

The Galway Review

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The Galway Review

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FOREWORD

Since our first publication The Galway Review continues to attract worldwide attention. Every effort is made to ensure we maintain excellence and thank you all for your continued support.

The second edition has arisen from public request. A new publication is always exciting, prompting the writer to keep future editions alive. This publication features fresh material as well as some earlier contributions held over, due to space restrictions. It also contains work by several writers who were invited as our guests, to contribute to this second publication. If you have been excluded so far from both books; at a future date some already sent submissions may appear in print. The volume of work we receive is both welcome and challenging. For those selected for our online *The Galway Review*, we are happy to tell you that interest is growing daily from all over the world. As our reputation has gained huge momentum there was a deluge of welcome submissions recently.

I recall reading a sign in a Boston building which read “the future is for those who prepare for it.” Young writers from schools have been included; this helps to pave a pathway for a new generation, offering a space to continue literary traditions. We are grateful for the response of teachers, parents and facilitators who introduce students and young writers to such an opportunity. The good wishes coming our way have greatly encouraged us. Our team welcome the many helpful suggestions received. The Galway Review exercises co-operation. We are striving to harmonise with fellow writers in the City, County and further afield. At all times we are happy to promote endeavours from other enthusiasts. We are extremely grateful to the Galway Education Centre, Galway City Council, National University of Ireland Galway and to those who have in any way advanced our worldwide profile.

Máire Holmes
Editor in Chief

Máire Holmes

The Soul Searching of Patrick Kavanagh

Dedicated to the late Deirdre Manifold, a close friend of Patrick Kavanagh's.

In the author's note of *Collected Poems*; Kavanagh says – "But somehow or other I have a belief in poetry as a mystical thing and a dangerous thing."

In 2013, aided by digital technology the word mystic is so misused it is in danger of losing meaning. This was not so during Kavanagh's life time. Having heard many stories about Kavanagh as a character, this week I asked a man known as "an file" – who drank with Kavanagh in Mc Daid's – if there was a vast difference between the public man and the private person. I quote his reply; "His public profile was ALL theatre; the private man is expressed in his art" –

Today, dealing only with the private man; I will meet Patrick Kavanagh in the field beyond and go to a colourful cut-away bog of soul searching and mystical things. I'd like to thank Margaretta D'Arcy for the title of this talk and Ger Considine for inviting me to speak.

A poet's mind produces well made verbal objects, saying something significant about a reality common to all of us. Reading Kavanagh's poetry for this talk was like an archaeological dig, where hidden layers of earth prompt mystery to reveal itself; turned soil takes in fresh air and now breathing words express, as was, a soul searcher's own truth.

"And you perhaps, take up religion bitterly
which you laughed at in your youth,
Well not actually laughed
But it wasn't your kind of truth."

What is soul searching?

Soul searchers seek the deepest experiences of the human spirit.

A person might be very familiar with a tree or a bird or a wild flower in the field. One day; and the sun does not have to shine, or branches move – the tree, bird or flower is perceived in a unique way. Neither sensational nor alarming, the person has an expansive exquisite awareness.

"Bring in the particular trees that caught you in their mysteries

And love again the weeds that grew somewhere specially for you.”
Sometimes the silent experience embraces an immaterial ray; illuminating the core of existence; ephemeral or eternal. The tree, bird or flower has not changed, yet self is understood, and placed in relation to an unseen source; that has significantly magnified perception or intuition.

Rhyming is also unified. It establishes poetic form and is highly appealing to both poet and reader. From over four thousand religions in the world it can be traced back for centuries in poetry and religious traditions. Frequently found in song, and in Medieval Latin verse; it appeals to the senses. In the English language or in the Irish language it occurs very naturally; where playfulness explores the unity of word, giving meaning; or for more fun, no meaning to the sound produced! To use Kavanagh's own words it can enrapture or encapture in a web.

“Upon a bank I sat, a child made seer.”

The third eye; which some traditions call the spiritual eye; is occasionally open to a Seer: it eliminates both eyes as we know them and a single eye opens. This eye is actually seen by the Seer as he or she; sees clearly that which can be grasped mentally. Whereas, mystical experience beyond the mind; cannot capture or recapture, what is not contained in memory, imagination or intellect. In such incidents, mystical imagination suffices.

The following poem *Primrose* has a line in it that could only be seen through this one eye.

“I read it through the lenses of a tear.”

The tear is not seen through spectacles, or both eyes, but within the lens of the tear itself, viewed by that one eye.

And when he says “my sight grew dim” it's because he was back into both eyes! I'll just let Kavanagh explain.....

Upon a bank I sat, a child made seer
Of one small primrose flowering in my mind.
Better than wealth it is, said I, to find
One small page of Truth's manuscript made clear.
I looked at Christ transfigured without fear-
The light was very beautiful and kind,
And where the Holy Ghost in flame had signed
I read it through the lenses of a tear.
And then my sight grew dim, I could not see
The primrose that had lighted me to Heaven,
And there was but the shadow of a tree

Ghostly among the stars. The years that pass
Like tired soldiers nevermore have given
Moments to see wonders in the grass."

Urban or rural; the poets soul searching seeks to go into the deepest, sometimes dark places. This darkness hints at melancholy, yet aching, painful bleak melancholy often leads to slight light transforming the inner landscape.

"The birds sang in the wet trees
And as I listened to them it was a hundred years from now
And I was dead and someone else was listening to them
But I was glad I had recorded for him
The melancholy."

His bleakness when it presented, were in moments of disconnection, poverty, isolation, loneliness from the very root from which thought, imagination, inspiration formed. Yet even that brief disassociation, produced written evidence of yearning that constantly drives his being to the edge of ability, soul searching and response. His brother Peter said "he wrote because he had to- poetry for him was a cure-all for any soul sickness."

"One side of the potato pits was white with frost
How wonderful that was! How wonderful!
And when we put our ears to the paling post
The music that came out was magical."

Wonder is constant in Kavanagh's work. His astonishment is evident. -
The presence which permeates is a presence felt, opening the silent eye of the heart: A mystical thing!

"And you who have not prayed
The blackbird's evening prayer
Will kneel all night, dismayed
Upon a frozen stairs."

The origin of the symbolism of a stair, or a ladder, dates back to the dream of Jacob.

A ladder (sometimes) became the axis mundi- the centre of the world, where steps could be taken to awareness. Ascending the staircase is always a quest.

In John of the Crosses ascent, there are seven steps to Nada. In Yoga, which means union; invisible steps by breathing, lead to similar enlightenment. Christian Ascetics have rigorous steps towards spiritual

wisdom.

“For this, for this,

Do I wear

The rags of hunger and climb

The unending stair.”

Reaching the top of the stairs is a symbol of silent transcendence.

The journey from senses to unseen spirit can be taken in steps yet the art of union with the unseen remains ineffably enigmatic.

The spark of a soul can also happen spontaneously in the twinkling of one eye; both eyes, three eyes or by breath; or ardent love; many such incidents are written; recorded, told or *not* told.

“Feed the gaping need of my senses; give me ad lib

To pray unselfconsciously with overflowing speech

For this soul needs to be honoured with a new dress woven

From green and blue things and arguments that cannot be proven.”

The power of any language does not adequately explain human thought, if perception is beyond empirical knowledge; this influences’ the continuous soul searching; seeking the centre of soul presence.

The earth Kavanagh dug became more seductively attractive and enigmatic, the spirit of the land was nourished by mystery; deepening his written and unwritten word. Soul searchers seek deeper and deeper; paradoxically you climb up the ladder while you are going down.

“Here we go round the mystic wheel.”

Kavanagh’s work is sprinkled with the dust of humanity and the tears

of a soul searcher. Dr/ Sister Una Agnew say “Kavanagh’s sense of God is often captured in strangeness, otherworldly yet thoroughly situated.

The atmosphere he evokes is filled with a strangeness that awakens awe, mystery, wonder...”

Tranquillity walk with me

And no care

O, the quiet ecstasy

Like a prayer.

I find a star- lovely art

In a dark sod

Joy that is timeless!

O heart that knows God!

O heart! Everything flows in the human heart, whether destructive, creative, or survivalist. The heart knows. The heart loves. Quote

Kavanagh: "I'll lead you through the world of art, where beats a universal heart."

While ascents are well covered in literature; equally, descent into the abyss can also result in the turning of a heart; such can occur during the most painful moments in life where steps to despair reach a point of tidal alienation. A person or poets axis mundi does not have to be known; nor does it have to comply with that of another. Kavanagh says in the author's note of collected poems "A poet merely states his position"

From a documentary aired on R.T.E in 1993 produced by Julian Vignoles; I quote the following words for Deirdre Manifold; from the poem Deirdre: "A golden ample stream.

You were born to love -
And love's healing."

From Bohemian Jungle we read; "And thus he came to get a peep into the temple of the muses. He was full of love."

Metaphorically; at the capstone of temple, vertex of stairs, zenith of ladder; even in the depths of despair; or a rhyming heartbeat; summit of a mountain, or silence; invisible paths by breathing; and occasional insights through one eye - over the alps of the senses and beyond the field beyond; across bog, light and mystery; the soul searchers seek... the deepest experiences of the human spirit.

I end this brief talk with some of Patrick Kavanagh's own colourful words;

"Where no one important ever looked
The raving flowers looked up in the face
Of the One and the Endless, the Mind that has balked
The profoundest of mortals. A primrose, a violet,
A violet wild Iris- but mostly anonymous performers
Yet an important occasion as the Muse at her toilet
Prepared to inform the local farmers,
That beautiful, beautiful, beautiful God
Was breathing His love by a cut-away bog."

