asking if she wanted anything, she didn't respond. She wanted her plant back, she wanted her life back. He could give her neither.

Vera stopped cleaning, stopped making meals, and stopped speaking to her husband. Not consciously, she wasn't trying to teach him a lesson. She'd simply

come to the end of something. Sitting still, she experienced a heaviness as if she'd suddenly put on weight. When Marion turned up, all bustle and plans, she sent her packing, told her she needed to be alone. She told Michael the same thing and Paul, who pretended to ring out of the blue. Then she waited. She'd no idea what she was waiting for but she waited anyway. In the garden, flowers wilted, died eventually. One morning, towards the end of summer, she announced she was going home for a visit. Her husband nodded, threw a wad of notes on the table. Without a word, she pushed them aside.

Vera asked the bus-driver to let her off a mile from her old home. Taking her time, she walked the road she'd walked as a child, the hedgerows ablaze, the ground bleeding beneath her feet. Overhead, the sky appeared red and as she cut a path through the burning bush, she understood why she'd come. Reaching up, she broke off a branch, then another and another until her arms were laden with fuchsia. She could hear her mother's voice telling her to take them out of the house, about the bad luck they'd bring. This time she had an answer. Mother, she'd tell her, we make our own luck.

The Guest

He's down from Dublin for the weekend. Isn't he fucking mighty? Coming home one wet weekend for the summer. And Mam and the auld lad have the house cleaned and the steak and onions chopped. The carrot soup is bubbling over the pot. He's bringing a friend, he says.

Mam is wearing a silky green scarf and I've never seen it before. She's humming and spraying air freshener and has put the dogs out since yesterday. They bark and scratch the back door and every so often she lets a roar out to stop them.

A friend, he says.

The auld lad made me do the farm alone earlier. Made me do it so he could go down town to the Credit Union and take out a little present for him. He says it's what a father does for his eldest. A son who's making his way in the city. Socializing with other guards. Politicians. Bankers. I said he has loads of money, wouldn't we be as well galvanising the old turf shed and making use of it again. The auld lad told me to stop being a miserable bastard.

A friend, he says.

I have friends. I brought the Lynskey girl home one Saturday night and rode her. She woke up with fluffy hair, put on denim shorts too short for a Sunday morning. She walked out barefoot holding her black high heels in her hands and she waved a bye as she went out the drive, doing the walk of shame until her younger brother collected her in his boy racer Fiesta. And I told Mam I had a girlfriend when we sat down for the breakfast. I sawed off half a sausage and stabbed it into the egg yoke. The yellow overflowed on the plate.

Mam said was it that tramp from last night? A good girlfriend wouldn't let that kind of thing happen under any parent's roof. No matter how persuasive the fella might be. That girl's family wouldn't have taught her manners anyway, the auld lad said. Not with a father like hers. Did I not know the father tried to screw our family out of four acres by planting hedges on our side of the back fields? Well he did, back in the seventies. He got a slap for it too off the auld lad. And Mam had a show down with Mrs. Lynskey after Christmas mass a few years back. Mrs. Lynskey with her stoat wrap, Chanel No. 5 and sherry leaking out of her. Mam said she needed to be brought back to earth.

Then the auld lad said not to be mixing with that tight arse's daughter as he cleared his throat into the fire. Mam agreed and shoved an apple tart into the oven.

I texted the Lynskey girl for a few weeks and met her in Flanagan's pub on Friday and Saturday night, got the shift and the wank after the lock in. But she would never be good enough so I never brought her back again.

The auld lad tells me to smarten up. Have a shower and don't be embarrassing the brother when he gets in. The cow shite under my nails and the three day shadow on my cheeks. I change into a clean blue shirt and jeans and scrub my hands but I don't shave.

What time are they even coming? I ask and Mam tells me to hush and to get the Budweiser from out of the cold house.

I hope there's enough in a crate, she says.

I sigh and stomp towards the door. The dogs run inside and go wild, hopping all over the couches and onto Mam and she eats me for it.

I whistle and shout. Misty, Sam, out with ye. Out.

And I go out with them.

I get the crate of cans, get pissed wet with the rain slamming down and lumber back into the house. I warm my hands up in front of the hearth. Mam tells me to put more coal on.

There's a beep outside and the flash of headlights. He pulls up the driveway in his red Japanese motor. Mam is squealing and the auld lad's gone to the front door. Out he hops, ducking from the rain to the passenger side. He opens it and Mam holds up the net curtain and is straining to look at the passenger.

My jaw drops. I laugh. Is that the friend? I say and wonder will Mam and Dad be impressed with this Lynskey sister.

She Knows Where Syd Barrett Lives

THE COLLEGE week started the same way it always does; Muggins stuck in that auld prefab which was more like a World War II POW camp than a lecture hall, freezing me nuts off listening to Prof Mulvehill drone on and on. Today he was talking about some set of statistics and how they compare to some set of other statistical data, and how they both relate to some Venn diagram of population movements or Gaussian Curve of population distribution or some such auld shite. I was furiously taking notes but could not make head nor tail of any of it. My brain was getting fried. I needed to take a break and do a different kind of research.

My eyes scanned the lecture hall. There must be someone who knew what was going on, whose notes I could cog later, or who could make sense of it all for me. Then I spotted her – Susan Murray. She was in one of my soc'n'pol tutorials. She was always getting A's in her essays and assignments, always had the answers before anyone else, and was the only person I knew who genuinely found exams a breeze.

The girl had brains to burn, but in the spirit of the old fine line between genius and madness she looked completely nuts.

You could not miss her. Perched on her nose was the most enormous pair of thick, horn-rimmed glasses. Buddy Holly was not in it. Then there were the elaborate hairclips – usually with a big flower, peace sign, or once, a skull on the end of it – placed always, only, and ever, behind her right ear, partially keeping her, long and slightly unkempt, black hair in place. More than any of that though, it was the clothes she wore that really attracted attention. Although I could not see from where I was sitting – Susan was down at the very front of the hall, I could only make out her head – it was a safe bet that whatever she was wearing would be loud and quirky. Whether this was her just looking for notice or an expression of who she really was, was a mystery.

Susan had a thing for Paisley tunic dresses with patterns that looked as if the dressmaker was prone to seriously bad flash-backs from acid trips. Then there were her Doc Martins. She had an array of them – white, yellow, floral patterned, even velvet – any colour but the traditional black; but topping all this off was her penchant for luridly loud pink tights which made her legs visible from about a mile off they were so bright.

I will never forget the first time I saw them. It was at a party at Seán's gaffe last year. For some reason I found myself sitting beside her. The party was in full swing but I needed a serious sit down having overdone it on a combination of Tennants and the particularly lethal punch that was on offer. Goodness knows what went into the making of that witches brew. I found out, but unfortunately it was only afterwards, that it contained foul levels of Buckfast, a beverage memorably and accurately described by my mate Billy as "the sweat from Satan's scrotum."

I headed for – or rather fell into – the sofa in the middle of the living room. I was a bit out of it so that may be the reason I did not fully register the gingham pink, purple’n’dayglow orange dressed entity beside me until it spoke.

“Hhhheeyyyyy!” said this lazy drawl of a voice. I could not tell immediately if it was a greeting or an expression of disdain.

This girl was a bit out of it as well, but I imagined it was as a result of quite different substances to the ones flowing through my bloodstream.

“You’re Darragh, aren’t you?” she said. Again I had difficulty reading the tone. Was she being polite or looking to pick an argument?

“Eh...yeah...”

My second thought was, ‘How the hell does she know me?’

“Eehmm...have we ever...met before?” I asked.

“We’re meeting now, aren’t we?” she replied, not that she sounded sure herself.

“How do you know my name?”

She gave a derisive snort and regarded me through her heavy lidded, almost narcoleptic eyes, which were magnified to twice their actual size behind her glasses. I could not help but think that those horn rims could do some damage they were that sharp.

“There’s nothing I don’t know!” she pronounced with a wave of her hand. There was no ambiguity in her voice this time.

With no warning she leaned right up close to me, her right arm all but touching my left. Her face was directly before me. She had glitter on one of her cheeks and two small stars painted on. Less than an inch separated the tips of our noses.

“What’s your star sign?”

That was a demand.

“I, I, I don’t know,” I stammered. There was too much drink in my system to be able to make any rational guess as to where this conversation was going.

“Well when were you born?”

“Eh..August 24!”

“Virgo!” she drawled, drawing out the ‘o’ for as long as she could. Then, with great urgency, she announced: “I’m a Taurus!”

Well fair play to ya, I thought, but did not see in what way this little nugget of information was useful, and besides, I don’t believe in any of that Horoscope stuff anyway.

“A Taurus...and a Virgo...” she said, before sinking back onto her side of the sofa, a funny, satisfied little humming sound coming from behind the coy smile that had spread across her face.

We did not say anything for a while, just sat on the couch and let the party rage on around us. ‘On A Plain’ by Nirvana was playing on hi-fi system. It was a near continuous rotation of Nirvana, Happy Mondays, and Primal Scream. It was really getting on my nerves but I knew this was the kind of party where asking to hear Guns’n’Roses or Mötley Crüe would get you ejected out the door with the sole of someone’s boot imprinted on your arse and a ban from invitations to all similar

future events. Still, how many times tonight had I heard ‘Never Mind’ already tonight?

Eventually, some merciful soul changed the CD, and put on something I actually knew, or could at least tolerate – Pink Floyd’s ‘Dark Side Of The Moon’. It was another of the records my dad had, but never listened to anymore. As ‘Breath’ flooded into the room, or what I could hear of it over the babble of voices and shouting, I felt myself relax completely.

“Oh, that’s a great song,” I said. “What an album.”

“Really?” said Susan, who was somehow under the impression I had directed my last utterance at her.

“It’s not as good as ‘Meddle’...or ‘Piper at the Gates of Dawn’...”

Her nose wrinkled up in disgust as she said it.

“Sure whatever you’re into yourself,” I said. I really did not want to get into a debate with these music geeks I seem to be forever stuck meeting. “I just like the song.”

As I said it, I was looking at the tights she was wearing, and part of me started giggling. They were a shocking shade of pink. They were near luminous – as was the pink headband she had on. I could not get the image out of my head of her walking home at night, lighting up the road as she went along. She saw me giggle. I stopped immediately. She was looking directly at me again.

“Huh! Dark Side’s got nothing on Syd Barrett,” she muttered, before her tone became interrogatory. “D’you know Syd Barrett?”

“Eh, well not personally,” I said. She ignored or did not hear that.

“He was a fucking genius! The lost child of Swinging London.”

She was now drifting off into her own world.

“Who is this Syd guy?”

Susan gave a sigh of exasperation. She scratched her knee and shook her head slightly.

“The original leader of the Floyd!” she said. “Oh you need to experience Syd. He was...he was...Oh I’m going to have to make you a tape of his stuff.”

She was wagging a finger at me. “I’m going to have to educate you Darragh Kyne!”

For a few moments there was silence between us again until she began looking around her.

“This party has peaked!” she declared, and not exactly quietly. “It’s just flattened!”

I could not figure out how Susan had come to that conclusion. The party was roaring all around us. Everyone was talking and laughing, the place was crowded and Bernard Dempsey was due in a while. He was bringing a stack of house and rave albums with him and that was going to take the whole shebang up several notches from where it was already. Maybe though when your brain is stranded on some far flung astral plane out in deepest space it is hard to get an accurate perspective on what is going on back on planet Earth.

“D’ya wanna split?”

She was back giving me one of her stares again.

“What?” I blurted.

“It’s boring here. D’you wanna go?”

“Eh, eh, w-where?”

“D’you wanna come back to my place? We can listen to some music, I can introduce you to Syd Barrett. We can just...hang.”

I always dream of being at a party where some girl comes up to me and wants me to go home with her, but a geeky freak intent on giving me a musicological lecture on some acid-casualty was never part of the fantasy.

Yet her eyes were really staring into mine, almost boring a hole through them. No one had ever looked at me with such intensity before. Our faces were very close now. Her mouth was partially open. Her lips were full and moist. I’m sure it was just the effects of the drink, it must have been, but for a brief moment I really wanted to kiss her.

