

**Dear The Galway Review Team,**

**9 Bealtaine 2022**

I hope everyone had a Happy Saint Patrick's Day in March and a Happy Easter in April! In case it ever interests your readers, in Ireland there is a lovely group called the St. Patrick's Missionary Society (<https://www.spms.org/>). In Northern Ireland, there's a riveting place called the St. Patrick's Centre (<https://www.saintpatrickcentre.com/>). The society and the museum are fascinating. May God bless the Irish!

I found 3 sonnets I wrote a couple of years ago and have been looking for a literary outlet to publish them. *The Galway Review* is an ideal place, since I have been publishing sonnet sequences in a manner similar to the sonnet writings of Seamus Heaney, one of my mentors. I have taken the liberty to go into detail about each of the 3 sonnets, for the benefit of readers. I would be most grateful if you might publish this cover letter, as it amounts to what might be considered a literary essay, designed to inspire and to explain. Sometimes, things are better left unsaid, so that readers can explore their own meanings of a poem. Sometimes, there is no downside to a poet shining a light on the personal dimensions of a poem. The poet John Matthias has been a guide there.

Emulating a ladies-first respect, the first sonnet is about Maureen O'Hara, an Irishwoman born in Ranelagh, a suburb of Dublin City. As a mentor Seamus Heaney worked to do in his sonnets, I emphasise the importance of place and geography in a person's life. After all, where we are from shapes who we are and who we become. As far as time and a time-frame goes, the parameters, as it were, if we can say there are parameters, are a

century, from 1920 to 2020. A biography online reads, “In 2014, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences selected O’Hara to receive the academy’s Honorary Oscar, which was presented at the annual Governor’s Awards in November that year. O’Hara became only the second actress, after Myrna Loy in 1991, to receive an Honorary Oscar without having previously been nominated for an Oscar in a competitive category.” What’s important to note here is that the Academy itself understands and realises there are performers who are as talented as those who are nominated for an Academy Award in an annual process. That’s why they go the extra mile to recognise the most talented. An Honorary Oscar is like an Honorary Doctorate, a lifetime achievement award to reward excellence at the highest level. The phrase in the poem “passion, warmth and strength” comes from an inscription on the actual award itself that was presented to Miss O’Hara.

Continuing the movie theme from the first sonnet, the second sonnet contains a variety of motifs, including one about one of my all-time favourite films, *Top Gun* (1986). But first, I’d like to explain the most personal aspect of the poem. When I was young, I used to hang out with my grandfather and other family members who were veterans of the Second World War. We would go to late-night diners, some of which were open literally all night. I would hear their war stories and gained the highest respect for what some historians call “the greatest generation”, the World War II generation who suppressed the evils of Hitler and others and uplifted and personified goodness. I use the phrase “rare hours” in a double sense: (1) very rarely did my war-veteran family members talk about their war-time experiences, because those experiences were so painful and difficult to talk about and (2) the times in which they felt most

comfortable discussing their war stories were late at night, when not many people were around. These war-torn guys would open up, since they didn't feel like they were on stage or anything like that. These Navy men would feel the "Navy Blues", a measure of sadness, depression, and sorrow, but it was cathartic and healing for them to get their thoughts and feelings out and onto the table. The sonnet carries on, then, into how I, as a California teen, would travel to the Naval Air Station in Miramar, California, the setting for the film *Top Gun*. I used to ride my motorcycle just outside of the fence that separated the military base from the rest of the world. I would re-enact a particular scene from the film, where Tom Cruise's character, Maverick, raced the jets he saw on the tarmac. That actually could be done, so I did it. The highly-skilled Blue Angels and other jet pilots would line up on the runway and increase the power of their engines and high heat and roar off into the sky, the midnight blue. In 1986, the movie *Top Gun* was one of the highest-grossing films, making \$176,781,728 in ticket-sales revenue. The idea for the film was born after a Hollywood movie producer read a 1983 article in *California* magazine, titled "Top Guns":