Des Kenny

Galway's "Fleurs Du Mal"

Despite the fact that Fred Johnston does not come from Galway as the biographical note to his collection of short stories entitled "Dancing in the Asylum" wrongly asserts, he has been so long living in the city and has played so large a part in its recent cultural development as the founder of the Cúirt Festival and the director of the Western Writers' Centre that he has become an integral part of its literary landscape, a fact that is forcibly demonstrated by this powerful collection of stories.

And again, despite the statement in the final sentence of the same blurb that this is Fred Johnston's first collection of stories – there has been at least one previous one – the stories in "Dancing in the Asylum" are by far his most accomplished and the work of a craftsman who has served a long and arduous apprenticeship. These stories are written with a literary power and confidence that is only achieved after many years of hard graft.

The stories are unremittingly dark as intimated by the dedicatory quote taken from Hervé Bazin's "Vipère au poing": *L'Homme doit vivre tout seul. Aimer c'est abdiquer. Hair c'est s'affirmer. Je suis, je vis* (Man should live alone. To love is to abdicate. To hate is to affirm one self. I am I despise)

Beginning with Pritchard, an alcoholic and wife beater who has lost his job, whose wife has finally left him and who wakes up in an Asylum after a monumental bender not knowing where he is, we move through a wide series of characters who are either losers or are desperate living futile pathetic lives in an uncaring society.

The stories move from the macabre as in the title story through ironic humour to sordid decadence and hopeless gestures as each of the characters fight their own demons and though there are occasional brae gestures of defiance, they are rarely successful in their struggle.

Throughout, Johnston shows a deep empathy for his characters. Even

at their lowest, the characters show a human resilience as in the finale of “Vancansou” which injects a raw energy into the narration and allows occasional victories.

Overall a general malaise pervades the stories and the volume has strong claims to be for Galway what Charles Baudelaire’s “Les Fleurs du Mal” is for Paris except that it doesn’t quite reach the levels of despair the French classic does.

In “Dancing in the Asylum”, Fred Johnston explores a segment of Galway life that is too often ignored. He does this with wonderful literary skill, understanding, sensitivity and the deft touch of the poet always aware of his character’s humanity and dignity. It is an important, not to say natal, addition to Galway’s literary heritage.

Bernard Kirk

The urgent need for more dialogue between Enterprise and Schools

This country is home to 9 of the top 10 pharmaceutical companies in the world. 12 of the world's top selling medicines are made there and 9 of the top 10 IT companies in the world are based there. Many will be surprised to read that the country in question is Ireland.

But how did we as a country reach this enviable position from a country described 'as a small poor country on the edge of the Atlantic' in the early 1980's. Three reasons are often offered – the major investment in education, with a significant contribution from Atlantic Philanthropies, our corporate tax rate and the focus on capturing the research and development elements of the major companies. In addition a key ingredient to achieve this was the marketing of Ireland as a country with a 'young, well-educated, skilled workforce'. However the delivery of this key ingredient is now becoming a significant challenge for enterprise as many of the skills students now display at the end of their education are not matching the requirements of the employers.

In the IT sector this has reached a near crisis proportion, resulting in page one headlines about €70,000 positions which cannot be filled. This mismatch of skills needs to be addressed urgently, but to address it we need to begin a dialogue between primary and second level schools and enterprise. Engagement needs to be early in our young people's lives in order that our young people consider career paths in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects at third level.

Currently, the CEO's of the leading major employers in Ireland recognise that a twin track approach is required. In the short term, a focussed re-training of graduates whose skill set is not aligned to the requirements of the employers while for the longer term, as a country, we need to support initiatives in primary and second level schools to promote STEM. As part of this longer term approach we, as educationalists, can make a major contribution to the continuing success of our country in partnership with our leading employers thus creating job prospects for our young people. As educationalists we are part of that fabric that builds an economy that builds a community prepared for whatever happens in the present but especially to build a roadmap for the future. President McAleese speaking at the CREST Awards in 2011 described it

as “a patchwork quilt of endeavour, the partners who are willing to work together with that common focus and the people who have the passion for Science, Technology and Engineering and the passion also, and the belief, in our young people and what they can bring to these worlds!”

Over the past 12 years in the Galway Education Centre, we have worked to provide a conduit between enterprise/industry and education. This has involved translating the needs of enterprise to match the syllabus of various curriculum. In return, we have been able to foster, within the enterprise organisations we partner with, an understanding of the limits, focus and curriculum requirements of the teachers and schools. It has been, and continues to be, a learning journey for all of us involved. However it is worthwhile when the benefits accrue to our young people. Galway Education Centre now works in Ireland, and globally on with The Medtronic Foundation, SAP, HP, LEGO Education, The National Flight Academy (USA), DELL, Intel, Trimble and MG Equity Partners to promote the STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Art and Maths) subjects. We continue to strive through dialogue between education and enterprise to inspire young people to realise their talents and find their element in areas such as design, innovation, creativity, teamwork, and entrepreneurship

The development of an understanding by educationalists of the needs and visions of our leading enterprises is now an imperative. To quote Gerry Kilcommins, CEO and VP of Medtronic Galway, “It is no longer a should do but a must do’. As an economy dependent on future innovations in Science, Technology, Engineering and Agriculture, as educationalists we need to engage in a two-way dialogue with enterprise. We should remember that the leaders of our enterprises today are almost all past students of ours who have passionate views on education from their own experiences, but also due to current involvement of their children in our education system. The ‘silo-effect’ is no longer acceptable with education and enterprise each focusing on their own independent focus.

As a country we need to continue to develop young people who are innovative in thought, willing to try new ideas and will take their ingenuity and apply it to settings that cause ‘disruptive innovation’. We need students who will bring new ways to develop technologies and pathways so that those who are underserved, in particular, are able to access the services many of us take for granted. To achieve this requires partnership and dialogue. Let’s get listening and talking.

John Kenny

Fear

The carpet in the hallway is a deep red, the theme continued up the walls and across the ceiling; lights dot the way down its length. There is the hushed elegance of a cinema. No movie posters mar the walls, but barely perceptible doors flush with the red, hint at access to auditoriums of some kind; this is somehow understood.

We say little as we pad down the hallway, the silence instilling in us a reverence, even in my daughters. We reach a junction and glance left and right. A man at the end of the corridor to our left, dressed in a suit, calmly faces us, arms by his sides.

Julie starts forward, the girls trailing behind her. I reach for her, but she slips away. I struggle to say something, but I'm capable of little more than mumbled half-words.

I'm drawn after Julie and the girls towards the man. As we near him, I note his pale face, black eyes, dark hair. My heart beats in my ears, my vision tunnels. The warm red carpeting offers little comfort now; the slit of a mouth in the man's face offers even less. Raising his arm, he points down a passageway to his left. My wife walks serenely in that direction, followed by my girls.

I call out, but they don't look back; their minds are closed to me. Terrified of losing them, I follow.

The man appears by a door, points at it. Julie opens it, steps inside. Light escapes, to be swiftly shut off by the closing door. Further along the corridor the man stops and indicates again. Annie disappears through another door. Shortly after, Jess does the same.

I am alone now with the man, his black eyes sucking at what little light remains in the hallway.

He points to another door. I open it and walk through. I am on an escalator that drops down to a large foyer. But the stairway is ascending from below; I am forced to scramble down a few steps, only to be brought back to the barrier of the door. Again I scramble down a few steps and I suddenly see large screens overhanging the foyer, on them, scenes of my family going about their lives. Cooking dinner, going to school, watching TV. But I am nowhere in these scenes; it's as if I've never been there. Annie and Jess are my daughters, and yet not of me,

because I have never existed in their lives.
I lunge down the steps. Two, three steps at a time. But I'm drawn back
up again. If I can get down to the foyer maybe I can find an exit. I jump
several steps, several more, but I am pulled back to my starting point.
The man appears at the foot of the escalator below the giant screens.
He looks at me and my light spirals away from me, down the up escalator
and into the pale infinity of his now grinning face.

Dick Donaghue

Hanging in

"They're very interesting, of course," the Gallery proprietor said, turning away from Angela's paintings and, adjusting his bowtie, feigned interest in passers-by through the window. She studied his narrow back, her artist's eye automatically dividing the play of light and shade on the back of his shirt, while waiting for him to speak again.

She knew she had taken a chance bringing her work to this gallery. Landscapes and portraits by established artists, none of which strayed from the conventional, surrounded her. Their cozy commercialism indicated that her work was unlikely to be accepted here but she was determined to approach every gallery in the city. There must be at least one who would recognize her talent.

Angela's paintings, lined up along the bottom of the white wall, were a stark contrast to the existing exhibition above them. From her pictures the features and limbs of imaginary people, stared at the viewer, superimposed on clothes they might have worn, hung out to dry on clothes lines in a multitude of settings. They hung upside down, some dangling limply, some twisted as if in agony, others entwined like lovers; in back yards, gardens, the balconies of high rise flats and draped across bushes at the roadside camp of Travelers. This was the first time since graduating from Art College a year ago that Angela had been able to sustain a theme in her painting and was excited by the potential. The raw edge she sought in her work was beginning to manifest itself.

The proprietor swiveled from the window. His eyes opened wide in surprise when he saw Angela and her paintings still there, as if she were expected to vanish while his back was turned. He rubbed his small hands together briskly to cover his irritation. Angela took a deep breath in anticipation of rejection. The man's eyes flicked to her rising breasts then, meeting her gaze, quickly slid past her to the door. She let her breath out slowly, suppressing her anger, remembering someone telling her once that she was much too pretty to be an artist. Stubbornly she stood her ground.