“You interest me,” she said.

I was suddenly very confused.

“We can just hang,” she said again. “Just chill. Everyone else is so boring.”

It was all getting too much for me. I was torn over what to do. She was a freak, but there was something about her that was beginning to excite me. She just wanted to hang, but I was not sure I could trust myself. I do not know what I said but I made up a host of excuses. I am sure none of them were convincing, but I made them and got out of the living room as fast as I could, decamping to the kitchen where Mickey and Seán were and there I hid in the corner for ages.

Sometime later I ventured back to the living room. Susan was no longer around. I admit I felt a bit bad about the whole thing, but she was so baked that there was not much chance of her remembering anything from tonight, least of all talking to me. My suspicions were confirmed as she never made that Syd Barrett tape for me. I still say ‘Hello’ to her, and sometimes chat, when we’re waiting outside the soc’n’pol lectures and tutorials – after all she does claim she knows me – and though she always replies, and is very polite, a look of confusion never leaves her face. It is as if she wonders why we are engaging in this ritual. Still, it is enough, because hey, I am going to need to pick her brains, and notes, later on today.

John Walsh

Winter Sun

‘Sir, I have a history to tell you.’ The Cuban waiter stood at our table, his hands clenched behind his back. ‘I am not waiter really. I open my first bottle of wine twelve days ago. And I make big mess.’

We stared at him, wondering what it was that made him tell us this.

‘I study physics, five years, you see. Then I get job, how you say?’ He made a brush gesture.

‘Sweeping the streets?’

‘Yes, yes. I love physics. But I have no work. Here I say to boss, I cook. Boss say I need waiter. I say him I am good waiter.’

We were tucked away for a week of winter sun. Everything was closed in our part of Fuerte, except the fish restaurant in the old harbour. We drove over in the evening to watch the sun sink into the bay. Each sunset got points out of ten. But nobody clapped, not like they do down on Mallory.

Maeve, Sandra’s sister, was getting over her break-up with Connor. It had dragged on too long. She didn’t want to talk about it anymore, just put it behind her. She went crazy about the cats, fed them our fish-leftovers and watered-down milk. Sometimes so many of them turned up it got out of hand.

‘My boss never smile,’ Ruben said. ‘He always very serious. But good boss. He not see when I open my first bottle of wine. I turn my back like this and I make big mess. Now it is better.’

We wanted to ask him if he had a villa in Cuba where we could holiday next. But then he told us his story and we were glad we hadn’t. The other waiter was called Juan Carlos.

‘Like the King of Spain,’ he said.

‘Where is your kingdom?’ I asked. But he didn’t understand. They stood waiting to clear away the plates the minute we had finished.

Normally Sandra and I holidayed on our own. But right now Maeve needed us. And it was okay. I took off whenever I could to the other side of the island, past the wind park, where the waves were rough like our Atlantic waves. I climbed the mountain that every evening brandished like a shield of flame in the intensity of the sun. It was an ancient portal towering over the miles of sand dunes.

There was something final about the way Ruben told us his wife had left him. ‘She abandon me.’ His five-year-old daughter he had to leave back in Cuba. ‘My heart break.’

We looked at one another, there was no easy reply. She could come to him when she was old enough to decide for herself?

‘In thirteen years? When she is eighteen?’ There was a flash of anger as if we had said the wrong thing. ‘But now I have new wife,’ he said eventually and smiled towards the back of the restaurant.

Maeve didn't want anyone new. Sometimes after enough wine she thought she wanted Connor back. Other times she was glad it was finally over. I supposed she and Sandra had long conversations about him. But maybe I was wrong and they were only lapping up the sun. Filling in the spaces between the deserted beach bars.

'The man of your dreams just walked by,' I said to Maeve when she came out with the sliced lemon. We were on the terrace enjoying our g&t's.

'What did he look like?' She made a show of looking around for him.

'Like Sting.'

Anyone like Sting would make her happy. Then he passed by again and she said he didn't look like Sting at all. The cats played around our sun-beds, just out of reach. They never came close enough to be touched. Maeve longed to touch. To coax one onto her lap. The grey one or the black one. But they wouldn't let her.

Our last sunset was an eight. Maeve said an eight-and-a-half. In its wake a cold breeze swept into the harbour. Ruben was waiting at the door for us as we hurried into the restaurant.

'Sir, I have question,' he said as he led us to our table. The three of us managed to smile. 'You have eat Cuban?'

'No,' we replied in unison.

'Then you come to my house to eat.'

For a moment we were lost. 'Tomorrow is our last evening,' Maeve told him.

Her words startled Ruben. 'I start work tomorrow eleven thirty. I must be here all day, boss say.'

I felt embarrassed, sorry we were leaving.

'Then next time,' Sandra said. 'We will come back. Will you be here?'

'I don't know. But next time. Okay.'

Ruben came back ten minutes later with a number scribbled on a wine label, Viña Berceo, the one he always recommended. 'Sir, you call me, when you come back next year. We eat Cuban together.'

I fumbled for words. 'What do Cubans eat?' It was pathetic, I knew. But Ruben explained to us and seemed to be happy.

'Next year,' he repeated and left.

'Sir, this is Lis, my new wife.' Lis gave us a shy smile. 'Next year Lis and I make Cuban food for you.'

We nodded and laughed. Ruben poured the Rioja with the usual ceremony. Tinny Elton John music sounded over the speakers. The blades of the wind park stood still in the sand-hills. Near the Supermercado a German couple waited in a glare of headlights. In the distance Costa Calma was a neon nightmare.

Nicola Geddes

Star Maps

My body is covered in moles and freckles. Long ago I decided that they were magic reflections of stars and suns across my white skin. Orion across my shoulder, Cassiopeia on my leg, Sagittarius on my foot.

My star maps have led me into a life of adventure; they whispered to me “you are both free and safe.” I understood this freedom and this safety and I steered my ship by magic. Even with maps, you can take a wrong turn. You can get lost anyway. You can rely more on magic.

At the end of the century I took a few turns that changed things. My ship sailed to a flat dry land of red sand. What little water there was moved backwards. The land threatened me with its harshness, and yet duty kept me there for three long months. I dreamt of the freedom of the cliffs and of wet grey limestone and damp mossy grass. I dreamt of my lover and of my dog, so far away in my cottage by the sea.

I dreamt of red dust and blood and flames, and O, who could not see out of her eyes.

And then, out of my dream and into this world came the red dust, and O, her head bloody, stumbles towards me, crying “I can’t see”; the words hit me like a punch. I lose sight of my maps.

Drawn on my body are my stories. But they are more than skin deep.

I returned to the land of limestone as my Saturn returned, and brought with it notions of ambition. I closed the red door to the little thatch cottage by the sea. The tide had changed. My potion jars gathered dust as I gathered acclaim and success. And although I had known heart ache and sadness before, this was a new bleakness of the soul I now faced.

I found a sorceress to help me. Her magic was new to me and I was both impressed and intrigued. Pulsatilla, Natrum Muriaticum, Sepia, Phosphorus. And then there was Carcinosisin.

I began to look for my maps. When I had time. When I remembered. But I was very tired. Every day was a long list of things to do, and willpower propelled me from duty to duty.

My dreams were the first to come back. They reminded me of my maps. It was painful to know that the stars were still there, even when I could not see them for the glare of street lights. It seems so obvious now; I must live where I can see the stars and understand how they are reflected on my body. But at the time it was so much harder to see. Visibility for all sea areas: poor to very poor, clearing to moderate.

I woke from a dream, the content of which I did not recall, but the message was clear. Look, it told me. Look now. One of my maps was changing; a dark planet appeared that seemed unfamiliar, as if it did not belong there at all. Orion across my shoulder, Cassiopeia on my leg, Sagittarius on my foot. Cancer on my right arm.

When I was a little child I was planting herbs in the garden with my father. “Dad, do you believe in magic?” He took some time to reply. “I believe in green magic,” he said. “When you are ill, I make you soups and teas from these herbs and you get better. That’s magic, isn’t it?”

And again, another dream. The borders are clear, but it has spread to the lymph. And again, into my waking world it came. I willed the young doctor not to say those words, but he did, he did. You do not understand, doctor. I cannot leave my love and my child. I cannot leave them. Take those words back! I should not have come here. How did I come to be here? Where is my boat? Where are my safety and my freedom?

Are my star maps turning against me?

But I had more on my side than I knew at that moment. My Dad made me soup, and he told me of his journey. I was surrounded by many who wrapped me in a blanket of kindness, crocheted from threads of love and magic, ties of belonging, colours of warmth and comfort.

My sorceress sat at the end of my bed and, after looking hard at me for some time, said, “You’re going to be fine.” She left me with new and strong medicine. I tried to find my magic. I thought she could help. I said, “I need to be very careful; the stakes are so high, I really have to get this right.” She laughed, “How can you get it so wrong? Just live your life.”

I found myself again in my boat. I leaned over the side and looked deep, deep into the ocean. It told me I was free. I was afraid to believe it. It seemed too much to hope for. But the wind, too, whispered, free! Free and safe. And eventually the doctors caught up. Again they told me what I already knew. But they said it in their way: “You can go now. But come back every so often. Take the fear with you, and be wary, be watchful.”

That fear is still with me, an awkward thing; it can unbalance my boat, especially in strong winds. But yet I have found my maps again. They have a sense of true north, but they do not say how to get there. I assume there are lots of different ways.

I am told we can look into the night sky at stars that are long since gone. I understand; we all shine for a while. I understand that whether my star maps save me or threaten to kill me, I cannot live without them. I change, they change, and yet we all stay the same. We shine across galaxies and throughout time.

***Gottfried Benn* (translated by Eva Bourke)**

Chopin

Not much of a conversationalist,
opinions were not his forte,
opinions don't get to the point;
whenever Delacroix expounded his theories
he became restless, he himself couldn't
account for the Nocturnes.
Frail lover,
mere shadow in Nahant
where George Sand's children
ignored his disciplinary
suggestions.
His tuberculosis
was the kind that drags on
with internal bleeding and scar formation;
a quiet death as opposed to
one in throes of agony
or by firing squad:
the piano (Erard) was moved to the door
and Delphine Potoka
sang for him a song of violets
in his last hour.
He travelled with three pianos to England:
Pleyel, Erard, Broadwood,
for twenty guineas
he would give fifteen minutes recitals
in the soirees
at the Rothchilds', the Wellingtons', in Strafford House
and to the assembled Order of the Garter;
then, dark with fatigue and near death
he went home
to the Square d'Orleans.
Then he burns his sketches
and manuscripts,
no leftovers, fragments, notes,
those indiscrete clues -
said at the end:
"I have accomplished what I set out to do
as far as my abilities allowed."
Each finger was to play
according to its natural strength,

the fourth being the weakest
(mere twin to the middle finger).
When he began they rested on the keys
E, F sharp, G sharp, B and C.
Anyone who heard him playing
certain Preludes
in a country house or
in the high mountains
or through French doors
opening onto the terrace of a sanatorium
will scarcely forget it.
He composed no operas,
no symphonies,
only those tragic progressions
from artistic conviction
and with a small hand.

Gottfried Benn, 1886-1956, central, magnetic and controversial figure in 20th century poetry in Germany. Considered the diametrical opposite to Brecht due to his (brief) flirtation with Nazi ideology, he has recently been rediscovered and his importance as an innovator in poetry is again being acknowledged.

Harald Hartung (translated by Eva Bourke)

Glance into the Yard

As it begins to snow
the girl in the yard
swings herself deep
into the growing white darkness
Happiness is a sleep of seconds
I look up, the empty swing
still sways a little.

Harald Hartung, *Born 1932 in Herne. He is a poet, literary critic for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, chair of the Literarische Colloquium Berlin among other things, essay writer, professor of literature and grand old man of German letters.*

Thomas Rosenlöcher (translated by Eva Bourke)

The Garden

I sit in the garden at the round table
and prop my elbow on it so it marks
like the point of a compass
the centre of the world.
A tree enfolds me with its many greens,
and slowly the sea of the early year
rises, luxuriant with blossoms.
The birds shout like lunatics.
Beautiful shadows wander over me
and flower petals fall onto the table
and melt away, snow! The boughs drip black
and from the road comes a sound,
that was my life. Suddenly I'm air
and am still sitting here and talking to the tree,
whether it might not exchange countries
to perform its outrageous blossoming,
where no one yet has marked
with his elbow the centre of the world.