<http://www.topgunbio.com/top-guns-by-ehud-yonay/>

Many people do not realize that the character Charlie, played by Kelly McGillis, is based upon a real-life figure named Christine Fox, whose story, career, and life are featured on a military info. web site called Military.com and on the web site for the United States Naval Institute:

<https://www.military.com/podcasts/left-of-boom/2020/09/03/meet-real-charlie-top-gun-christine-fox.html>

<https://www.usni.org/about-us/board-directors/honorable-christine-h-fox>

I have a past connection to the Center for Naval Analyses, so writing a poem about the Navy was of particular interest also. The sequel to *Top Gun* (1986) is titled *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022), which will have a screening on 18 May at the Cannes Film Festival:

<https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/infos-communicues/communiqu/articles/top-gun-maverick-and-tom-cruise-at-the-75th-festival-de-cannes>

The movie will be released in Ireland and the United States on 27 May.

The third sonnet, “Hard Cider”, is mostly self-explanatory, but I’ll give a personal view and provide an Irish and Irish-American take. My favourite hard cider is Magners Irish Cider, and I do like to try other ciders, since hard cider is the only alcoholic beverage for which I have any taste or any interest. I’ve always believed in the motto “everything in moderation”, since it can lead to the most balanced life. On occasion, I’ve had more than just one pint, and it felt so damn good; I was not drunk or wasted, but buzzed enough to seriously ease any pain or stress. Never drink and drive! That is a big no-no. It’s not only dangerous, it’s criminal. Don’t do it. In the poem, I move from Old Testament times to New Testament times to Modern times. What might be of interest to your readers is the

geography of Irishness in America. I make specific reference to a small Irish area in the State of Missouri, just east of the major metropolis of St. Louis (or Saint Louis). From Wikipedia, I will include these statistics, because they are very interesting:

Large cities with the highest percentage of Irish ancestry:

Boston, Massachusetts 22.8%  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 16.2%  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 14.2%  
Louisville, Kentucky 13.2%  
Portland, Oregon 11.9%  
Seattle, Washington 11.65%  
Buffalo, New York 11.23%  
Nashville, Tennessee 9.8%  
Kansas City, Missouri 9.66%  
Raleigh, North Carolina 9.5%  
Cleveland, Ohio 9.43%  
Saint Paul, Minnesota - 9.4%  
Baltimore, Maryland 9.14%  
Cincinnati, Ohio 9.05%  
Austin, Texas 8.5%  
Charlotte, North Carolina 8.4%  
Chicago, Illinois 8%  
Memphis, Tennessee 7%  
New Orleans, Louisiana 6.8%

Medium-size cities:

Weymouth, Massachusetts - 45.5%  
Quincy, Massachusetts - 33.5%

Scranton, Pennsylvania - 30.3%  
Albany, New York - 18.1%  
Fayetteville, Arkansas - 15.21%  
Charleston, South Carolina - 14%  
Savannah, Georgia - 13.8%  
Knoxville, Tennessee - 13.5%  
Erie, Pennsylvania - 12.4%  
Omaha, Nebraska - 11.9%  
Syracuse, New York - 12.4%  
Columbia, South Carolina - 10.1%  
Huntsville, Alabama - 10.2%  
Little Rock, Arkansas - 9.6%  
Lowell, Massachusetts - 9.4%  
Mobile, Alabama - 8.7%  
Shreveport, Louisiana - 7%  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana - 6.4%

Small cities, towns, and villages:

Scituate, Massachusetts - 61.5%  
Holly Bluff, Mississippi - 58.33%  
Almond, North Carolina - 50%  
Salem, Alabama - 47.3%  
Braintree, Massachusetts - 46.8%  
Marshfield, Massachusetts - 46.7%  
Belmont, Louisiana - 45.56%  
Pearl River, New York - 45.75%  
Milton, Massachusetts - 44.7%  
Hull, Massachusetts - 44%  
Walpole, Massachusetts - 43.0%  
Duxbury, Massachusetts - 41.4%