The proprietor cleared his throat. "We're booked up for quite a while," he said, his gaze now focused on some point in mid-air behind her. "In fact it would be at least ... oh, six months, before we even begin to look at

new work again.”

She nodded, accepting the obvious rejection in his tone, knowing it would be the same story in six months time.

As she bent to retrieve her paintings she was aware of his eyes appraising her again now that she was no longer watching. Sod him, she thought angrily, if he'd paid more attention to my paintings ...! Shrugging off her annoyance, she stacked her work carefully into the portfolio and zipped it shut.

He walked with her to the door and, opening it to let her out, paused in the entrance to squint up at the sky as if checking for rain, although the sun shone brightly on the mid-morning street, so that Angela had to squeeze past.

“Come back in a few months time, dear,” he continued, resting a hand momentarily on the small of her back. Her teeth clenched in fury at the man's effrontery. “Let's see how we're fixed by then,” he concluded, swinging the door closed behind her.

I don't think so, you bastard, Angela swore under her breath as she hurried down the street...

In the past week she had shown her portfolio to five gallery owners. The reaction was much the same. ‘Come back in six months.’ ‘You don't do landscapes by any chance?’ ‘Not developed enough for us, I'm afraid.’ or, ‘we may mount a group show early next year, perhaps then.’

Disheartening though the process was she had no intention of giving up. There were hundreds of artists ahead of her but, she reminded herself, they had had to start somewhere too.

Back at her flat Angela threw herself on the bed with relief, breathing in the familiar creamy aroma of paint and linseed oil which always had a soothing effect on her. Time, give me time and I'll hang with the best! It's just a matter of hanging in there, she reassured herself, smiling at the pun.

The screech of Tony's motorbike pulling up outside woke her from her daydreaming. Before she had time to swing her legs to the floor he had bounded up the stairs and flung himself beside her enveloping her in his arms and an aura of petrol and warm grease.

“I can see it went well for you,” he teased. “Resting after a hard morning's bargaining with the arty-farty galleries, huh?”

“Same old story,” Angela said, snuggling closer to him. “Give them pretty landscapes. That's all they want.”

“They're only shopkeepers, like you say.” He kissed her ear. “They're not

ready for you yet.”

Angela pulled away from him and sat up. “What time is it, anyway? It must be lunchtime. Are you hungry?”

“Constantly,” Tony replied, pulling her back in a fierce hug, kissing her hungrily and unzipping her jeans.

After their lovemaking, Tony lay naked in the sunlight streaming through the window, blowing smoke rings towards the ceiling. Angela, wrapped in a dressing gown was brewing coffee in the small kitchen.

“Hey, listen,” he called, “why don’t you paint me? Y’know, reclining ‘Adonis’ and all that? You could pretty it up in a landscape for them.”

Angela carried the coffee into the bedroom and sat on the edge of the bed. As she handed him a mug she glanced down the length of his well defined body which he kept in shape by working out twice weekly in the gym

“No,” she sighed, “too small. That’s the problem.”

“Too small ...?” he snorted. “That’s now, after the deed is done. But not before, remember?”

Angela laughed and slapped his muscled thigh playfully. “No, I don’t mean that, you eejit. It’s my work I’m talking about.” She stretched out her arms, slopping coffee onto the bed, causing him to jump back. “Bigger canvasses,” she explained.

Tony flexed his muscles and winked at her. “Think big, that’s what I always say.” And, swinging himself off the bed, downed his coffee and zipped himself back into his clothes. “Gotta get back to the garage,” he said, kissing her goodbye.

As the bike roared into the distance Angela was seized with sudden inspiration. Whisking the white linen sheets off her bed, oblivious to the fact they were a recent and expensive gift from her mother, Angela tugged until they ripped down the centre. Satisfied, she dropped them on the floor and raced outside to the garden shed where she remembered seeing a few lengths of timber and some rusting tools. It was hard going with the old rusty saw but she managed to hack through them. She hammered the laths together into rough frames then stretched the sheets tightly over them. Working quickly she primed them, throwing the windows wide open to let out the pungent smell, then stood back viewing her work with satisfaction. Four large canvasses stood against the wall.

A bit rough, she thought, but they’ll do for now. I must find a studio, this bedroom is too cramped. Maybe that’s why I work so small. I need more

space.

While waiting for the primer to dry Angela wondered how she could get her hands on some big brushes. Then she remembered seeing several old household paintbrushes at her mother's. Without pausing to put on a jacket she raced out the door. Along the canal a woman and child threw crusts to the ducks. Angela watched as diamonds of light scattered along the gentle ripples. Pretty pictures, she thought ironically.

A sudden outburst of squabbling and squawking pierced the air as a flock of seagull's swooped out of the blue sky, dive-bombing the crusts and trying to scatter the ducks. On their home territory, and bigger than their scavenging sea cousins, the ducks chased them off, running along the top of the water screeching and spreading their wings in anger. The gulls soared and wheeled in preparation for another attack.

Angela watched the running battle in amazement. The gulls don't usually come this far inland, she thought, unless a storm is brewing. She checked the sky behind her and could almost feel the weight of the large electric-grey cloud, pregnant with rain, blowing over the rooftops from the sea.

It was one of those summer squalls that spring unexpectedly out of the Atlantic. The excitement of the battle in the water below and the approaching storm above thrilled her. For a moment she stood, transfixed against the canal railings, filled with a fusion of the beauty, power and violence of nature.

This, she realized, was the missing element in her paintings. The instilled passion of life. A storm didn't ask for permission to blow; it raged regardless, sweeping all in its path. Seagulls swooped unceremoniously; aware only of the dictations of hunger. Tony didn't seek approval to make love to her; he took his pleasure brazenly. But the final thought made her wince. Perhaps she should be more stringent with him. Perhaps he was beginning to take her for granted. She put the thought to the back of her mind deciding to think about it later.

As she watched the scene before her, Angela recalled her early childish drawings hidden in the back of her copybooks. The pleasant little paintings to please her father. Praise for neat, careful work from teachers. Never really letting herself go. All through life, all through Art College, Angela saw now, how she had tried to please everyone except herself. Talent was not lacking, she knew, but somehow the fiery passion rumbling deep inside her had always been doused by a desire to please others. Even her brushes were small, her drawing boards manageable, as if she had a fear of what she might do if that passion was given its head.

It did not hinder her graduating with a distinction. But that was college, she mused, out here is real life.

The rain, suddenly unleashed, pelted the canal water like pellets. Seagulls wheeled. Ducks thrashed. Mother grabbed her screeching child and ran for the shelter of the trees. Only Angela danced with joy as the wind squalled and rain soaked her.

“Yes!” she whooped triumphantly, “tearing those sheets was an inspiration!” It was as if ripping them was an act preempting the storm, renting the sky, with its unbridled force.

When she arrived at her mother’s house her clothes were saturated.

“Holy God, Angela,” her mother scolded, when she saw her standing inside the kitchen door, a pool of water gathering at her feet. “Have you no raincoat? Quick child, run up to my room and change into something dry before you catch your death ...” Her mother, a smaller, plumper version of her daughter, draped in a flowery apron over baggy slacks, ushered her up the stairs.

It was she who had recognized Angela’s need to express her talent and argued in her favour, against her husband’s reluctance, to send his daughter to Art College. Fortunately Angela won a scholarship so that he could not harangue her about throwing his money away on, what he called, a wasted life. He would have preferred to see her use her aptitude in maths to follow him in his profession of accountancy. Unfortunately he did not live to see her graduate four years later.

“Mam,” Angela said as she traipsed downstairs and bundled her wet clothes into the dryer. “I need to get some things from the garage.” Her mother gazed at her in amusement. Dressed in one of her old cotton dresses, her daughter looked more like a younger sister.

“It’s a long time since I was able to squeeze into that,” she remarked, laughing. “But what things do you want from the garage. I can’t remember when I was last out there. You’d better ask Francis when he gets home. It’s his domain now.” Francis was Angela’s younger brother and training in furniture design.

“Oh, just saws and hammers and ...” Angela thought for a moment. “Have we still got the large paintbrushes ?

Her mother shrugged. “I suppose so. Francis would know. But wait, I’m sure some of the old things are still in a box under the stairs. I don’t think he’d like you taking his things.”

“Thanks,” Angela said and went out to the hallway to rummage in the cupboard under the stairs. “They’re here all right,” she called and

dragged the box into the kitchen. She selected what she wanted then said without looking up. "Mam. I'm thinking of leaving."

"Leaving?" Her mother turned from the sink and stared at her. "The flat?"

"No." Angela took a deep breath before continuing. "Town. Maybe go abroad."

"When ... Why? But I thought you were happy here?"

Angela shifted uneasily seeing how this sudden announcement had shocked her mother. It had taken her by surprise too, the words were out of her mouth before she realized what she had said herself. "I need to get out. Find a proper place to work. Y'know, this place is too small." Her mother laughed disconcertedly. "Well," she began, then stopped, not knowing what to say next.

"Not right away," Angela hurried on, backpedaling now, to take some of the sting out of her decision. For herself as well as her mother. "I need more space to work. I need to ... Oh I don't know. Travel a bit ... See more ..."

The ideas came tumbling out of their own accord and, as they did, taking Angela more and more by surprise, the excitement of getting away and seeing the world stimulated her. It was as if the decisions were out of her hands now. As if some other authority had taken over.

"And what about Tony," her mother started in alarm. "What will he think. He seems such a nice lad. I thought ..." She let the words trail off.

"Well, maybe I'm getting too attached. Oh, I dunno ... It's ..." Angela shook her head and hurried on as if to shake away any guilt feelings before they took root. "Y'know. I need time ... space ... to develop. See the rest of the world. There was no chance when I was at college. And then Dad ..." She stopped abruptly. She did not want to drag his reluctance to pay for foreign travel into the conversation. And then his sudden illness ... She could see her mother's mounting anguish at these old wounds being resurrected."