Thomas Rosenlöcher, was born 1947 in Dresden. He studied at the famous Literaturinstitut Leipzig. Well known for his witty poetry, he writes among other things about the profound changes in the former GDR after unification.

Friedrich Hölderlin (translated by Eva Bourke)

When I was a boy

When I was a boy
A god would rescue me often
From the clamour and lash of men.
I would play with the flowers
In the kind woodland shelter
And the gentle winds of the sky
Would join in my play.
And as you delight
The hearts of plants
When they reach out to you
With delicate arms,
You also made my heart glad,
Father Helios, and like Endymion,
I was your favourite,
Mother Luna!
O you faithful
Kindly gods.
If only you knew
How my soul loved you!
Although then I did not call you
By name yet, nor did you
Ever name me, like men do
As though they knew one another.
But I knew you better
Than I ever knew men.
I understood the stillness of the ether
But never the words of men.
The melodies of the woodlands
Were my teachers
And I learned to love
Among flowers.
I grew tall in the arms of the gods.

Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843, *major Romantic German lyrical poet and author of the prose work Hyperion. He was closely associated with German idealism.*

Emily Cullen

A Promenade

Clare looks far away today.
I'm a centaur with wheels
instead of hooves,
propelled by gales -
not quite the *flaneuse*;
a shadow pushing a pram
past Mutton Island.
Behind me: the Prom.

Briny onslaught takes my breath,
jolts me out of sluggishness.
Hair flaps against my cheeks
like brushstrokes.
I am an elongated figure
like a Jack Yeats
only more defined,
but do I still qualify
as a *woman of destiny*?
Or am I another invisible
muse on the horizon?

I walk towards the Claddagh
into the miasma
of a divided sky
where I will read the plaque
bearing MacNeice's lines,
impress his words upon
an afternoon slipping away,
intent to stride outside
the strictures of the frame.

The lurid sun behind me
daubs the Long Walk houses
in its unearthly glow.
Boats are already tied
averting a clash
with phalanx of foam.
Not much time left
to make the dash for home.
Sky now opens like the sixth seal - all in a Galway afternoon.

Emily Cullen

Suspension

Fr. Burke Park Playground, Galway

Sitting on a child's swing
in a mild trance of joy,
we listen for the sing song hum
of our playful pendulum:
hee-haw-hee-haw
a kind of donkey metronome.
Thighs no longer feel the pinch
from the chunky chain links
as legs kick out and in.

It is one of those evenings:
the sun still gleams at seven.
My baby boy sits on my lap,
my arm fused to his waist.
His crown nestles under my chin,
eyes smile up at mine,
thrilling to our swoop and rise:
hee-haw-hee-haw,
pointing to a white arc,
faint in our blue sky.

'Moon!' his favourite word,
he repeatedly exclaims.
I wish I could freeze our frame,
swaying languidly
across the azure
keeping the easy tempo:
hee-haw-hee-haw
so I shut my eyes,
imprint it on my lids;
we are forever stilled

until the clang of a recorded bell
sunders our floating spell,
blasts our lunar reverie.

Tim Dwyer

ANGEL ON EARTH

Mary O'Hara

Irish Harpist and Singer

I don't always know
which memories are imagined.
Her songs were lullabies
rising from the family phonograph.
I hear them now
through a stack of losses,
feel the soothing
as only a child can
from the pure voice
of the beautiful girl
with the flowing hair
playing on her harp
the music of the air
before the tragedy
of her young poet's death
before joining the sisterhood
and leaving this world
to seek the comfort of God.

Tim Dwyer

ROAD TO GALWAY, 1949

for my father

He helped build this road-
a farmer, then soldier
then pick and shovel man
saving up his pay
for that boat ticket to America.
He shipped off
the same year
the Republic was born.
What freedom did he find
in his new world?

Fred Johnston

A QUESTION

Old lovers often want to know
where did the good of old love go
in which space beneath the heart
did the death of old love start
could it have been solved or cured
with incantation or resolving word;
but we who live in the age of treason
are fools to look to love for reason
there is no button we can press
that offers the broken dead redress
so how can something mad as love
as mad as soldiers on the move
conform to potions, ritual, prayer
when so much blood hangs in the air?

Fred Johnston

CHANSON DE LA JARDINIÈRE

Mon mari m'ordonne d'arroser toutes les fleurs mortes,
dans notre jardin brumeux des pissenlits, des marguerites se pelotonnent:
j'écrase les pommes sauvages, et je marche à quatre pattes
entre le berceau de sa luxure gothique, pierreuse,
et le feu glacial de mon désir. Je suis un coing sacré, méprisé. Il me mange.

Mary Madec

Diptych

If I were an artist I'd draw Demeter looking back,
Persephone stretching out like a light beam
into Spring.
Demeter like Lot's wife
shadows in the salt,
her strained moist eyes
bright as the candle of winter
flickering on the thin outline of herself,
the white x-ray of her bones,
pale tissue in which throbs her dreams—
out of which come her sobs and screams.
Persephone comes back to Demeter
with her old juices,
claims her so she might live,
dollops of tears, swarovskis on lupins

Mary Madec

Persephone: Coming of Age

At the end of the Spring season, she plays in the ragged grasses
clumpy, uneven, wet like the hairs on the mount of Venus,
the sentinel peaks rising in the distance
by the tender early light, now her breasts;
in the waters of the inlets her arms and legs
stretch like promontories.

She is aware of the suck and tug of the earth
taking her into itself, into its dark folds.

When she thinks of her hips, they are a boat
carved out of an old apple tree she remembers.

She longs for a river; she would give herself to its bed,
its mud and stones like flesh and bones.

And she knows, as a salmon knows, that she would go with it
into the dark places water flows, on its way to the sea.

Michael Farry

Six things I miss about teaching

Fresh September chalk
to write the wrongs of all their worlds,
one by one by one.
My desk's relentless bulk,
cluttered with fantasies of first term,
facts of final months.
Rushed coffee at eleven,
reassurance of reality, as solid
as the clink of teaspoons.
Each new story start,
the glee of shared enjoyment, relish
of a stored memory.
High classroom windows
through which I stared out every day
at what passed for life.
Knots of eager heads
animated over vital tasks, weaving
intricacies in words.
And among tedious sheets
of biro-scrawled, third-hand mimicry,
one Grecian novelty.

Michael Farry

Limerick Café

The chocolate cake was a let-down,
sinless, synthetic, but I ate it all
having learned long ago that food
is sustenance first and only after,
something else. My coffee was good.
Here scattered in our secure seats,
we read our random textbooks,
mine modern obsolete poetry,
a memory from the Latin times,
the author dead fifty-seven years.
I couldn't see my neighbour's cover,
guessed from the weight, colour
and her total concentration
that the tale was a thrilling lesson
in the uselessness of learning.
And just beyond her, I could tell
by the casual way the single man
skimmed his weighty newspaper,
allowed its shocks go stale
while he negotiated his crisp,
salad-filled, brown bread slices,
that he, like me, learned sometime
in the last millennium's uproar
that a sandwich is more real than
all the world's small alarms.
Here we sit, at individual settings,
a choir, concentrating on our notes,
or cast of epic drama, delivering
learned lines, rehearsed asides,
moving to direction. Or maybe not.
In any case we do what's necessary,
keep our heads down, take and eat
what's vital, some scraps of food,
liquid, printed words and, a bonus
if available, fresh chocolate cake.

Homage to Leland Bardwell

The poet feels light-hearted in her house by the sea –
now that she is almost ninety she can say
that all ill spirits, despair, guilt, regret have long fled
her threshold and are engaged elsewhere.

She only remembers now if and what she wants – the honeyed light
of late summers, winter winds, salty and brazen, the healing bitterness
of poems, stars slipping down August dawns, and most of all
she loves the spectacle just outside her windows
performed daily in her honour: the maritime birds
whizzing back and forth on their trapezes, the dizzy
stunts of the tides and the way the storm conjures
a polished coin from a pocket of rain clouds at night.
Blackberry lanes wind downhill to the last spit of land
where she lives alone in a house with a blue door
and the sea comes and goes freely
high up over White Beach.

It's the home of music and courtesy, safeguarded
for the moment by her non-judgmental cat since the poet
has just gone out to her trampoline and now flies high
with a breeze from Ben Bulben caught in her wild grey locks.
From a height she sees the whole bay ringed by the glistening
horizon, a friend's cottage and himself at his keyboard as he writes
his scorching, witty lines, she sees her children
and grandchildren at different ends of the earth,
she sees islands setting out like ships from their ports
and fields like green baize tables in libraries, and what she sees,
and her books freed from the shelves sail the air with her – Hope against Hope
in dark times, also Baudelaire the flâneur's perfumed volumes,
all the women saints, and one by one her old lovers, husbands and friends,
as well as countless noble beasts of the wilderness
join her, tigers in amber and black, proud lions
and panthers, shining as liquid tar
They surround her to tell her their stories, dreams and
terrors and joys above dust, ashes and pain
elevated by the scent of wild flowers,
upheld by the silent earth's golden white light.

**The poet told me that after an illness she temporarily had hallucinations as described above and that she felt it as a loss when they ceased during recovery.*

Eva Bourke

Snow Story

If I had one wish it would be
to have been born two or three
hundred years earlier in Japan.
I'd adopt a new name:
Banana Tree or Blue Ink Pot,
or even Cup of Tea
and talk to crickets and swallows
knowing that the Milky Way
was reflected in their eyes, too.
I might take to the road,
the one to the Deep North
or live in seclusion complaining of too many visitors.
I would study how a tree
stands for itself and nothing else
and try to learn from it.
I'd teach important things
like ideograms, meaning "polite frog"
or "snail climbing Mount Fuji"
and on my wanderings fix my broken sandal thongs
or tears in my knapsack,
listening to the small songs of the insects.
At the end of my life I might find myself alone
living in a grain store with snow
falling through holes in the roof.

Eva Bourke

Feeding Time

for Ruby, Lesy, Clea and Julian

It's not the simulated wave behind glass
 that thunders every three minutes
 against the rocks
nor the conger eel, dark lord of drain pipes
 and sea caverns, not even
 the saw teeth
 of the starry smooth hound
on its restless back and forth glide
 that can detain the children
 but pulling us fast by the hand
they stop to linger, point, call out
 at a round shallow basin
 where they would see them
as a bird or a god might see them
 from a height
 in their shadowy universe
where the earth and all its creatures
 are flat
and everything is buoyancy, silence
 and circular, glass-
 sealed horizons:
schools of plaice grown huge in captivity
 speckled discs, dim moons
 that orbit indolently
or rays, kite-tailed, more intricately patterned
 than the most fanciful
 Japanese fabric,
the fluid stroke and flap of their wing-like fins
 that glint in the milky underwater light
 as tin foil might
trimmed with fine copper wire trim around
 the rippling edges, adrift and cruising
 on their otherworldly cruise,
 flashing the odd Morse message
with tiny tinsel-backed mirrors that go on
 and off on their languid bodies.

At feeding time they rise in a twinkling, lift
blunt heads, ogle lop-sidedly from the water,
mouths agape as if they wished
to have a word with the young man in blue overalls
whose offering – an iridescent dollop
of hake – they accept
without as much as a blink of close-set eyes,
then one toss of their pelerines
and they sashay
back into their universe, singularly aloof,
bewitching and more
fine-grained
than the pale sand on the ground
with which they blend
so seamlessly.
There is no hope on earth for us
they might reveal the measure
of their insight.
But the children, the bravest first,
slip their hands into the basin.
They touch the fish,
they feel the skin of a poem composed by fish
rough as sand paper or cool
and slippery as silk
with their fingers and something –
a memory from long ago surfaces
and touches them –
weightlessness
shadow world
well-spring.