Vaucluse, South Carolina - 40.62%  
Crum Lynne, Pennsylvania - 39.2%  
Gloucester City, New Jersey - 38.8%  
Fackler, Alabama - 38.16%  
Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania - 37.9%  
Cleary, Mississippi - 32.3%  
Iron City, Tennessee - 31.3%  
Oak Lawn, Illinois - 30.4%  
Waldwick, New Jersey - 30.1%  
Puckett, Mississippi - 29%  
Troy, New York - 24.3%  
Butte, Montana - 23.6%  
McEwen, Tennessee - 22.7%  
Albany, Louisiana - 22.5%  
Abbeville, Mississippi - 21.9%  
Havertown, Pennsylvania - 21.7%  
Erin, Tennessee - 21.0%  
Hester, Louisiana - 18.4%  
Hernando, Mississippi - 18.1%  
Greenwood Village, Colorado  
Brandon, Mississippi - 16.5%

I happened upon an Irish pub when I was working in St. Louis and made it a regular habit to visit this pub to read, write, and listen to live music. I loved every minute of it. Speaking of live music and now speaking of Galway, one of the best YouTube links takes one back to 1996, when one of the best guitarists, Mark Knopfler, visited Galway:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vycKbXIfGcU>

That about summarises the 3 sonnets. I went with pentameter for the 3 poems, with a mixture of free verse and rhyming. I included a new biography, different than the ones used already, since there are details I'm keen to include. Attached is a .jpg with a photo in case it's needed. I hope this letter finds everyone there in Galway doing very well!

Very sincerely,

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**Biography:**

Shane Blackman's father, John, is an Irish citizen who's taken the family to Ireland often. Shane received a BA in History and Literature from Wabash College and an MA in History from Indiana University. At Wabash, Shane won the Walter Fertig Prize for Excellence in Writing and a coveted Distinction on the college's comprehensive examinations. He has been Lecturer in History at Indiana University and a Research Fellow with Yale University and Princeton University. Shane has taught Creative Writing in Arizona's high schools, and his poems have appeared in *The Mythic Circle* and *The Galway Review*. When the Irish writer and Nobel Prize winner Seamus Heaney was Professor of Poetry at Oxford University, Shane was a Visiting Scholar at Oxford.

## **Maureen O'Hara and the Movies**

1920 was the year of her birth  
In the province of Leinster in Ireland.  
She played football with the boys and the girls,  
Until the sun went down and the lights went on.  
Maureen traded soccer for theater  
And film, for music and gold cinema,  
For the signals "lights, camera, action".  
O'Hara shined like a bright sky's stardom.  
Hollywood was safe haven and harbour,  
Which inspired "passion, warmth and strength":  
The motion pictures gave her an Oscar,  
An Academy Award well-deserved.  
In 2020, *The Irish Times* ranked  
Ranelagh's native daughter as supreme.

## Navy Blues

At late-night diners, I heard war stories  
From my great uncles and my grandfather.  
They weren't tall tales or exaggeration.  
They were true stories, spoken at rare hours.  
Inspired, at 18, I rode my motor  
Cycle to the Naval Air Station in  
Miramar, California, and raced the  
Blue Angels and other fighter jets, who  
Showed a willingness to advance their speeds  
And engines to crazy heat at midnight.  
That's what Tom Cruise did in the flick *Top Gun*.  
I went faster than Mav, just for a while.  
Adrenaline is what stamps memories  
Into the mind for good and forever.

## **Hard Cider**

Proverbs 31 says it's fine to have  
A cold brew every now and again, to give  
Hope and healing for the broken-hearted,  
Strong drink for people in bitter distress.  
Jesus issued a liquor license when  
He turned the water into wine and beer.  
Christ clarified that moderation is  
Good for a worn body and a torn soul.  
At an Irish pub in east Saint Louis,  
I drank the best strawberry cider on  
This god-damn planet and God's green-like earth.  
I read novels and listened to the bands.  
From ancient times to the bliss of modern  
Times, alcohol has found the truths and lies.