The older woman slumped against the sink, entwined her hands heedlessly in her apron watching the growing excitement on her daughter's face as she elaborated her plans. She shook her head in bewilderment. Going to college was one thing but she could see no reason to traipse around the world. That, to her, who never had any desire to be anywhere else but where she was, was only looking for trouble. She put on a brave smile. "If that's what you want dear," was all she could say.

Angela rushed to her and hugged her "I knew you'd understand," she cried.

Tears welled up in her mother's eyes. "I'm sure I don't," she said, sniffing and dabbing at her eyes with the edge of her apron. "But you seem to know what you're doing."

"It'll only be for a while," Angela said, trying to soften the blow.

"And what about money? How will you live.?"

"Odd jobs, I suppose. Everyone does it." This had been the main problem during college holidays. Her parents had refused to finance or allow her to go off with other students to work part-time in Europe. Angela could never fathom their reluctance to do so. Then, when her father had become ill, there was no point in arguing. She had had to make do with local summer jobs. The exciting stories brought back by her friends, of foreign cities and galleries, had almost brought her to tears. She was surprised that her mother had given in so easily this time. But how could she object. I'm old enough to make my own decisions now, Angela thought. Or perhaps the suddenness of the decision and my excitement has caught her off guard.

She watched her mother dab at her eyes and turn away to fill the kettle. A cup of tea seems to be her way of concluding any disagreement.

Over the sound of splashing water her mother said, "I can manage a few hundred pounds."

"No, please. I'll manage."

"You'll need it," her mother said flatly and Angela, overcome with gratitude at this sudden change of attitude hugged her again tightly.

"Thanks Mam. I love you."

Later, poised with a four inch paint brush in her hand and pots of paint ready on the floor, Angela stood before the four blank canvasses in deep silence, waiting for the rush of inspiration. Waiting for the creative dam to burst and overflow, she was unaware of Tony entering the flat until his hand rested on her shoulder, making her jump.

"Swimming," he said, grinning and waving his togs and towel in front of her face.

"Oh." Angela jumped. "You gave me a fright."

Tony pointed to the four canvasses. "What's this?" he asked. "The Opus Magnus. Big, huh!" Then he noticed the bare mattress. "Jesus," he exclaimed. "What happened the sheets?"

Angela pointed distractedly at the stretched frames.

"You're mad, Angie babe!." He shook his head vigorously. "Anyway, get your togs. The tide's in." He checked his watch. "In ... four minutes. Let's go."

"I can't." Angela bit her lip.

Tony grinned and eased the paintbrush out of her hand. "The sun is shining," he sang. "The tide is full. It waits for no man, or woman."

Angela reached for the brush but Tony held it behind his back. "Come on." He danced away from her. "This will keep. The tide won't. I need a swim."

Angela shook her head. "I have to work."

"Sure," Tony said. "But later. I'm bursting to get into the water. I need to get the grease out of my system. I've had a tough day. Hot as hell."

Angela glared at him. "And I've had it cushy ...?"

"Angie. Angie," Tony pleaded, coming and putting his arms around her.

"No, Tony. Don't." She pushed him away gently.

"What?" Tony looked at her, bewildered.

"I don't mean that." Angela said. "I have to do this," She indicated the canvasses.

"Yes," he said. "I know. But let's go swimming first. Okay."

Angela frowned in anguish. How could she refuse to go swimming? But she had to start painting. It was important. "I have to do this," she said adamantly.

"Angie?"

"Look, you go on ahead," she said, forcing a smile. "I can ..."

But Tony did not wait for her to finish. He dangled the paintbrush between his thumb and forefinger, before her face, then dropped it at her feet. Turning abruptly, he stomped from the room without a word.

"Tony." Angela took a step after him. "Tony ...!"

The only reply she got was the street door banging shut behind him and the roar of his motorbike engine snarling down the street.

"Oh, damn," Angela cried. She picked up the paintbrush and turned to the canvasses and glared at them.

"You," she hissed angrily between clenched teeth. Then, filling her brush with paint, she flung it with all her energy at the first canvas.

It struck and splattered like an exploding firecracker, before sliding down the surface, leaving a thick stream of deep vermilion in its wake.

Angela stared at it through hot tears welling up and stinging her eyes in frustration. She wiped them away with the back of her hand. The deep gash of red, cutting the white ground like an open wound, danced before her. She stooped and picked up the paintbrush once more and filled it.

As she began to spread the paint, elaborating on the gash, opening it out as if searching for a definition, her anger slowly dissipated, leaving a void

which gradually filled with excitement.

Time evaporated. Swabs of colour in thick impasto gathered force, producing shapes that boiled up inside her, taking her unawares, merging and molding together in swirling abstract mass. Weighty purple storm clouds fought for space with pink streaked flocks of birds. Hovering menacingly, motorbikes roared through electric skies, underscored by bejeweled rippling waters. Working feverishly, brain and limbs stretched to their limits, Angela was drawn out of herself and transported, mesmerized by the shapes and colours emerging before her.

Finally, every ounce of energy drained from her, she dropped her brushes and fell exhausted on the sheet-stripped bed. The four large canvasses stood against the walls, transformed and triumphant, as she herself was by the power of latent forces which had taken her over and, it seemed, sucked the very substance from her soul.

The voice inside her trumpeted, "I am an artist. And I must be free!" Exultant, throwing wide her arms as if to embrace the ceiling – the walls – the street, the feeling inside her swelled until she could almost feel herself enfold the whole world.

John Jennings

Nine haiku

Weather

The world is changing
trees and grass and peace are gone
don't leave me behind

Traffic

Claustrophobic crawl
cars obscure my journey's end
discourteous traffic

Time

Monstrous crushing waves
melt the small sandcastle walls
tale of passing time

End of Day

Summer evening dusk
Stealing light from college halls
Gone home for the night

Rainfall

Window wet with rain
Drops fall from the cloudy sky
Distracting weather

Daylight

Summer morning rays
Chasing greyness from my room
Ubiquitous light

Road crossing

Broken traffic light
Pressing button time and time
Destination blocked

St. Patricks Day

Lively dancing fun

Crowds awash with streaks of green

Patricks day parade

Working in the Garden

Yellow fuzzy stripes

Collecting red flower nectar

Very busy bee

Natalia Krause

I am sitting on the moon

I am sitting on the moon
shining and bright
though pain has taken over me
the pain of every woman
alone on the Moon
those in ignorance of love
those not loved sufficiently
those who have not given love a chance
those never caressed
cuddled
touched
hugged
admired
glanced at with curiosity
embraced not only by the body
the fingertips
but with eyes full of love
with loving words and positive emotions
pain of those who believe sex is dirty and unclean
pain of those who suffer from hunger of beautiful feelings and emotions
pain of those who take a hot cup of tea as an expression of love from
an insensitive type of soul,
those who are starved of touch from constant refusal of that beautiful
divine pleasure
since it is not him
not the time
not the right conditions
not like that
then having to wait years
crying into pillows
touching themselves
dear women, lovely
miraculously gentle
taking care of and cherishing

with contrary thinking
and stubbornness
happy and sad
I love you all
thank you for the femininity
the softness of this pain being her
it is time to examine the pain deeper
time to do what you love
and to be with him who loves.

Luke Morgan

Blackbird

There's nothing we can give it. There's nothing
it wants anyways, despite the way its head
jerks this way then that,
but singing Blackbird is something my daughter
feels she must do – a duty of sorts.
Not to the elephants or rhinos, but ravens –
or rather, this particular raven,
perched on the swinging phone line
overlooking the zoo.

It's like he rules the world, she whispers to me.
I think they've always ruled the world, ravens –
on pedestals of scantily-clad twig-tops,
sliding through snowscapes like dagger hilts.

It stays still for so long, it could be a father
with his daughter, gazing on an exhibit,
not pointing, but observing.

Oblivious of passers-by, she puts a hand
on me and tries to balance herself
like the raven on the swinging wire. Look dad,
she cries, now I can rule the world too.
Then, she goes back to humming.
I look to her, the faces of strangers
and then up at the black king,
wondering if I could share that assurance,

if I could have the language of song
while the Earth swung, beneath my feet.

Balance

As I stand upright at this moment, the tiny convulsions
between heel and calf providing the level
for my knees to lock,

a parakeet is held on an elm's forearm,
a zebra stills herself over a bank to drink,
a flamingo strides across a tight-rope of water.

Have you heard of the myth
that an elephant can roll on a beach ball, feet tucked-in,
for a child who must stand against the wooden fence
to see? A cricket hangs onto grass long enough to feed.

A lion on a cliff-edge crouches deep,
the zebra's muscle ticks. The great world

spins, like a beach ball.

Kernan Andrews

A first 'date'

SITTING IN a café on Dominick Street, my mind could not let go of the notion that it had all been a wonderful, though delusional dream. It was only a small part of me, but it was enough to cause doubt. Since the morning, I kept turning the event over and over in my head, an indulgence as much as a way of reassuring myself.

"I've really enjoyed the conversations we've been having," she had said as she got ready to leave for her lecture. "It would be nice to hang out, get to know each other better. Does Saturday suit?"

It is what I have wanted, longed for, since I first met her but never dared hoped would happen, and not like this, with her asking.

She told me to meet her at half-twelve. In my excitement I had arrived about fifteen minutes early. I also needed time to let the butterflies in my stomach, frantic and hyperactive, time to settle down. I thought about buying a newspaper, just to have something to read, to check the previews for today's matches, as a way of taking my mind of my nervousness, but I never did. My head was too all over the place to concentrate.