Eva Bourke

Evening near Letterfrack

I'd brought the papers into the house, the saddest stories for years, newsprint wet from rain or was it tears blackened my hands and now I watched the mountains – old herd of nags – lower themselves around the bay, hippodrome-style. The sky was clearing, islands reappeared. Clare Island, Bofin, Inishturk and way out High Island seasawed among the breakers. Fast forward breezes shook quaking grass, sorrel, colt's foot, rhododendrons fuchsia shrubs, the rustling of some broad-leafed bush sounded as if a score of blades were being sharpened. Out near the strand a rock, a fossilized cetacean was inch by inch submerging in the rising tide. A feather of a cloud in the sheer sky withstood the inroads of two transatlantic vapour trails for longer than two minutes. Dog bark and pheasant call, a donkey heehawed like a rusty barn door hinge and on the trade routes of the birds the evening traffic went on, swift and purposeful.. Such clarity of air, voices were carried far across from a sandy beach beside the pier. Two women walked the tidemark together in complete intimacy picking up flotsam, stones and shells, the keepsakes of a day they wanted to remember. The one, young, black, wore a Nubian crown of plaited locks, the other's head shone in the evening light like weathered driftwood, smooth, bleached and silvered. They talked as friend to friend, mother to daughter, old to young, black to white. Two dogs were chasing one another around them in the tidal surf. Where were divisions now? The line between the water and the sky, all binaries and opposites dissolved here at the end of Europe among the quartzite stones and soft black bog. Don't be afraid, someone sang in the distance, and, I'll stay with you! The air was brimful of avowals and annunciations.

John Arden

The Great Gas Giveaway

An ex-Minister's Remorse

Oh never ask us why we gave away the Gas:
No memory can stand the strain, the shame, of that. Alas.
“Commercial confidentiality” (sssh, watch your mouth)
“National security” (sssh, whether north or south).
Sealed lips forever best, to the east as to the west,
Show no embarrassment, encounter no disgrace.
Who could foresee Shell's corporate heart of stone
To smile and to take: and forever to rule? My God, if all were known,
Forever we shall lose our face, abandon forever the pride of our place.
Sealed-lips mandatory. (Ssh sssh. End of the story.)

**Thanks to Margaretta D'Arcy for permission to publish this previously unpublished poem by John Arden.*

Anne Irwin

Summer in Galway

Today the clouds heaped back
over the Salthill Hotel
wait.
Under a turquoise sky
the sea sparkles
the gentian whale-mouth beams,
we walk the prom
sucking crisp air
deep into our shallow lungs.
soaking sun
into our sodden bones,
tanning our winter skin
as though by osmosis
we would become radiant
and glisten with summer.
As though there was a summer
as though we can inhale clouds
transforming them into bright tomorrows.
Towards evening
a parchment moon rises,
hangs low over O'Connors chimney
watching.
The clouds, stir
puff like a steam engine
spread out over the prom,
over the liquid sunset.
Tomorrow another deluge.
Summer in Galway

Anne Irwin

All we can do is Wait

(This poem was inspired by Mary whose husband Keith suffered from Alzheimer's. She was his carer)

Framed in the brown respite window
I wave to you
A smile melts your bewildered face
And I know you understand I have to go
And that here your fragile mind is free to meander
The intangible world that is now your home.
A year ago you stopped traffic
Played with the pedestrian lights
chanted at passers-by,
or stockpiled stolen sugar and bananas
But one by one even those thin threads
that connected you to our world
snapped.
Your mind dissolved
your words disappeared
At home I am your jailor.
You alert
waiting
a clink of the lock
and you beeline nowhere
and lose yourself in alien streets.
Inpatient with your pacing
I remind myself that whatever I do for you
You would do a thousand fold for me.
I think of
Our forest walks
And you would sing to me.
For fleeting moments
I still see that love in your eyes.
You used to say I was your goddess,
your Hindu Kali, your Isis.
I cherish those rare moments
and know that they will not last.
For now your beautiful ephemeral spirit
That gossamer film of light
is trapped in your coarse crude body.
All we can do is wait.

Laurie Allen

Road chill

You left to cross the road
But the grim reaper had come to claim prey
And with magnificent synchronicity
Raised his glittering sword
Scythed you down
Your execution quick, clean
The cut deep excised with extreme acuity
The wound still fresh with us
Weeping
The scythe glistening crimson
Grim reaper you have left a hole
No healing or filling up
No gentle lapsing of time
Salving the pain
There lies a vivid red scar.

Jack McCann

Is Love Alive?

How can one tell
if love is alive inside?
If love is there at all?
If it is, does love conquer all?
Have you tasted love?
What is it like?
Is it sweet, juicy?
Does it stop the world
or make it go round?
Does it shout from the rooftops
Or does it not make a sound?
Love is in your voice, your smile.
Love is in the air you breathe.
Your heart beats love.
My heart beats in unison,
absorbs your love, fills me.
I taste it and it is real.
Love is there,
it is alive.

Jack McCann

The Water's Edge

I walk the water's edge,
eyes scanning water, sand and stone.
Everything cleansed with the tide,
bringing newness, an expectation.
A nameless piece of wood
from the hull of a sunken boat
with traces of blue
scratched by fish and rock
and devil knows what
to lie on the shore in front of me,
rolling the possible picture
of the last hours
of that ill fated vessel.
Did her Master go down with her
or is he still walking the water?
The vision of the white wrinkled hand
comes back to haunt me,
thrown out of the sea
by a crashing wave
to land at my feet
and forever frighten me.
Never matched to the rest of its frame,
it lies in some morgue
awaiting its claim.
It still sends shivers down my spine,
every day since I was nine.
There is a bottle bobbing on the water
with a stick sealing its mouth,
as if sticking out its tongue
to all who rest their eyes on it,
compelling its retrieval in cold frothy water
to show it does contain a message
saying "Save me", signed Ireland.
Sorry Ireland, the boat is already sunk
And the hand severed!

Jack McCann

Bullied

Standing alone,
tears stream down her cheeks.
Fingers point,
sniggers carried in the air
settle on her shoulders,
weigh her down.
Names are thrown
at her ears,
pierce her
until she cries out.
Lonely,
ostracized,
isolated,
weakened by constant
verbal assaults,
shaken by alienation,
she is dying inside.

David J McDonagh

The hills go on

I'm always drawn to the scenic route,
by the Docks and the Claddagh,
to where the bay
opens out
 and the hills beyond
 and the shimmer between
make me glad I avoided
the practical way.
That first summer, the Saturday crowd
would race for the corner
overlooking
the bay;
 the bright view
 was a promise
 of good times
just beginning.
Seven summers later,
someone finally pulled the plug,
but they could not remove the scenery.
While call centres come and go,
the bay and the hills
go on
 sustaining us,
 inviting us
to take the scenic route.

David J McDonagh

After the scan

For Linda

He's Clark Kent but he's no Superman;
let nature take its course.
Sensitively, he waives the fee
and sends us home to wait.
Outside, a hug and one request:
I want to drive to the sea.
There, I look to familiar hills:
immovable, ancient, certain.

Neil McCarthy

Sirens

The thought does cross my mind, fleetingly, almost on a daily basis, each time the sirens thunder past, whether I have by a few minutes' stroke of luck at a poor soul's expense missed a fatal accident.

In the Starbucks of the local convenience store, twelve hopefuls sit nervously waiting for their name to be called to the interview, jolting every time the shop floor music is interrupted by the brusque announcer.

I sit with my doppio, staring out across a sea of fruit and vegetables, listening to the discounts on offer, morbidly wondering if one day I will burn, perhaps be cut in tact from the mangled wreckage of my wife's car;

or if my name will be called somewhere else, with a quiet lane leading to our door, as I peter out away from the sirens, from these giant stores and coffee bars where out of twelve disciples waiting, one will leave here walking on water.

Neil McCarthy

Six Dictionaries

At first we looked for excuses,
 hammered down a beer here
a cocktail for collateral there,
uncorked wine in hours unknown to God
and chose Tom Waits over religion.

Next thing you know we're on our honkers,
 looking for reasons,
behind the couch, in the residue of used
wine glasses, in living room picnics in
power cuts, in you tubes of ourselves, as if
the people we were then are the people
that we now attest to being.

For the next trick, we looked for words,
 lay in bed for hours wishing the
ceiling above were a search engine while our
flagrant fingers did most of the talking;
six dictionaries would not have baited my
 mouth to hook you.

Now, we look for each other, physically,
as absence undresses you, lays you down
beside me on my mattress, places your arms
gently crisscrossed under my pillow,
kisses your neck, your breasts and naval;
the shiver of the tree outside my open window
just a wishful breath
falling from my mouth to yours.

Eithne Reynolds

Binn Guaire

Diamond Mountain

Leaving Galway city
To Cross Binn Guaire,
I came upon some spider webs
Of gossamer thread strung across the yellow gorse.
The mist was heavy on the branches,
The webs caught every drop of dew
Weaving through the hedge rows,
A filigree of jewels.
There must have been a world of spiders at work that morning
Spinning and weaving for God alone,
I was an unexpected traveller on the road that day
They could not have known I'd see
They did not weave for me.

Mary Murray

A walk on the prom

Overcast sky
Strong summer breeze
Dark grey sea
Ruffled white lace edges
Sweep ashore
Seagulls screeching
Circle above
Swoop down scavenging
A lone heron stands
Striking a pose like a bronze
Statue
Famine memorials
Tall against the sky
Hold the names of ships
Ling, Linden, Ohio
These among others sailed out
Of Galway past the lighthouse
A beleaguered people's
Last sight of home
Large drops begin to fall
Rain becomes relentless
Running in rivulets
Down my face, front,
And back
I reach a shelter
Wait until the rain clears
Abandon my walk
Turned for home.

Micéál Kearney

Neé Lianne

Gran

Never burnt her bra.
Always kept the kettle boiled
and the sweets well hidden.
She loved her High Nelly
would cycle down to Sweeney's in Mulroog
or Lane's of Toureen for tea and talk.
Now she time-travels, chases shadows
meandering trails carved over mountains
generations deeper.

Micéál Kearney

Grandmother Clock

Originally from Carron, County Clare,
then hung on the wall at aunt May's in Pollock,
went to Toureen and finally in Cregulas
was placed on the wall
just as the leaves began to fall
and tick-tocked — until it stopped
at 5.21am in the Year of Our Lord, 2007.
And none of us, since,
has had the heart to restart it.

Pd Lyons

Anarchist

black beret
rich with pleats n buttons
green down to the floor coat
wait in line for the coffee machine
young women at the nearest table
quartet study group
ponder the ability of children
to reach the alphabet
good crows of the Spanish arch
some crumbs left for the sparrows
through 100% UV protection
waves the open ocean
new world
across the bay
somehow the difference now has come
with out effort
and all those stories never told
up in tobacco
cross the causeway
reach out into the disappeared.

Pd Lyons

Grey Horse In Connecticut

Walked a waking dream
north by Thomas church
before the red wing black bird flew
where barn-breaking winter had not withdrew
even though the fourth day of sunlight
had woke the river from its sleep
and red birds sang with invisible birds
and the only other sound
fresh water ice berg scrapes against the shore
spun slowly in an eddy water loop
copper green burnish brown
pushed eventually further down around the bend
and myself to cross the wood plank bridge
must walk the stone wall borders an ancient flooded road
found there in some wood shake barn
himself framed in darker doorway
cocks his black edged ears to my whistle
slights his softer winter whiskered head to my whistle
no other movement.