The waitress came over, asked if I wanted anything. I said not yet, that I was waiting for someone. My eyes were fixed on the café windows. Staring out into the street, waiting for Clodagh to arrive, I must have thought every woman who passed by was her. Hope and disappointment in the space of a moment.

The café was not busy. It would have been eerily silent but for the two women sitting by the counter, talking animatedly. Their voices almost drowned out the radio. Leonard Cohen's 'First We Take Manhattan' was just about audible over their chatter. I wondered if Clodagh was a 'Laughing Lenny' fan. I suspected she was given she was into all that poetry stuff and playing the guitar. I never saw the appeal of him myself, and could never hear his name without thinking of that time Billy started

singing, to the tune of 'Suzanne': "My name is Leonard Cohen/I can't sing but I can moan."

I might keep that one to myself, I do not think Clodagh would appreciate it.

The only other person in the café was an elderly man, wearing glasses and a tweed suit. He was sitting in a corner, sipping from a large mug and reading a book.

I kept looking at my watch. It never made the time go faster, just made me feel more anxious. It had started to go past 12.30 and my anxiety only increased. I tried to reassure myself it was not a cause for worry. Nobody in Ireland places any importance on being punctual – especially in Galway. We have our own idiosyncratic form of GMT in operation here – Galway Maybe Time. Its most extreme form occurs in August, when people asked to do anything reply, "Oh It'll be after the races!", kicking the said request not so much into touch as into a semi-permanent limbo.

I was drumming my fingers on the table. She was only two or three minutes late. In anybody else it would have been nothing, but I was already thinking 'She's not coming'.

I was about to order a coffee as a way of justifying my presence when the door opened and Clodagh entered, that incredible smile across her face. My utter relief at seeing her was thrown off course by the violent lurch in my stomach as it tied itself up in several knots.

"Hey, how are you?" she said, taking an olive green army cap off her head and laying on the table. "I'm so sorry I'm a bit late."

Her long auburn hair was tied in a plait which fell over her left shoulder and trailed down almost as far as her waist.

"No, no, you're OK," I said. I am sure she could hear the relief of tension in my voice and inside I cringed a little. "Eh...I'm not long here myself."

The waitress, who was bringing two scones to the chatty women, gave me a puzzled glance as she passed by. I thought I heard her emit a faint snort of derision. I did not care though. Clodagh was finally here and I

became so lost in her large green eyes that I did not even hear what she was saying.

"Sorry?" I said.

"I said it's freezing outside! Oh my God it's sooooo cold!"

The Christmas had been mild but the New Year had seen a sharp dip in the temperature, with the nights often becoming frosty. Walking to the café I noticed for the first time that winter how I could see my breath each time I exhaled.

"Yeah it's pretty nippy out there," I said. "Coldest it's been in ages."

I was thrilled though to see Clodagh had one of her extremely short skirts on. Despite the winter tights - black, wonderful, my favourite type on a girl with legs like hers - they were perhaps not the most practical given the temperatures. Visually though? Let's just say Bruce Springsteen's 'I'm On Fire' made a lot of sense to me right then.

The waitress came to take our order. Clodagh asked for a coffee, then flashed her sparkling eyes at me.

"Uh...Uh, the same!" I said.

Did I really need coffee? I was hyper enough as it was, the butterflies having come no nearer to calming down.

I took a deep breath to steady myself.

Clodagh smiled at me.

I needed to take another.

I am no expert in these things, but at least I had the explanation my friend Lisa Sweeney gave me once; a situation like this would be classed as a 'date'. It in no way signified we were going out. It did however mean it was a possibility, provided the dates when right. But it was Clodagh who asked me here, who had given me that mix tape before Christmas, surely they were enough signs that she was interested? Or maybe they

were preludes and today was the test?

The waitress came back with the coffees. She smiled at Clodagh as she left the steaming hot mug in front of her but when she turned to me her look said: 'What is a girl like that doing with someone like you?' The coffee tasted equally bitter. I put three large spoons of sugar to take the edge off it, but it hardly made a difference.

Clodagh was having no such problems.

"Ooooooh that hits the spot," she said. "Lovely hot cup of coffee."

She was wearing her German army surplus jacket. The left lapel was still sporting that odd badge with the MP5 over a red star. As she took the jacket off and left it at the back of the chair, my eyes kept darting back and forth between her soft, pale, face, framed by the deep red of her hair, my lap, and the floor. The smile never faded from her face.

"Are you OK?" she asked. "You seem very nervous."

Her gaze was directed towards my hands. It was only then I realised I had been playing with the serviette on the table, parts of which I had ripped and torn, and the remainder I was now twisting around my left and right index fingers.

"Eh, no, no, I'm, I'm fine," I said, hurriedly pushing the wreckage of the serviette away from me. Clodagh let out a small laugh. She could see right through me.

John Walsh

Yesterday's News

The young woman was face-down in the water. Of course one immediately thinks of suicide. The newspaper says a corporation worker jumped in and rescued her. A passing driver took them to a nearby hospital, where she remains critical.

He looks at his watch. Ellen is late. She said she would come for breakfast. It's odd because being punctual is a big thing for her. He folds the newspaper and drops it onto the armchair. Then it crosses his mind Ellen might want to sit there and he tucks the newspaper into the bookshelf.

The sky is heavy with low cloud, leaves frame-freezed against the greyness. He's counted the spoons into the coffee machine, remembering details like the line of shoes in her front hall, the space created between them for his own; the small tray of chocolate-coated waffles set on a wicker table. Candles poised for lighting. The first time he was there, he was afraid their lives would clash. The image of the drowning woman returns to him. What is it like to be dragged back into this world if you have decided to leave? She must have thought about it, have come to terms with what she was about to do.

Yesterday when Ellen rang, she was parked outside his front door. The surprise was perfect. He didn't bother to ask how she had found him. She had a knack of walking into his life. The first time she appeared he could feel something was about to happen, but he managed to avoid it. Months later, when she turned up again, he was caught off guard. After that, his life never went back to the way it had been before.

'You're such a baby,' she had told him in St. Ives. The room wasn't ready. The cleaners could walk in on top of them she said. No way were they going to make love. She placated him with her finger on his lips. He sulked. The narrow streets got tangled up in it. Most of it was façade anyway. In the restaurant a waiter eventually took their order. Then they waited. Ellen told him she had known all along what they were getting into. None of it had been a surprise for her. 'Why you chose me I don't know. Or was it the other way round? Maybe I was the one.' She shifted the knife on the right. 'Who knows any more? I knew there would be chaos.' The waiter brought the starters. Small portions on large white

plates.

He checks again that everything is on the table, rearranges the blue napkins. At the sound of the doorbell he jumps. Suddenly he is walking along the hall, unsure of himself, wondering if it will be obvious that she has spent the night with someone else.

'Hi! Sorry I'm late. Still haven't caught up on Irish time.' As she slips past him in the

narrow hall he feels the touch of her breasts against him. It triggers needs he has almost forgotten. She knows how to do this to him, the same way he knows she can do it to others.

'How does anyone find you in this mumbo-jumbo?' she is saying. Outside the wheelie bins are lined up for emptying. He closes the door and turns to her. 'What do you mean?'

'All the houses look the same. You need to make things a little easier for people.'

'People?' Anyway, yesterday she didn't have a problem.

He follows her into the kitchen where a single green candle flickers on the table. It jars with the napkins but Ellen won't say anything. She turns and angles her face towards his, allows herself that second of hesitation.

A rock-breaker in the distance hammers staccato as their lips touch.

'Poor Ian.' Her fingers trace a line across his cheek. She lets her fingertips rest on his lips, then pulls them away.

'Cut the pity-crap, Ellen. It's not you.'

'It's not *my* pity we need to talk about.' She walks over and sits down at the table. 'Feel this place. It oozes with pity. You have to get out of here. Christ, why do Irish mothers have to screw everything up?' She stares at him, waits for him to speak. It's hard to pinpoint which direction the rock-breaker is coming from.

'Straight into it as usual. Not much changed, has it?' He turns his back to her and reaches for the coffee pot.

'You started it.'

Ian decides not to reply to this. The coffee smell drifts in the air. 'Did you have a good night?' he asks as he half-fills her cup.

'Do you really want to know?'

'I probably don't,' he lies. 'Doesn't really make much difference who you are fucking at the moment.'

'I don't fuck.' The way she spits out the words appeals to him. 'That's your department.' Her eyes lock on his, ready to release bolts of contempt. 'Is that what it was, Ian? Did we fuck? Was that all?'

'Of course we fucked. We enjoyed it, remember?' Had that been all, the chaos would not have happened. The noise of the rock-breaker stops.

'Anyway have you a better word for it?'

'Fucking's fine with me.' For a moment she poises the white cup at her lips and stares into the garden. Then she swings around. 'We had our chance, we didn't take it. No, correction, you didn't take it. The cage was wide open, Ian. What held you back?' She is dangling a strip of salmon on her fork. 'And now, are you any more ready? I don't think so. You want to know how my night was? Spectacular. How about yours?'

The noise of the bins being emptied outside disturbs his concentration. Last week he complained about his bin being dragged halfway through the estate. 'We don't get paid to keep people happy, mate.' The way they looked at him, he knew what they thought.

He wishes they hadn't got so tangled up again, after all she has come back, for whatever reason he isn't sure. 'We're good for each other,' she always told him. A kind of a mantra. In ways we are, yes.

'I had a strange dream,' he tells her.

'Try me.'

The bin lorry has reached the corner. 'I was somewhere in France, standing outside a bakery, looking at all the cakes and sweet things. But I've no money. Suddenly I feel someone tapping my shoulder. When I turn around, this woman hands me a bag of sweets. Before I can say anything, she disappears into the crowd. Leaves me wondering why me.'

'That's easy.'

'Sorry?'

'Ian please, don't act so innocent. You must know it's about you, about the signals you send out. Maybe it's not even a conscious thing you do. I picked them up. Other women pick them up. We all come running with our little bags of sweeties for you. Sweeties, sweeties!' She dangles the blue napkin in the air.

'Stop it, Ellen. Just stop it!'

'Oh, have we touched on a sore spot? How many bags of sweeties will it take to make it go away, Ian? Have you any idea? Or maybe you don't want it to go away. We all need our little hang-ups, don't we?'

'Cut it out. You didn't go to all the trouble of finding me here just to go all psycho on me now.'

'You asked for it. Anyway, let me be good at something.' She reaches for bread, fidgets with a slice on her plate. 'We used to talk every day, remember? Fuck the cost. We knew everything about each other. I miss

that. I wanted to see how you are.'

'So, can you spot the difference?'

'Nothing's changed. How much longer are you going to go on doing this to yourself?'

In September they rented a house somewhere near Killarney. He picked her up off the late flight in Shannon. It rained all the way down. He told himself they needed time together, it didn't matter where. But the everyday things caused complications. The absurdity of pushing a trolley around Costcutter; the frustration of damp fires; Ellen's need to take in everything new. The real world impinged on them. After the week nothing was certain any more.

'I don't know. Three years, five years? How long does it take? These life changes. You're the expert, Ellen. You should know. You've read all the books.'

One day he built a fire in a corner of the garden, watched the flames eat through the pages of the books she had given him. He thought this way he could break the hold she had on him. She laughed at him when he told her what he had done.

'What are you freeing yourself from, Ian? I have no power over you.'

'What's his name?'

'Does it matter?'

'What does he do then?'

'He's a doctor.'

'A real one?'

'An anaesthetist.'

'So how did you two meet?'

'Does it matter?'

'And you're sticking to your story that it's nothing?'

She doesn't look at him. She dabs her lips with the blue napkin, then drops it on the plate.

'On a scale of one-to-ten he's a five, maybe a six.' As she speaks, she walks over to the

patio door. 'Probably more a five. Do these things open?' She releases the catch and slides back the door. 'You were an eight, maybe a nine. Not bad,' she says as she steps out onto the patio. The candle flickers in the draught. 'The gardens they give people here aren't big enough to swing a cat in. You don't have a cat, I know. You're not into animals. Pity! They can be such good company.' From the garden she asks, 'who did your wall?' 'I did it.' He's surprised that she has noticed.

'I like the colour.'

'The grey was doing my head in. A few cans of paint was all it took. Blue breeze blocks seem less obscene.' He leans against the patio door, notices the paleness of her hand as she touches the wall.

'True,' she says and turns to face him. 'Do you keep a score on your women, Ian? Was I a five or a six, maybe an eight or a nine?' He wants to answer but she doesn't let him. 'It's okay. Don't get alarmed. I don't think I really want to know. Where's my Brooder?'

'He's in the other room.'

She comes back in, slides the patio door shut behind her.

It's the only picture on the wall. The other paintings are still in a pile in the corner. She told him it reminded her of him. He had to stop brooding she said, had to get himself out of it.

'I thought of you the minute I saw this. I told you. You're back in that same place, aren't you? But it's no use raking over the past, Ian. You'll never work it out.' Her eyes fall on the edge of the newspaper in the bookshelf. She pulls it out, glances at the headline and drops it on the armchair again. 'I'd better go.'

'You could stay.' He wants to walk towards her but there is no movement.

'Keep us company for a while.'

'No, Ian. I have to go. I don't want to be part of your prison any more. We almost had you out. But now the two of you are stuck here together. We failed miserably, didn't we?'

When she leaves he blows out the candle, clears the table, dumps the napkins in the bin. Then he picks up the newspaper. There's a story about a fire in one of the new estates. A man trapped in his bedroom, overcome by smoke. The fire had probably started downstairs in the kitchen. He was unconscious when they got to him. The medics tried to resuscitate him in the back of the ambulance. But he didn't make it.

Kate Ennals

Christmas Eve at the Neighbours

We unclasp the gate, walk up the garden path.
We see a silver tree in the window.
It flashes and sparkles.

Inside six children race about.
they charge between the low lit kitchen
and the flickering blue light of the lounge
to paw at a pile of presents.
We poke our heads round the door
to say hello to Vince
where he lies sprawled, watching TV.
Six santi socks hang in a row
on the back of the leather settee
he raises a glass.
Mary pours a G&T
In the orderly kitchen
where not a dish is out of place.
She shows us eight Christmas dinners neatly plated:
two slices of turkey, two scoops of cream potatoes,
brussel sprouts, green beans, stuffing,
congealed gravy splashed accross the top.
"I cooked it all today" she says with pride.
"Do you eat on Christmas Eve?"
"No. I'll stick it in the micro wave
tomorrow. It leaves me free to have a few."

Imagine, Christmas day with no hot oven,
no peeling, no lists with things to do,
no rows about carving.

As we sip our drink
We hear a slap and Vince roar
"Go to bed or there'll be no Santa!"
We pretend we haven't heard.

We clink our glasses,
We take our leave.

The children clatter up the stairs.
near midnight as we stuff stockings,
Three doors up
We hear her screams.

Eileen Bennett

Spoiled for choice

“Where are you going?”

“Out!”

“But it’s raining.”

“So I’ll get wet! What do you care anyway?”

There was no answer to that. Not anymore.

Susan pulled the door hard behind her but it caught in the mat and what should have been a dramatic slam became a pathetic, muffled thud.

“Not with a bang but a whimper” Eddie said as he adjusted the crumpled mat and closed the door carefully. From the tiny window he watched Susan splash through the puddles on the boreen. Even dressed in wellies and a rainmac she was impressive looking – tall, slender and elegant with an air of confidence and self-possession that Eddie had never encountered in people his own age. Compared to the woman he’d been sharing this cottage with for almost six months, his contemporaries seemed like shallow, foolish schoolchildren.

Susan’s three dogs ran from the woodshed to join her. The sight of them made Eddie angry.

“You big, stupid, pampered ugly strays – I hate your guts!” He shouted through the antique lace curtains, knowing he couldn’t be heard, as the dogs followed their mistress, wagging their tails, looking up at her adoringly, begging for recognition, for love. At that moment his contempt for those dogs and their fawning gratitude reached a new level and he despised them utterly.

Eddie knew what would happen next – what always happened when she

walked out on their disagreements. Susan would stride the length of the South Beach, march up the steep path to the bench on the Head made for lovers and tourists and sit taking deep, cleansing breaths.

Good air in. Bad air out.

Then, after gazing thoughtfully out to sea for a while, she would stroll calmly back and everything would be forgotten.

There were several things he could do now and Eddie considered them all.

He could follow her to the Head, sit near her – but not too close – contemplate the ocean with her and walk in silence beside her all the way home. She liked that when he tried it before. She said she felt he was giving her the space to be angry and was being supportive of her emotions.

That was good, she said.

He could make a pot of soup. That had worked well too. She said it was warm and welcoming and nourishing and helped her feel positive about herself.

That was good too, she said.

He could run her a bath and add aromatic oils – something calming, something sensual – have towels heating on the radiator, a bottle (or two) of wine chilling in the fridge, a big roaring fire in the living rooms and candles everywhere.

This was Eddie's personal favourite because it always resulted in frantic sex. And afterwards, Susan would hold him and rock him and tell him how happy they were together, how right they were for each other, how Fate had ordained that they should be united – in body and soul. Forever.

Eddie couldn't put a name on what he was feeling at that moment but suspected that something closely resembling the last straw was moving into place. The novelty of being Susan's toy boy had worn thin. There was nothing new and exciting in his life anymore and he longed to break free.

He sat in the armchair, then stood and walked around the room. Suddenly everything about the place irritated him: the African sculpture Susan had haggled over in some colourful bazaar in some colourful city Eddie had never seen; the hand-woven blanket given to her by an American Indian woman with a name Eddie thought only existed in Westerns; the temperamental old stove he had to coax to life every day; the whole half-natural, half contrived rustic look and feel of the place; and, most of all, the photographs. Some were framed and hanging on the walls; others were pinned to doors and curling at the edges.

Susan wearing a broad-brimmed hat standing beside a dusty Aborigine man. Susan on an elephant. Susan with a llama. Susan at the Trevi Fountain.

“Arty farty as be-fucked!” was Doyle’s reaction the first time he stepped inside this cottage.

“Arty farty as be-fucked is right!” Eddie said to the walls. “And I’m sick of the sight of you.”

He walked up to a large framed photograph of a tanned and healthy Susan smiling from underneath a large sombrero.

“And I am especially sick of the sight of you!”

With his left hand he steadied the imaginary gun that the fingers of his right hand were forming. He lined up his shot carefully, aiming for the point at the top of Susan’s nose where her eyebrows almost met.

“It’s you or me, pardner” he drawled in his best cowboy accent. “This town aint big enough for the both of us hombre.”

He sat again and ran both hands slowly through his hair, along the back of his neck and over his face, bringing them to rest in the praying position in front of his nose. He thought of Doyle and Mac and the Great Adventure they had all started together barely six months earlier.

“We’ll take a year off and see the world!” Doyle had said after they graduated. “Then we can get all serious and settled.”

But on the way Eddie had met Susan in a pub in a small west of Ireland village and ended up more serious and settled than he ever imagined possible while Doyle and Mac went on without him.