Aimhreas

Tá fear ar m'aithne
atá an-dhílis do Ghaeilge
ar uairibh ámh
ní maith leis go mbeadh
rudaí curtha as Gaeilge amháin
Le faitíos nach dtuigfeadh daoine é
Ar ócáidí eile, ámh
Bíonn faitíos air
rudaí a chur i nGaeilge
le faitíos go dtuigfeadh daoine é
Is baolach don Ghaeilge

Uinseann Mac Thómais

Louise Tinn

“Mise an Ghealach”
a deir sí liom
is í fós leath
ina codladh
le teocht
agus tinneas
Is 100.5 F céim
A bhí le feiceáil ar an teocht mhéadar
Anuas ó 105F
Bhí a múisc
curtha di aici
ó 10.30in.
Faoiseamh.
Ba faoiseamh dhomsa é
An ghealach a bheith ag luí liom
Agus meangadh ar a héadan.
(6 Eanáir 1996 1.43rn)

T – léine

“Tá mise ag iarraidh do T-léine”
a d’fhógair sí
ag féachaint suas orm
le súile lasta
“Tuige?” Ceist réasúnach
“Tá ceann a Daidí ar Ciara,
mar ghúna oíche”
Chaith mé díom é
Agus scar mé leis
Agus im sheasamh
leath nocht
Chonaic mé m’aingilín
Katie, chúig bhliana críonna
Ag dreapadh an staighre
go sona sásta
Feistithe i bpobal (Dé)

Louis Mulcahy

Dóchas sna hAibhleoga

Dílseoirí gioblacha na Gaeilge
á n-ionsaí ó gach aon taobh
lotha mar chaoire fé aiteann
an tor ina choróin dheilgneach
á bpríocadh is á gciapadh.

Croí lárnach mar thine spíonta;
gríosach ag dul chun báis
ach anois is arís ag brúchtadh aníos
chun aibhleoga a scaipeadh thar cláí.

Aibhleoga a dheargódh agus a dh'athbheodh
úr, saor, tuisceanach
mórálach as a n-iarta féin.

Louis Mulcahy

Cleachtadh Domhnaigh

Domhantaí beannaithe
ceathrú chéid ó shin;
ardú chroí orainn
agus daoine ag teacht

ina sruthanna suaimhneacha
ó gach ceathrú den bParóiste
chun bailiú isteach sa tsáipéal;
na slite tréigthe ina ndiaidh.

Sea, is sinne beannaithe chomh maith
ar bhóithre ciúine na nDomhantaí;
agus Lasse dhá bhliain déag d'aois
ag foghlaim tiomána.

Louis Mulcahy

Cruach Mhárthain

Éalaíonn m'anáil
nuair a fhéachaim ort
mo sheoid stuama sheasamhach
id' chlóca mín trédhearcach.

Is maith liom thú i lár a' lae
dealramh na gréine ar chruth agus dreach
is aríst i gclapsholas an tráthnóna
gealach cheanúil ag maisiú do chinn.

Ach is fearr liom ar fad thú ag breacadh lae
's drúcht na maidine go bog ar do ghrua;
solas cúthail ag féachaint cliathánach
ar d'anam a luíonn leathnocht.

Ag na hamanta san tagann rabharta im' chuid fola
a chasann mo cheann, a mhúsclaíonn fonn.

Louis Mulcahy

Ó Chloichear go Glaise

Bhíomar cráite
ag caoirigh scrathacha, scáinte
go raibh nós acu teacht is lonnú 'nár bpaiste
chun dochar a dhéanamh dár saothar
gach uair a bhíomar as láthair.

D'osclaíodar ár ngeata ar a slí isteach
is dhúnadar é laistiar dóibh.

Sea, bhíodar cliste, sleamhain is tapaidh;
ach ní rabhadar tapaidh a ndóthain don mbuachaill
a ghabh is a chaith i mo veain iad
chun saoire fadtéarma a bhronnadh
ar bharr na haille deich mhíle ó bhaile.

Tá fear anois ag siúl ar an bhfód seo
is tochas ag loscadh a chinn is a thóna.

Trevor Conway

Atlantic

Today, I touched America,
Felt its sweat wash over me.
I became metallic blue,
Slipped into the cool chill
with the smooth, neoprene skin of a seal:
Delicious.
The world was a thing behind me.
Under water, you're inside a bottle
Quilted with the jostling clink of waves.
Nostrils fizzle.
We are pre-born fish,
But I, too, hang like the seagull,
Held at the hips as though
Lit into the air.
(Applaud.)
Taste with your skin.
I was ragged, flat and limp,
Philosophical or dead.
All the birds must've thought me strange.
Commerce, culture, communication –
All were skeletal things,
Faces coated in metal and glass.
I saw shadowy figures on the sand,
And was part of history, unrecorded.
Continents came and spoke to me.
Breathing daily through my window,
I hear it, a heaving animal.
I touched it yesterday, too.
The foam, engorged brown and red,
Dripped like silk from my limbs.
I had been beaten,
Saved.
The salt on my lips made me long
For something I'd tasted before.
I think it was – in fact, I'm sure –
Deep-fried potato.

Trevor Conway

Black and White

I stared at the screen:
It was “black and white”,
Or, as I called it,
“Grey”.
(I was a pedantic child.)
My parents said they were old films,
Images from long ago,
So, naturally, I assumed everything
Was black and white:
The trees,
The clothes,
The sky
And skin.
What an amazing world.
When did it change? I wondered.
Did everyone just wake up
And find themselves in colour?
Nothing is black and white now.
But I want to believe again.
I want to see the world in these two shades.
The orange street lamp glows
As evening ripens blue.
Words fall to the page:
Black and white.

Gerard Hanberry

DID SHE EVER LAUGH?

Did she ever hear laughter,
sweet and spontaneous,
even in her clinched youth
when all the rooms were dark
and the chapel was dark
like the burdened sky,
the mists and the grey-varnished lake?
And the grass always grey
even on summer days
when the wild roses and bell-fuchsias
drooped lifeless and grey
along the hedgerows
up to the horizon.
Did she ever laugh
in the kitchen where the walls were dark
like the flagstone floor,
cold when they knelt to say the grey rosary,
stringing her faults together
all the way to her mother's eye,
and later unspooling to her husband's,
dissonance and drab duty,
the heavy tablecloth and dinner service,
hope absent or an impediment?
Now, after all those grey years,
nothing
only pursed silence,
the dark hall, the stairs,
the empty rooms,
the ticking of a great
grandfather clock.

Gerard Hanberry

BETRAYAL

Did she feel her substance crumbling
from the top of her head,
the roots of her hair,
through cheek bones and neck sinews,
shoulders, breasts, waist, womb,
hollow and shadow less,
fading the length of her thighs,
shinbones, the balls of her feet –
only a rummage of dust,
powdered like glass
beneath his hobnailed heel?

Gerard Hanberry

WHAT OUR SHOES SAY ABOUT US

According to the radio phone-in,
the world's oldest shoe has been found
in an Armenian cave, well preserved,
buried in sheep dung for over five thousand years.
The excited curator at Toronto's shoe museum
told the host that going by the style of the antique loafer
not a lot had changed in five millennia
She described a stylish moccasin,
cut from a single piece of cowhide,
laced along seams at the instep and heel,
tanned and tailor-made for the right foot,
the shoe of a rich man, so ancient yet so familiar.
Six policemen with Winchesters
shot a man in Utah last night,
fired a volley of bullets at a target
fixed to the prisoner's chest
while he sat hooded and strapped to a chair
in a room with white cinderblock walls.
The reporter did not mention the convict's footwear.
Perhaps he walked barefooted through the sandbags
to that high-backed throne on its little pedestal
facing the gun port slit, flexing his toes
to catch the last curve of the earth, observers in their places,
the firing squad trooping in,
regulation footwear spit and polished for the occasion.
Later they would have crunched across the gravel yard
to their cars, ignoring the chanters
with their megaphones and placards at the gate.
Another caller to the show
wondered what all the fuss was about.

Gerard Hanberry

NIGHT-CALLERS

I haven't been back since, can't face it,
came here straight from the hospital.
It's alright but full of old crocks,
I'm one now myself, I suppose.
The surgeon did his best but the fingers
never came right after the lump-hammer.
I can handle a spoon but not a cup
and the knife and fork bests me.
I'll manage, but when I think
of Maura's lovely dishes,
the way she kept her plates so nice on the dresser,
the lot smashed to smithereens – No,
I could never darken that door again.
The Sergeant calls in if he's passing,
brings me a little drop,
tells me the night-callers are still at it.

Allison Long

blue eyes

blue eyes
and still you insist
something other
blue eyes
and still you see
nothing else
blue eyes
and still you declare
unremarkable
blue eyes
and still you crave
deeper meaning
blue eyes
and still you demand
better
blue eyes
and still you can't
love me
just me and that blue.
me.
the girl you promised
everything
and yet nothing at all
that blue
you know the one
mine
and no one else
me.
who waited for you
waited
and kept waiting
that blue
the type you find
never
except that once
me.
the one you didn't
want
but you needed
that blue was me.

you.
that broke the pattern
shattered
into tiny blue china

Allison Long

Epitaph

I would not know your face
though it hovers in the corner
of my left eye in fragments of memory
closing in where the pain is sharpest

did I meet your mother?
were we holding hands?
that story – it was about you.
you leapt from my first story window
to watch the fireworks and when
it rained, your body was a dark silhouette
against the smoke and steel and sky
you never came home
though I'm sure you were there
while I slept
Did we love each other?
Were your eyes green or were mine?
I can't seem to remember.

Margaretta D'Arcy

Girl Angst

I sit on a rock in my brand new frock
Watching the world go by
Oh me, oh my
Why does the world
Not stop to look at me
Sitting on my rock
With my brand new frock?
Oh me, oh my
Should I begin to cry?
Or maybe cry?
Or better sigh
A better still die.
So that someone passing by
Might stop and ask me why?
So that then I would not be
Just watching the world go by
In my frock on a rock;
For the world would be watching me
And watching my rock
And watching my brand new frock
And how happy the world would be
To look at me so, and see.
No need to sigh.
No need to cry,
Or even die.

Margaretta D'Arcy

Hymn

We're wild and we're wicked, we're wanton and wilful,
As we spin through the city proclaiming our madness,
We will not be quiet, we've discovered our wildness
And our leaping and lurching and lustings unending.

We'll lustily slash as we wander and wonder:
We will not be controlled in our roving and raging,
Our passion, compassion, fanatic obsession,
Eyes open reviling our being unyielding.

We're wild and we're wicked, we're wanton and wilful,
As we spin through the city acclaiming our madness.
We will not be quiet; we've discovered our wildness,
Our lurching and lustings, our hurlings and whirlings.

Margaretta D'Arcy

Valentine

For JOHN 2008

Fifty-one years old
fifty-one years
sharing your bed.
If I ask for your food
it is as if I have been somewhat lewd,
a spasm crosses your face
and a hand goes out to grasp the plate
as if stray food
is more sacred than your bed:
it is your Space.
Well, after fifty-one years
I can hardly begin to shed tears
but enjoy what I can
with my very peculiar man
who is not so fat
but not yet as thin as a match:
two-and-a-half more stones of flesh
than that I vowed to cherish all my life.
Maybe it is a bonus
when the nights are cold:
I am cherished
in your arms and your fold?

Pete Mullineaux

Requiem

The cows have gathered in an adjacent field,
I can see their shapes in the moonlight –
a meeting of the tribes, they are here in their multiplicity;
black, brown, black and white – some all white,
like ghosts, or recent converts.

Just now I heard a moan from one of them
that had me awake as if I had been shot.
It's the night before their calves are taken,
they know from the look in the farmer's eyes.
They call him by name
although it sounds like 'moo' to us.

I listen at the window to their keening –
we make recordings of whales and dolphins,
say they are a higher species
as close to us as nature gets –
but the cows are singing in their camp,
refusing to be cattle
marking their loss
celebrating the grass
thanking the rain.

The females, even the males most of the time
are gentle, considerate, abiding.

But tonight the cows have run out of patience,
can ruminate no longer; they sing
their mass; make ready for battle,
tomorrow they will paint themselves red –
attack.

Pete Mullineaux

Salthill Air Show

Looking out across the Bay,
something brushes my cheek – such cheek!
swallows and martins, bank, manoeuvre – switch
flight paths to avoid near fatal collisions;
displaying pale under-bellies, gun-metal backs
they follow the ragged contour of rocks
linked and guided by some other sense
beyond our limited radar –
the only air show in town.

Robert Jocelyn

PLAYA

Stones
Burnished a glistening black
Are dragged cart-wheeling into the surf
To be tossed, tumbled and dallianced with
Until the next tidal surge
Frog-marches them up onto the sand
Only to undertow them back again
Playthings

Robert Jocelyn

THE LAND

I sat by the tide pool down by the shore
And watched the winkles and limpets
Labour their way up the granite rocks,
Motivated by some primeval urge.