Chopping firewood, cutting grass, fixing what needed fixing, keeping Susan warm and comfortable and satisfied – that was Eddie’s role.

He sighed.

A big, black spider slowly making its way from behind the sombrero photograph caught his eye and he sat very still and watched it intently. It paused briefly when it reached the floor, as if to catch its breath or check for predators, before continuing its journey. Eddie waited until the spider was on open ground, with no possible means of escape. He leapt from the chair and pounced on it. Using first his right foot and then his left and then his right again he ground the creature into the wooden floor until all that was left was a faint stain.

“Ha!” he crowed triumphantly. “You weren’t expecting that you creepy leggy bastard.”

He felt better.

Knowing that Susan would not have approved of the senseless slaughter of a fellow creature was a bonus. He considered cleaning the stain but decided against it. It would always be there, he thought, as a reminder of that sweet moment when he resumed control of his life and only he – and the spirit of the spider – would ever know what caused it.

Now it was time for action.

He could follow her to the Head and push her off.

He could poison the soup.

He could drown her in the bath and chop her up into little pieces and feed her to those ever-ravenous dogs. Or better still, wait until after the sex, smother her with a pillow and then turn her into dog food. And maybe, after they’d devoured her, he’d mince the dogs and throw all their

bits to the gulls.

The perfect crime!

He slapped his thighs.
“Decision time” he said.

He rubbed his palms together.

“The walk, the soup or the bath?”

He clasped his hands in front of his chest and chanted “the walk, the soup or the bath?”

He danced around the furniture singing “the walk, the soup or the bath?”

He had a good voice. Susan said she knew they were meant for each other when she heard him doing Leila at the Seaside Bar and Singing Lounge that night last summer.

He changed his tune and assumed a guitar playing stance.

“You’ve got me on my knees Leila....”

The unmistakable sound of the post van coming up the boreen stopped him short. He pulled on his jacket and went out to intercept Jack. Experience had taught him that if Jack got out his van he expected to be invited in for tea as a reward. Susan’s cottage was his last stop and he’d be in no hurry to leave and would spend an hour or more boring Eddie with bits of gossip about people he didn’t know and had no desire to know. Susan loved his visits and his small town chatter. She called it ‘quaint’ and genuinely felt she was being granted an insight into the psyche of rural Ireland. If Susan was out of the house, Eddie often pretended to be leaving as the post arrived.

Jack was rooting through a large empty bag on the passenger seat. He pulled out a crumpled postcard and rolled down his window.

“I saw herself heading for the beach”

“Did you?”

“I was giving her your post but she wouldn’t take it.”

“What harm”

“Only a little postcard and she wouldn’t take it. Would have saved me the trip up here and all.”

He handed Eddie the card.

“It’s from those lads you came here with last summer. They’re in Australia now if you don’t mind. Bondi Beach no less. Having a great time by all accounts and earning good money too.”

“Isn’t it well for them.”

“Aren’t you the sorry young lad didn’t stay with them instead of burying yourself in this hole of a place? Still, love is blind and there’s no accounting for taste, as my old father used to say.”

“Bye now, Jack.”

“Going out are you?”

“Getting a bit of fresh air.”

“You’re in the right place for fresh air, young lad. We’ve always have plenty of that. Damn all else but any amount of fresh air. Though I wouldn’t say you’d get too much of the same fresh air when herself is in the house!”

Jack winked and seemed to be expecting an answer to his comment. Eddie decided to be generous and throw Jack a morsel, knowing it would shortly grow into a feast.

He put his arm on the roof of the van and leaned in toward the window.

“Between ourselves Jack I’m worn to a frazzle.”

“Is that right now?”

“There’s days I can hardly walk. She has me nearly killed, if you know what I’m saying.”

Eddie winked at Jack and banged the roof of the van.

“Bye now Jack.”

He started to walk towards the end of the breen. He waved at the green van as it raced passed. Jack was in too much of a hurry to pass on this snippet of the details of Eddie and Susan’s active sex life to notice Eddie turn and walk back to the cottage.

He stood inside the door staring at the picture in his hand of sunshine and blue sea and cloudless sky. He turned it over and read Mac’s untidy scrawl. Eddie could just imagine his friend sprawled on some exotic beach surrounded almost naked, nubile, exotic women.

Jack had already narrated all of what Mac had to say but down the side of the card, in Doyle’s tiny, precise handwriting, were the words “Come on down mate!”

Eddie smiled. That was typical Doyle. He didn’t say much but what he said always hit home, like a guided missile, and every word counted.

Eddie unpinning a photograph from the door frame – Susan at the Pyramids – and replaced it with his postcard. He chose two bottles of wine from the well-stocked rack and put them in the fridge. He built up the fire, tossed in Susan at the Pyramids and watched until the flames had crept up and consumed it. He turned on the water heater and spread big, soft, white towels on the radiator in the bathroom.

He lit all the candles and drew all the curtains.

And he sang on his way to the woodshed.

“You’ve got me on my knees Leila...”

Laney Mannion

We all make mistakes ...we do

Your explanation for you is far flung from this creation space
I looked pondered a while and gave up
Who masks the masked crusader who flung out the wit of thirty 3 and a half?
What notion took flight into the thoughts of the midnight hour to take you and spin you up into a wonder that lasted all night and into next week.
We were alone in the cupboard of arseholes and might
We laughed merrily at the masters of this right wrong who the hell belongs
Being slightly ostentatious in the ways a pedantic way of carting around ideas and flinging them out at you
Like you're careless with your brainpower,
Your knowledge,
Your way of seeing,
To stand over an dictate, to throw fort sarcastic wit,
Put down the years you have walked this earth
With your eyes wide open.
Your emotions felt and delved into laboriously mulled over an made sense of as best you could,
No one can feel what you feel
There is the self-inserted out there walking around
Throwing caution to the wind and ignoring the blinding obvious
We all make mistakes... we do.

Angela Byrne

At the edges

There's a rainbow over that field you left,
the one that trickles down to the sea,
the cattle have gone,
you're not climbing over the walls to get a closer look
or maybe from a distance.
August is still summer, almost
I dip my toes in, chance a paddle
among the dead jelly fish.
blown in with the storm last night
scattered at the edges of the trá.

The chair

Of solid construction
lovingly hand crafted,
how many bottoms
dropped down on to it,
to pause for tea
perhaps a fine meal.

A child's favourite to climb on
a make do ladder,,
it's wooden beginnings not disguised,
even with layers of paint,
enough curve in the batons
that says this maker took the trouble
to put design into robust functionality.

Van Gogh would of happily painted this chair,
pausing to place it next to a table
with sunflowers on.

Stephen Byrne

Carlsberg don't do countries, but if they did...

Carlsberg, probably the best lager in the world,
now a slogan engraved in the past,
Carlsberg, arm in arm with fellow conspirators-
Whiskey, Vodka, Buckfast,
ice-cubes, pink umbrellas, celery sticks,
the tribal song of comradeship,
combine forces in the shaker of
Saturday night and Sunday moan
to turn fountains of youth into
mangled spoiled children of
the whinging generation,

Carlsberg don't do countries,
but if they did,
Eire swaggering Eire would
rest knee deep in a pool of puke,
her friendly face, embrace
the fist of a stamp
with her Croagh Patrick stations of the bar;
her green, splatter postcards,
her tales sing of
fearless Red Branch Knights
who spill ancient blood
on the stone walls of Quay Street,
her mouthwatering beer battered fish
her Guinness stringy stew,
could shatter the strongest teeth;
our country our pride,
clad in new national slogan
"That calls for a Carlsberg"

Daddy's little flower
dressed in petals and lilies,
wakes with her seed soaking wet,

"That calls for a Carlsberg"
The jigsaw jaw
with the cracked black eye,
brands the shame of night,
the cabbies fear of the full moon
or the child afraid of the wolf
who licks the whiskey glass
"That calls for a Carlsberg"
Eire my Eire,
her song in a mist of moonlight
or the swaying flute of the reed
echoes poetry along paved empty streets
that calls for a Carlsberg.

Jack McCann

The Child Grows Up

The swing flies in the breeze
as if you are still on it.
Gone is the laughter ,
the shouts for “higher and higher”.
Even the dog dreams you will ride it again
so he can pull you back and forth
while you stand on the seat,
never doing anything normally.

The tree house lies empty, unlived.
No clambering on wooden rungs,
no sticking out window of smiling face,
no climbing on roof and up tree.
Quietness pervades there and here.
No more, “come and catch me’,
“find me if you can”. Of course, I can’t.
I wish we could play those games again.

The rocking horse stately stands still.
No rider to be found to rock him awake,
No one to comb his mane or pull his tail
Or dress him up with hats and coats and other stuff.
No one to call his name, to come out and play
Yet he stands at the ready fighting his misery.
Not liking the loneliness playing on his imagination,
He wishes his days away, rocking generations.

Life moves on, moves out, moves me.
Paths change, some dark, some beautiful,
companions too as time catches up.
We used to move mountains - nothing too difficult.
Now the thought of action swamps all energy.
The dog looks at me and wonders why
time moves on with tear in eye?
I have no answers for what’s gone by.

The Isolated Poet

I am an isolated island
sitting in the flow of the river of life,
sometimes almost submerged by its torrent,
other times glowing like a lantern in the night.

I stand back and look from afar.
I see through microscopic eyes for clarity.
Hem and haw over word selection
before committing to the page my direction.

I have known the isolation, the depth of emotion,
the mountainous solitudes, the hermit times,
highs and lows, ingredients for a working poet's poem
to turn on the tap of the reader's psyche.

I am master of my isolation. I have chosen,
yet I am still anchored to those that make a difference.
Do my poems make a difference? Touch a chord?
Or do they clog the gutters of the mind?