Then looked up to where our forerunners
Had edged up the hill, over other ancient works,
To leave their quilted corrugations
As a reminder to those of us who follow.

Not knowing nor seeking any other way,
More owned than owning the land in those far off days,
Their wheals now wait for a new, stronger skin to grow
And cover the broken-toothed ruins and scars of blinding toil.

The current surged through the pool, while nearby,
An old matted dog got up, stretched, then shook itself.

Jean Andrews

Ventilation

My mother's was the kind of world
in which something was always to blame.
So, when it came to dying,
without a thought,
she pinned it on us,
swearing we made her climb a huge great tree
when she should have been on her sick bed
and kept her there until she was all out of breath
and the only possible conclusion
was early, untimely death;
that we put her on a patch of green lawn
and made her run on the spot
and jump about until her insides burst
and she fell down
and down into unconsciousness.
She'd change the lock
on the front door when she got home
and that'd fix us,
she said.

Jean Andrews

Lipoczi

Lipoczi,
an alien name
in a Church of Ireland graveyard,
in the walled, portcullised portion
at the back of the church.

Shouldn't it be with the Catholic brethren
on the sunny slope at the front?
He was a Polish Second World War pilot
after all?

But Iris was the wife of Lipoczi
and she had the right to be buried there,
even if her workmates couldn't come in for the funeral
but huddled on the steps instead,
furtive, grieving, defiant,
half in, half beyond
obeisance.

My grandparents lie behind the lych gate
and my uncles who died before the First World War,
also my aunt, their sister,
who lived to see the American bombardment of Kandahar.

Oh, and my mother was one who mourned from the threshold
with her comrades, all those years before.

Kate O'Shea

The Trout

He gripped her
like a trout
from a running dream.

Pressing fingers
there, between
clammy gills.

Hanging above her,
slow-moving
as the evening sky.

Her body surged,
gulping him
like mayfly.

Kate O'Shea

Fish

She wanted to be shaped
like a beer glass.
Round and bulbous
foamy at the mouth
and mouth.

Something he would dip
finger into.
Leave dints in her
skin like blisters.
Only deeper.

She wanted to be gulped
behind lips and teeth.
Slide down throat,
then in belly
become fish.

Patrick Deeley

Axe

Not deep, this digging of a space for a bus shelter,
no big rupture, the effect of an eggshell
breaking under the drill, shards of footpath, soft
subsoil, pebbles and grit. You find resemblances –
a rib, a femur, a skull – bits and pieces
you suspect won't remember us after we are done
with waiting, with articulating heaven
as a sunny day, a win at the races, a lover's kiss.
Cars whizz the N6, everything looking easy-peasy,
the slick, mesmeric roll of Esker Riada
west to Galway, east to Dublin, so all-fired seamless.
But what's left is the stone axe the last man
dropped who knows how many centuries ago, maybe
on a grub-break or by his children or his
enemy called away – take it, natural as a handshake.

Patrick Deeley

Sub-fossil Tree Shore

Incongruous, of course, to find trees with their roots in the sea,
but then these are dead and branchless
whom only the barnacles take to and the salt sprays foliate.
Soft soap ebb slop slides among them;
the clay-stinting rocks won't grow them back. If I press
for metaphor, they leave me slack. And if
my mind goes worrying the lost woods of Connemara and Clare,
I'm still slipped by pine-stump remnants
of primeval forest all buttoned and coated with bladder-wrack.

Jean Folan

WOODQUAY PANORAMA

I stand at the Bish boat slip, scullers skim by the Pillars.
Swans, ducks, gulls gather, gray waters etch Galway.
Lifebelts hang by the weir over the uneven thrum
of an unseen cascade. A distant drone of traffic,
grey and blue buildings, the Cathedral mass looms.
Nee-naw, Nee naw, increasing volume, incessant intensity.
Past the white colonnades of the Salmon Weir Bridge
a fluorescent ambulance stutters through hidden traffic.
At the same time: reverberations over the copper cupola
of University College; a dark speck enlarges. Overhead
a red and white bird turns towards the concealed hospital.
The rotating noise of helicopter blades scythe my mind.
Smell of fresh cut grass. Stench of acrid bird shit.
Two swans glide, trail V shaped ripples.
I am mesmerised by the confluence of wakes.

Jean Folan

A PAIR OF NECKLACES

I loved the first,
a golden torc
with crescent moons
placed with gentle hands.
His finger pads lingered,
brushed my delicate skin.
The second,
I wish to forget.
A tight black band,
clamped hands,
fingertips crushing,
I struggled. Do bruises
still colour my neck?
He claimed it was a dream
but it was my nightmare
when the torc of his love
became the black choker.

Liz Quirke

Ashes

When I die, bring me to the lake
and pour me in. Don't scatter.
I want my toes to mingle
with the clay at the bottom.
I will become part of the sediment,
constant and forgotten.

And fish will nibble on my innards
and transport me to tables
all around Boluisce,
as a reminder to torchlight
poachers that they can never know
exactly what they're eating.

My hair will sway among the rushes,
caressing the soggy shore.
My shoulders will fall into holes
left by bedraggled cattle
trying to water themselves.

My heart, I want you to lob
into the middle of the lake
like a stone wrapped in a letter,
where a salmon will find it
and make it its own.

All this, love, so when you sit
in the damp, my hair will
brush your hand and my heart
will graze your hook.
and the wind will carry my mouth
saying "catch me, I'm yours."

Mairéad Donnellan

Buried

I thought it was only me
who didn't revisit the house
with too many rooms,
who put myself out by miles
when old enough to drive.

Seems you too don't bare your legs
since that summer,
you keep your key on the inside,
despise the smell of Smithwick's,
pipe smoke, and cologne you cannot name.

In whispers we recall a parlour
where rosebuds climbed the walls,
while we dialed home on his old black phone,
our ringing, ringing, ringing,
never picked up.

Stephen Byrne

Sea

I have always been scared of you,
your lust for sand,
your uncontrollable moods.
You open your jaws
in view of the naked hills,
the fertile gift of life
from the Corrib's great gob,
feeds your gaping belly,
but I know in your wave
and the froth
from your sobbing mouth,
you howl the grief of night,
ignite the horror of dawn.

From this balcony
not for the first time,
swarms an eager crew.
From this balcony
boats lose purpose
and the chopper's light
slays the Corrib's groan,
devourer of broken minds
and troubled youth.

Sea, I have always been scared of you,
your charm of the tender heart.
Wrecks, reeds and shells,
you spread your ocean of sorrow,
and in the fall of this dead night
with salt and stone
you will eat skin and bones
of a beaten stranger
and never know
the laughter of that child.

From this balcony
the sea doesn't know nor care.
Its soft music of high tide
draws the string of the cello,
and its moan shapes tears

from the well of my eyes
for the mourn of the mother
and the father's face of stone,
the brothers and sisters
canto procession of prayer.

Yes the sea commands
from this balcony
tonight,
the sea commands.

Mary Ellen Fean

CHE

Imagine if you had gone north that time
In Sixty-seven, not west to Kilkee
The Movement of July 27
might have begun
in Derry or Belfast instead of Cuba;
if you'd stayed, invoked the Irish
grandmother rule, sought asylum
El Commandant's revolution would have been ours.
It's a good time for a return,
now we've run
out of heroes, sold out patriots
traded them for star-makers.
We're selling everything,
the highest bidder your old
adversary;
America has found a chink in our
Too-green soul –
So welcome home,
Ernesto,
They won't murder you a second time.

Peter O'Neill

Leo

It is raining on the flowers like a funeral.
When it stops the vapour will arise like smoke
on the road in the sunlight.
There is an old man sitting alone inside an empty bar.
His thoughts are spinning inside his mind
like pennies upon the counter.
Memories are an irritant to him as a dog is to a flea.
He scratches them with his tongue
and the words pour out of his mouth
as graceful as a dictator's pas de deux.
With them he brings to the floor a forlorn stage show.
The muppets appear before you in single file,
you can see them all so clearly that you accidentally bump
into the wardrobe lady.
They are all made up of old hair and skin
and some of them are sewn up like old battered teddies.
On this particular day they are all to be found dancing
outside The College of Surgeons.
There is an accordionist playing Freight Train Rock.
The stoker fuels it all with vodka and red.

Gerry Galvin

Weather on a Summer Afternoon

After a shower
Hedgerow tear spills
Over scrambled thorn
Bumble bee berating
Rising meadowsweet
Soufflé from the sun's oven.

After a shower
Meddling in undergrowth
Dog rose gasps in
A writhe of bindweed's
Snaking intentions
Choking air.

After a shower
Snapped in jaws of secrecy
Scouting fox grinds out
Ins and outs of weather
Murder in the hedgerows
Phantoms in the grass.

After a shower
Young elder's pride
Foam dancing to a blur
Apogee descending
Summer calendar's brief
Berry days to fall.

Gerry Galvin

REFERENDUM

The day of the referendum –
Austerity or Stability,
Europe or Armageddon –
I picked fruit for jam,
an old recipe, half gooseberry, half rhubarb,
the sour pair submitting to sugar,
a sweetener, a bailout
on the way to preservation;
jam for the bread
on cold winter mornings
when all that can be expected
from any direction
are the unknowable secrets
of bitter changing winds.

Luke Morgan

Amendment

One by one, fireplaces
drift into hibernation.
Merchants re-open market stalls,
tulips gently hatch
as unclenched fists.
The days stretch their arms
and head off to work, whistling.
Winter is now only a trickle
in a mountain stream, dashing
headlong into lakes
where it will plot again
its rise.
Beavers begin the workings of dams
and snow cowers in the shade
as a new sun strides to the sky,
pulling Spring
on a washing line behind it.

Luke Morgan

First Music

Was it water, its gentle sonata
over percussions of stone
on a wide-mountain score?
Was it air, simple sift
through trees – a sonar flute
through the strings?
Was it fire, rhythmic spit
and cello drone
that predicted the first gramophone?
Or crescendos at camp edge
where a mother's heavings
leave in their wake
a newborn's trickling cry?

Sarah Clancy

Beetroot Soup

This was one of those scrapey awkward days
and I was one of the squinters who frowned sideways
at it not prepared to look at anything directly.
You were one of the wardens, the guardians
checking that things were progressing as
they should be and I sat in my habitual seat
in my usual Cafe and kept my cranky head down
in the paper while you leaned on the counter
and watched me. I felt it on my neck hairs where
it landed and so I murmured fake approval for
the photos of some small-faced politician and
I perused the ads for gadgets that could be used
to improve my golf swing or those beige all in one
leisure suits that I can't imagine anyone wearing,
and I spooned my soup up feigning unfelt relish
for my audience when in fact I consumed it like a duty
instead of appreciating its exoticism and it
was beetroot thyme and ginger, but on a day like this;
a day for not feeling, for not even being it would take
Jalapeño peppers to break through my defences
to surmount my down-day survival mechanisms,
so it was odd then that I found my throat burning
and eyes watering when you said 'listen sorry
for interrupting, pet, but is anything the matter?'

Her sisters remember it differently

But then again she would wouldn't she? The ones who are older say their little sister bore the brunt of it though he doesn't see it like that. She prefers to dance in the kitchen with both parents singing and her up late on a school night when she should have been sleeping, but they said they were in training for Broadway, for stardom and not to tell anyone. She prefers stowaway games where they hid in the attic as quiet as mice, as mice, as meeses, she likes better the adventures she invented at Granny's while her mother was away singing Opera, in Paris or London or Rome, and she prefers how important she felt in the schoolyard when the others were taunting but she was the one in the know that the reason her Da had got scarcer was because of his extremely important work as a spy and if she said where he was to anyone they all might die and she'd crossed her heart anyways so she wasn't saying, she likes to remember reciting poems she'd learned off in school to pirates on shore leave down at the bar in the docks, how her Da had brought her and none of her sisters and how that night he'd held her so tightly and not let her get further in case those seafaring varmints would steal her and make her queen of the seas but he wouldn't let them, no chance of it, not in his lifetime; he'd slay 'em like dragons, like vagabonds and he'd brought her up main street where they'd sat in the church and lit candles till she started to shiver and he'd sworn she was destined for fortune, for magnificence even if he did say so himself and she liked remembering that bit, she repeated it often, like when

they brought her to visit her mother she'd say
Ma we're going to be magnificent aren't we? and they'd all laugh
while her mother would hug her.
But her sisters remember it differently.

Cúirt International Festival of Literature

About Cúirt:

Cúirt International Festival of Literature is a six day international literary event that takes place in Galway every April. Over the past 28 years Cúirt has become one of the world's best known literary events. It attracts writers and visitors from all corners of the world to enjoy Galway's unique creative atmosphere. Literature is one of the areas where Ireland is a world leader and Cúirt makes a vital contribution to our national reputation and provides Galway audiences with the best of writing talent. Previous guests include: Allen Ginsberg, John Banville, David Mitchell, Ian McEwan, Lorrie Moore, Amy Bloom, Margaret Atwood, Carol Ann Duffy, Billy Collins and many more. The Cúirt programme includes poetry and prose readings, discussion events, book signings and launches, children's and young people's events, spoken word, poetry slams, music, theatre and visual art exhibitions. Cúirt is known internationally for its warm and attentive audiences.

Our Location:

Cúirt is situated in the West of Ireland, one of the most scenic areas in the country which massively benefits the festival and adds to its appeal. Galway city is a coastal, cultural hotspot full of character and charm. Visitors are captivated by its vibrant centre, particularly, the Latin Quarter and the range of bars, shops, fine restaurants and cafés. Cúirt authors often visit the Aran Islands or the Burren while here and the festival helps arrange itineraries for people to get in as much as they can while in the west. Cúirt is Galway's first festival of the year.

Programme 2013

In 2013, Cúirt will present a programme of renowned writers from home and abroad over the six day event. This year's festival will also include a new EU cultural initiative: The Crossroads of European Literature. This project has Cúirt teaming up with literary festivals in Slovenia and Italy to strengthen writer collaborations and encourage visitors. The opening day of the festival will be dedicated to this strand of programming. There will be an official launch of the project in the City Hall, followed by a literary outing to Moran's of the Weir where there will be readings from Irish poet Colm Breathnach, Bulgarian guest Rumen Leonidov and Italian writer Davide Rondoni. In the evening, a seminar event will take place in the Slate Room at Busker Browne's, chaired by Vilenica Literary Festival Director: Gasper Troha.

This year Cúirt will officially open on Wednesday 24th April with Irish Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney and poet Michael Longley. Other festival highlights include: American poet Sharon Olds, who will make her first appearance at Cúirt, Irish author Edna O'Brien, who will be doing a retrospective interview with Vincent Woods following the publication of her memoir *Country Girl*. Claire Keegan, Ron Rash, A.M. Homes, and a long list of others will take to the stage

over the course of the week. There will be a Random House crime panel discussion chaired by Irish crime writer Arlene Hunt on Saturday 27th April and the programme will also include theatre, visual art, book launches, workshops and music/song events.

Outreach Activities:

Cúirt will also continue its outreach programme. The festival is now in its third year of running events in the wider Galway city area and in Galway county. This stream of programming, initiated in 2011 has gone from strength to strength and has generated new audiences for the festival as well as making the festival more visible and accessible. This year Cúirt will host events in Cnoic Suain, Spiddal, Carraroe, GMIT and the annual Kitchen Readings, which will feature author and playwright Michael Harding.

The Cúirt Labs:

A new young people's programme: 'The Cúirt Labs' will take place at the Galway Arts Centre this year. It is a special programme of events curated and organised by Cúirt Director Dani Gill and Visual Art Curator Maeve Mulrennan. Number 47, Dominick Street, will become a custom made space for creativity and fun. The programme will follow a conference format where children will attend a series of events over a period of hours. Session length will vary and events will include workshops, talks and hands on activities. A host of authors, illustrators, theatre practitioners, graphic novelists and practitioners from other creative disciplines have been lined up for the three day event that will cater for both primary school and secondary school level.

Launch of the Cúirt Visitor Programme:

In 2013 Cúirt will launch an International Visitors Programme. The festival will be hosting delegates from the UK, Europe, Canada and the US for three days during the festival. This group will include: editors, publishers, literary agents, publicists and book enthusiasts. The Visitor Programme will include local sightseeing and hospitality as well as participation in festival activities. The list of guests for this year will appear on the festival website: www.cuirt.ie

For further information on Cúirt please contact us on:

091 565886 / info@galwayartscentre.ie / www.cuirt.ie

Or download the festival app this year available from the Apple Store.

Galway farewells a champion of Irish food

(Gerry Galvin, who introduced a new eating experience to Galway)

When the late and much loved Gerry Galvin and his wife Marie opened Drimcong restaurant near Moycullen in the 1980s, Gerry came with the glowing accolade as one of Ireland’s leading chefs.

The couple had run the famous Vintage restaurant in Kinsale, and the reputation of the Kinsale restaurants, and its renowned Kinsale Gourmet Festival, left mouths watering in the rest of the island. Yes, we had some good food emporiums in the west, but, to be honest, no matter how hard Galway and Clifden chefs tried to vary their menu, men usually went for a decent large steak, chips and onions, while the more dainty sex opted for fish.

Initially Drimcong food was disappointing. The menu required several readings. But something very new, and unusual, was happening. There was much emphasis on the word organic, fresh, and traditional. What did that mean? Many Galway people loved oysters, but here oysters were offered with Clonakilty black pudding, with an onion and apple sauce. Surely some mistake?

There were potted patés, and pea soups, baked fish gateau (another mistake?), a spiced roast pork with an apple and thyme sauce, roast duck with a pepper marmalade (that can’t be right), Moroccan and Italian ricotta, couscous and pasta, and then something simple like Marie’s brown bread, and a huge range of Irish cheeses. It was amazing. Suddenly a whole new world of food possibilities was being offered and, after an initial hesitation, Galway took to this wonderful opportunity with all the pleasure and fun that eating and enjoying food entails. Drimcong was a place apart. Associated with special events, either in family or business lives, where food and service were always guaranteed to be a singular and a unique celebration.

I don’t think Galway restaurants were the same since. Yes, you can still get delicious Irish steak, but Drimcong led the way to a whole new eating experience which has given Galway a succession of top-quality restaurants offering innovative and beautifully presented food.

Gerry was an extraordinary creative man. He continued to receive every great honour imaginable, culminating in the Egon Ronay Chef of the year in 1994. After he had prepared dinner and, while guests were finishing up, Gerry would appear in

immaculate white jacket and talk to everyone. You could see that was one of his favourite times.

He was born in Drumcollogher, west Limerick, and enjoyed Percy French's song of the same name. He studied catering at the famous Shannon Hotel School, and with his talents under his hat, he travelled extensively. He met Marie while working in South Africa, and they decided to return to Ireland to work at Acton's in Kinsale. It was an exciting time. With Brian Cronin and others, they brought all the local restaurants together, and set up the very successful Kinsale Gourmet Festival.

After 12 years there, and with a growing family, Cristina, John and Jennie, they came to Galway, bought Drimcong, a county home where the children had space and fields to enjoy their childhood.

Then after 18 years working hard, Gerry and Marie sold Drimcong, and we were all envious when the two of them went off for almost a year in a camper-van exploring southern Europe.

But the food industry was not finished with Gerry even then. Just last May Euro-Toques Ireland (originally established by Myrtle Allen “to protect food quality and culinary traditions of Ireland”, gave him a special award for his Outstanding Contribution to Irish Food.

Gerry loved food, but he also loved poetry, producing his own volume of poems, *No Recipe*, which was launched by Michael D Higgins, the poet and President, in Sheridan's on the Docks.

Then another surprise. In the autumn of 2011 he launched a witty and sardonic crime thriller *Killer a la Carte*, about a restaurant critic (Gerry did not have much time for restaurant critics), called James Livingston Gall, who is also a cunning serial murderer. Were all restaurant critics murderers? I asked him. Gerry just smiled.

It was a great read, and I understand another volume was under way. Sadly that is not to be. At the Requiem Mass in a packed Oughterard Church on Monday, where the service was jointly celebrated by Fr Allen and the Rev Anthony Previte, I was pleased to see among the crowd of hoteliers, chefs and friends, the face of Pat Mullan, an award winning American-Irish crime writer. Obviously Mullen saw the artist in Gerry.

Biographical Notes

Laurie Allen holds an MA in Health Promotion from NUI Galway, and a BA in Anthropology and Communications from Goldsmith University, London. She worked as a Health Promotion Tutor with HSE, and in various film projects, including co-producer for *Welcome To Our World*.

Jean Andrews was born in Co Clare and educated at NUI Galway and the University of Nottingham where she teaches Hispanic Studies. *In an Oubliette* was published in 2005 (Arima). Her translations of the Spanish poet, Carmen Conde and her second collection will appear in 2013.

Kernan Andrews is from Galway. He is the Arts Editor and Political Correspondent for the Galway Advertiser newspaper. He holds an MA in English and a H-Dip in Applied Communications (Journalism) from NUI Galway.

John Arden (1930-2012) At his death, he was lauded as “one of the most significant British playwrights of the late 1950s and early 1960s”. He was elected to Aosdána in 2011. John Arden and his wife Margaretta D’Arcy are internationally known for their contribution to literature and social politics.

Eva Bourke is originally from Germany but has lived in Ireland most of her life. She has published six collections of poetry, most recently *Piano* (May 2011, Dedalus Press, Dublin). She teaches in the MfA program at NUI Galway, has received numerous awards and bursaries from the Arts Council and is a member of Aosdána.

Stephen Byrne is originally from Dublin and now lives in Galway. His work has been published in various places in Ireland and recently or forthcoming in *Emerge Literary Journal*, *The Dead Beats*, *Crack the Spine* and *The Rusty Nail*. He was a featured reader at the *Over The Edge* readings and was shortlisted for the *Over The Edge Poetry* competition 2011.

Sarah Clancy lives in Galway. She has written two collections of poetry, *Stacey and the Mechanical Bull* (Lapwing Press 2011) and *Thanks for Nothing, Hippies* (Salmon Poetry 2012). She collaborated with fellow Galwegian Elaine Feeney on the poetry CD *Cinderella Backwards* that they released earlier this year. Sarah has won or been shortlisted for several performances and written poetry prizes and had her work published widely.

Trevor Conway has been based in Galway since 2005. He has an MA in Writing from NUI Galway, and is a freelance editor, working on poetry, fiction, non-fiction and academic texts. His collection of poems, *Evidence of Freewheeling*, will be published by Salmon Poetry in 2013.

Emily Cullen is an Irish writer, arts manager, harpist and scholar, currently based in Melbourne. She was the inaugural Arts Officer of NUI Galway. Her poem *Primavera* was recently chosen as ‘poem of the week’ by the Australian Poetry organisation. *No Vague Utopia* (Ainnir), her first collection, was

published in 2003 and her second collection is forthcoming from Arlen House.

Margaretta D’Arcy (b. 1934) is an Irish actress, writer, playwright, and peace-activist. Margaretta is a member of Aosdána since its inauguration and is known for addressing Irish nationalism, civil liberties, and women’s rights in her work. Married in 1957 to English playwright and author John Arden, they frequently collaborated.

Patrick Deeley was born in Loughrea, Co Galway. Five collections of his poems have appeared from Dedalus Press. Three further works of fiction for younger readers have appeared from O’Brien Press in recent years. His *Groundswell: New and Selected Poems* is due for publication by Dedalus Press in 2013.

Dick Donaghue has worked with many of the Arts Groups in Galway over the past 30 years, mainly, Galway Arts Center, Macnas, Galway Theatre Workshop and The Film Resource Center. He has published two children’s books with An Gúm, one of which was featured on RTE television. His play *Explorers* was produced in the Town Hall Studio.

Mairéad Donnellan lives in Bailieborough, Co Cavan. Her poetry has appeared in *Windows Anthology*, *Crannóg*, *Boyne Berries*, *Revival*, *The Moth* and is forthcoming in *Skylight Poets*.

Dave Duggan is a dramatist and novelist, living in Derry. The Guardian described his first novel, *The Greening of Larry Mahon* (Guildhall Press, 2004), as ‘an engrossing study of shifting footlessness.’ He was awarded a Major Arts Award by the Northern Ireland Arts Council in 2010.

Tim Dwyer has recent and upcoming publications in *The Stinging Fly*, *Boyne Berries*, *Revival* and *Skylight*. He is a psychologist in a correctional facility and lives in the Hudson Valley of New York State. His mother was from Gort and his father was from the farm country near Loughrea. He recently returned to writing after many years.

Kate Ennals is currently doing the MA in Writing in NUI Galway. She has lived in Ireland (Dublin, Cavan, and Galway) for the last 20 years, and worked as a co-coordinator and manager in various anti-poverty and community sector programmes. Kate was shortlisted in the Desmond O’Grady Poetry competition in 2012.

Michael Farry, a native of Co Sligo, has lived in Trim since 1970. His first poetry collection, *Asking for Directions*, was published by Doghouse Books in 2012. He is also a historian and his book *Sligo, The Irish Revolution 1912-1923* has just been published by Four Courts Press.

Mary Ellen Fean lives in Shannon, Co Clare. Her work has appeared in *The SHOp*, *Revival*, *The Clare Champion*, and she was shortlisted for The Desmond O’Grady Poetry Award 2012. She has read her work widely.

Jean Folan lives in Inishcrone, Co Sligo. She is a student on the MA in Writing at NUI Galway. A featured reader at *Over The Edge* 2007. Winner, Culture Night 2010 Ballina, Co Mayo. Runner-up Culture Night 2012, Galway. Her

first collection of poetry *Between Time* will be published by Lapwing in 2013.

Adrian Frazier is a graduate of Pomona College (BA 1971), Trinity College Dublin (Diploma in Anglo Irish Literature, 1973), and Washington University in St. Louis (MA 1976; PhD 1979). He has been on the faculty at Nanjing Teachers University (1979-81), Union College in New York (1981-2000), and the National University of Ireland at Galway.

Maureen Gallagher lives in Galway. Her first collection of poetry, *Calling the Tune*, was published by Wordsonthestreet Press in December 2008. She has won many awards for her work. In 2011 she won The Goldsmith Poetry Award and came second in the Swift Satire Award.

Gerry Galvin lives in Oughterard, Co Galway. He is a chef and former restaurateur, author of two cookbooks, *The Drimcong Food Affair* and *Everyday Gourmet*. His first poetry collection, *No Recipe*, launched in Galway by Michael D. Higgins, was published by Doire Press in 2010. *Killer A La Carte*, Gerry's debut novel was published in 2011.

Nicola Geddes is originally from Scotland, living in Ireland for many years. She is a musician, a published writer and teacher. She lives with her family in Moycullen, Co Galway.

Ndrek Gjini is an Albanian journalist and poet living in Ireland. He is author of books published in Albanian and English. He holds an MA in Writing from NUI Galway. He worked for Galway City Council as Arts Office Assistant, and currently works as Managing Editor for *The Galway Review*.

Gerard Hanberry is an award winning poet and writer who lives in Galway. His fourth collection of poetry is to be published by Salmon in 2013. This follows *At Grattan Road* (2009). In 2011, The Collins Press published Hansberry's biography of Oscar Wilde and the Wilde family, *More Lives Than One – The Remarkable Wilde Family Through the Generations*.

Máire Holmes *Joy* (selected poetry) was launched in September 2012 at International Culture Night, as part of Over The Edge and is available online from Kenny's Bookshop, Galway, Ireland. She has an MA in Writing from the National University of Ireland, Galway.

Anne Irwin was born in Ballyhaunis, Co Mayo, Ireland. She studied English and Philosophy in the National University of Ireland, Galway and is a practicing homeopath and teacher. She published in ROPES magazine and in Emerge Literary Magazine.

Ann Henning Jocelyn grew up in her native Sweden and finished her education in England. Since the mid 1980s, after marrying fellow-author the Earl of Roden, she has been based mainly in the West of Ireland, writing eight books and three more stage plays, which have been published/produced in a number of countries.

Robert Jocelyn returned to Ireland in 1995. With his wife, Ann Henning Jocelyn, he set up the Doonreagan writers' centre in Cashel, Connemara. His books

and lectures cover a wide range of historical subjects. Once a mountaineer he now sails his own Galway Hooker.

Fred Johnston is an Irish writer, journalist and musician. Currently he lives in Galway. He is author of many books and received the Hennessy Literary Award for prose in 1972, and Sunday Independent Short Story and Poem of the Month awards. He was Writer-in-Residence to the Princess Grace Irish Library at Monaco.

Miceál Kearney lives in Co Galway. He has published in Ireland, England and America. He read as part of Poetry Ireland's Introduction Series 2009. Doire Press published his 1st collection *Inheritance* in 2008.

Des Kenny, a member of the Kenny bookselling family in Galway, was educated in Coláiste Iognáid, Gaillimh, NUI Galway and the Sorbonne, Paris. He has been a bookseller, real and virtual, all his working life. He and his wife Anne have four grown-up children and live in Salthill, Galway.

John Kenny is a graduate of the National University of Ireland (BA 1992, PhD 2002). He is a regular reviewer of new writing for The Irish Times. Relevant teaching interests include modern world fiction, contemporary Irish fiction, literary theory, and the history of criticism with special relation to literary journalism and book-reviewing.

Allison Long is from Virginia and holds an MA in Writing from NUI Galway. She writes fiction and poetry and contributes book reviews to her local newspaper. She currently lives in Newport, Virginia.

Pd Lyons' work has appeared in many magazines and zines throughout the world. Two collections of work have been published by Lapwing Belfast. Originally from the US, he has been a resident of Ireland for years now.

Uinseann Mac Thómais is a former civil servant. Formerly of Roinn na Gaeltachta. He is currently on the board of Taibhdhearc na Gaillimhe, the National Irish Theatre, Gaillimh le Gaeilge, and Dúchas na Gaillimhe. Tá cónaí air i gCnoc na Cathrach ó 1983 lena bhean Gearóidín, a iníonacha Katie agus Louise, an cat agus na madraí.

Mary Madec has a BA and MA from NUI Galway and a PhD from The University of Pennsylvania. She has published poems here and abroad and in 2008 she won The Hennessy Prize for Emerging Poetry. In 2010 her first collection *In Other Words* was published by Salmon Poetry.

Adrian Martyn was born in Galway in 1975. He is author of some thirty articles on local and family genealogy. *The Tribes of Galway: Volume One 1124-1642* is due out in 2013.

Jack McCann is a plastic surgeon and former lecturer. Much of his poetry is inspired by his work in Ireland, Albania and Kosovo. He has published two poetry collections, *Turning On A Sixpence* (2011), *Escaped Thoughts* (2012), and is a contributor to *Off The Cuff* (2012), a collection of poems and short stories by KARA Writer's Group.

Neil McCarthy is an Irish poet. In recent years he has lived in Vienna where he continued to write and submit poems. He is a passionate performer of his

work and is in the process of releasing a CD recorded live in Vienna with some musicians. He currently lives with his wife in Los Angeles where he works as a teacher.

David J McDonagh is an Irish poet living in Tuam, Co Galway. He has his work published in many literary magazines here in Ireland and abroad. He previously published poetry on-line under the name Joseph Maximilian.

Luke Morgan is an Irish poet. He was the winner in his category for the inaugural Poetry Ireland/Trócaire competition for his poem *Atlas*. In 2012, Windows Publications featured a small collection of his poetry as part of their tenth anniversary edition. He lives in Galway.

Louis Mulcahy. Tá dánta Louis Mulcahy foilsithe i roinnt duanairí. Bhain sé amach an gearrliosta do chúigear i gcomórtas Bailiúcháin as Béarla i Lios Tuathail i 2008 agus arís i 2010. Beidh a chéad chnuasach filíochta. Tá sé pósta leis an Ealaíontóir Táipéis, Lisbeth Mulcahy. Is breá leis a bheith ag déanamh glóir.

Pete Mullineaux has published three collections. He has been anthologised widely in Ireland, UK, USA & France including Poetry Ireland Review 100 (Ed. Paul Muldoon), the websites www.poetrydaily.com, www.about.com/poetry & Van Gogh's Ear in Paris. He has also had a number of plays produced for the stage and RTE radio.

Maeve Mulrennan is 30 years old and based in the West of Ireland. She is currently the curator for Galway Arts Centre. She has studied in Limerick School of Art & Design, NUI Galway and IADT Dun Laoghaire. She was long listed for the Doire Press Chapbook competition in 2011.

Mary Murray lives in Galway for some time. She has BA Honours and a Masters in English Literature. She is a member of Skylight Poets, and has been published in *Behind The Masks*, *Mosaic*, and the Literary magazine Skylight 47.

Peter O'Neill is currently doing an MA in Comparative Literature at Dublin City University. He lived and worked in France and enjoyed reading Baudelaire, Beckett, Rimbaud and Proust very much. He had written some poems in French and now he is learning Italian. Dante is also his great love.

Kate O'Shea lives in Dublin. She was shortlisted for the Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Award 2012. She has been published in *Icarus*, *Acorn*, *Electric Acorn*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Burning Bush*, *Riposte*, *Poetry on the Lake – Silver Wyvern Anthology* (Italy), and *Poetry.com*. *Shamrock Haiku*, *Poetry Bus*, *Outburst Magazine*, *First Cut*, *CANCAN* (Scotland), *Lucid Rhythms* (USA).

Liz Quirke is from Tralee, Co Kerry and lives in Spiddal, Co Galway. She won the 2012 Edmund Spenser Poetry Competition at the Doneraile Literary and Arts Festival and was shortlisted in the Over The Edge New Writer Of The Year Competition 2012.

EM Reapy is a Mayo writer and has an MA in Creative Writing from Queen's University, Belfast. In 2012, she was chosen as Tyrone Guthrie's Exchange Irish Writer to Varuna Writers' House Sydney. She edits wordlegs.com and is

director of Shore Writers' Festival in Enniscrone. In November, in collaboration with Doire Press, she compiled and edited *30 under 30*, an anthology collection of young Irish writing. She is redrafting a feature length script at present.

Eithne Reynolds is a published writer, living and working in Dublin. She is a volunteer tutor with Fighting Words the creative writing centre in Dublin. Her poetry has been performed at many events, including the National Concert Hall in Dublin.

Moya Roddy attended the National College of Art and Trinity Arts Lab. She continued painting during a two-year stay in Italy, before moving to London where she trained as a television director at the Soho Poly. She completed an MA in Writing at NUI Galway in 2008. She collaborated with Pete Mullineaux on *Butterfly Wings*, broadcast on RTE radio in 2010 and two stage plays.

Kate Smyth was born in 1989 and is from Galway. After graduating with First Class Honours in English and Psychology at NUI Galway in 2010, she completed the MA in Writing at NUI Galway in 2011. In 2012, she moved to Dublin and achieved her second First Class Honours on the M.Phil in Literatures of the Americas course at Trinity College.

Christian Wallace was raised in West Texas. He moved to Galway in 2011 to pursue an MA in Writing. An electrician by trade, Wallace returned to Texas to work and plan his next adventure with his dog, Loretta. His poetry has appeared in *Persona*, *Words Work*, and *Wingbeats*.

John Walsh has published three collections of poetry. He is organiser of North Beach Poetry Nights and co-director of Doire Press. *Border Lines* is John's debut short story collection (Doire Press, 2012).

Ronnie O'Gorman is a recognised innovator in the media business. His newspaper, *The Galway Advertiser*, was the first free sheet in Ireland and one of the first papers to really embrace the use of colour and more telegraphic formats, content and layouts, which are now widespread in the print media business. Ronnie was born in Galway, where his family had run a successful business, printing works, bookshop and stationers since the turn of the century. He graduated in London and worked with the Westminster Press before returning to Galway in 1970 to set up the *Galway Advertiser*. The *Galway Advertiser* is today acknowledged as the leading free newspaper in Ireland.