Elemental Love

Throughout my lifetime
as I grow and wander,
you use the elements
to carve boy from baby,
man from boy.
You drown me in Holy Water
to protect me from outer demons.
But what of those
that are inside the flesh?
You breathe love-fire on me,
fanned by the wind
at your command
'til it takes hold,
becoming part of the roots of my life.
Finally, you throw beloved earth on me
to keep me from wandering,
announcing "dust to dust",
"I will see you in the hereafter".
Will it have Earth, Wind,
Fire and Water?

Eamonn Wall

Country life

Palms' greeting at the kitchen door
white with flour. Next, she would
offer words of welcome, then turn
away to wash all white right out.
She dried hands, then presented
scones. I made a pot of tea,
real Wexford tea, stronger than
tarmacadam. We offered familiar
conversation, terms drawn again
from a bag of clichés as warm
as pastries. We moaned when we
heard that the Wilsons had called,
the "fragile" daughter fidgeting in her
purse for sanitizer. On wooden
forms we sat, old clock singing
out the time. Rain, this day, falling
on the fuchsia in the garden. After
the cigarettes, drawn from packets
like cold revolvers, had been lighted
up deep talk commenced. This day it
began with that Carlow "So and So"
and concluded with a fierce attack
on the latest leader of the Labour
Party, an inoffensive Dublin gurrer.
Drinking deeply, I inclined my
ears: vowel, consonant, rhythm,
seanfhocal, bean an tí, huge bursts
of laughter, blue air Silk Cut
regular and ultra, Mrs. O'Kelly
held up to ridicule for favouring
pints of Smithwicks shandy. Lord,
the cruelty of it all, how I loved
to listen in on country life, taking
my turn, lingering on for encores
played out round the kitchen sink.

Heritage

By then ninety he reversed hands
so I might read a fable inscribed
on his soft washed palms. Self-
evident, he said, no bother please
with why, what, or how. He let
me run my fingers along his lines.
Closing his eyes, my father breathed
with an even calm. I smelled
onion on his breath, chapstick
richly coated to his lips. Light
of winter weak, defined, found
the curtain's slit, crossed his
crown as it wound across the room.
The lines I followed backward,
every strand ended neatly
tied with bows: green, red, white,
pink like roses and greens that grew
once in his garden by the sea:
songlines of a father's life yielded
up to me, two bodies joined together
winter's afternoon, light and water
flowed. Traffic along a moving street:
he sought to pass his life along to me.

Visar Zhiti**Elegy of the forest**

The forests have shrunk
And fear has expanded,
The forests have dwindled,
There are less animals now,
less courage and less lightning,
less beauty
and the moon lies bare,
deflowered by force and
then abandoned.

The forests have shrunk,
Poetry, sighs have diminished,
There are less words for leaves
and more rumours.

The forests have shrunk,
The rivers have lost their magic,
The rivers are bewildered,
They observe us like zebras in a zoo.

The forests have shrunk,
And shame has shrivelled,
How little shame we now have,
We regret nothing at all,
We have so little time to regret.
The roads have grown,
e maisur plage.
so have billboards and dilemmas,
warehouses, cinemas and praise.
The cities have grown,
And shame has expanded,
All that shame the newspapers cannot contain,
To be continued in the next issue
and in next year's subscription of folly.

The forests have shrunk
and the forest protection units have grown.
Love has recoiled
and the birds have less room
for their lovemaking,
For they cannot make love in office buildings.
Faces have receded.

A little boy draws trees on the walls,
Draws trees in my eyes,
Tattooing a tree
on his slender arm,
like the end of the twentieth century,
Piercing it so often with his burning needle adrip with ink
That the forest is in a frenzy of blood,
the festering sore of suffering.

The arrival of Pegasus in my cell

During the day -
Morning, afternoon,
During the night -
Evening, midnight, after midnight
Every clank caused me to shudder,
Reminded me of the shackles,
As if the guards were coming to take me away
And fling me into a cavern
where even fear itself is horror-stricken.
All the clanking...
But what clanking?...
What did it all mean,
the clanking?...
Petrified, I put my eye
To the loop-hole.
On the small patch of grass - horseshoes.
A stallion was grazing
As it once did
In my dreams.
Its shining body
Like dawn washed by rain and moonlight.
What good fortune has brought you here?
Are you not Pegasus?!
I, too, had verdant dreams,
as fresh as grass.
Some they trampled,
Others I kept.
Let me throw you some of them -
eat!
And with parched lips,
I whispered slowly,
As lovers might have whispered:
-Stallion, oh stallion...

It raised its head,
We looked one another in the eye.
I had not seen myself in a mirror for some time,

Had almost forgotten what my face looked like.
I saw myself in the stallion's eyes,
Such human eyes
shining as if in pain.
I was shorn bald,
Bearded and filthy...
and turned away
So as not to startle it with my wild appearance.

The epilogue (of which time makes a preface)

Life is less than hope.

And, still, I write poems
Though no one reads them.
Perhaps the wind does not read the stars at night,
Maybe the cliffs at the seaside
Feel nothing of the fury of the waves.

And, still, I write poems,
Which have destroyed my life. For seven years
They shrouded my body in barbed wire.
They shredded my skin and torrents of life flowed
like torrents of blood
down to the tips of my toes.
But I did not lose my soul, not all of my soul,
Bits and pieces I pulled out
Of the fissures of my body
and sent them back
to love,
to poetry.

With little, tiny bits of soul,
Like bees who have lost their way,
I now live on.

.....
And when you consider
that even inscriptions on gravestones
have readers,

You come to realize that poetry is greater than hope.

Kevin Higgins

Litany

After Charles Cotton

From lawyers with zebra pinstripes
and hair that was refused entry
to Sparkles Nite Club, 1975;
from Albanians* on the make
and side effects which may include
aggression, dizziness, hallucinations,
Deliver us.

From siblings who are Hitler
without the charisma
and every variety of herbal tea;
from nuns and boy politicians
who worry about what gets put up cervixes
that are none of their concern,
Deliver us.

From guest appearances by Lulu
and anything presented by Noel Edmonds;
from alternative therapists who
can cure Red Water in horses over the phone
and documentaries not about
the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities,
Deliver us.

From lady librarians who look like their nostrils
have just been assaulted by something horrible
and sandals with socks helicoptered in specially
from the Institute of Discredited Ideas;
from unique selling points and Intertextuality
In The Work of Medbh McGuckian;
Deliver us.

From you just saying what you think

and from what you think;
from meetings addressed
by Daniel Ellsberg
and radio advertisements that ask:
why go bald?
Deliver us.

From these and all
complaints waiting to be born
in newspapers I shouldn't open,
computers I shouldn't switch on,
Deliver us eternally or
at least 'til this time tomorrow.

[] The Albanian in question is Agnes Bojaxhiu, better known as Mother Teresa of Calcutta. This poem was written while the poet was reading 'The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa In Theory And Practice' by Christopher Hitchens.*

Fred Johnston

Noise

All ends up in noise -
traffic on the unfinished highway
crazy like the too-long married
tired of the stop and go
new lovers on mobile 'phones
cruising the gaps in conversation
everything is noise and nothing is.
Office desks scrape over and over
like mechanisms unevenly set
wrist-watch hands click
out of the ear's sight
there's a great unfinished thing
hanging in the air
making its own grunt and clamour -
Everything is noise, nothing is:
there's nothing to hear
lovers cry out and fall silent
silence is the sought-for
end of it all, end of the line
it's the silence that makes the loudest
wail, a welter of exasperation
We couldn't have come to a worse
condition
blood running neither hot nor cold
listening for the heart to stop
finish itself, fall silent
the noise of its descent like a bird
dropping out of the sky, soundless.

The politics of light

Means nothing at all to the unseeing
a feather on an eyelid, little else
But all light is compromise
tinctures of light and heavy
Granules of grey, lumens and footcandles:
the calculus of observance -
So what opens the dark is a matter
of disputation, a small thing
Of itself made omnipotent by the eye's
rage to absorb everything
A corneal thirst for definition -
but that's a different thing entirely.

Vertigo

It's not the falling down we fear
but the not getting up
some riot in the inner ear
a quiet convulsion at the periphery
of all that's certain
the violence of uncertainty
days waiting for the world
to right itself
for meaning to get its meaning back
red panic, as when bad news
drops through a letter-box
or a gun goes off, or a lover leaves
the urge to stay blind in a dark room
resist the light
deprive whatever is coming of light
to find you by; lie on the floor
while footsteps thud
on the bloodied grass, in the mud.

Liam Duffy

Out

In Taffe's

graciously accepting pints of Guinness
and well wishes
I can't quite hear
from the friends of my father.

"Where are you off to now?
And did you see the match"

"I might have,
who was playing and what sport was it?"

We talk about who's running such and such
bar and restaurant
and how they don't know what they're doing,
nobody would pay that for that.

In The Quays
the music gets louder
as the conversation turns to spit
and all is suffixed with 'eh', 'ah' or 'lad'.
The drinks go past last orders
as Dad knows the barman, but can't remember his name.

We go for afters at The Imperial,
where Dad knows the barman.

We're drunk enough, now, to talk about
the relatives we don't talk about,
The Troubles and to make a good spirited joke
about the uncle married to a Romanian
(neither of us are sure how many children he's fathered
or with who).

Outside my Dad walks along the taxi rank
passing the black drivers to find a 'local' one,

at home were we eat heavily buttered toast
with tea in a silence tempered by chewing.

"goodnight and God bless"
is punctuated by doors closing
the dishes left for the morning.

A Nation holds its Breath

Footage shows
a stock market floor
men in shirts
punching the air

cut to
indignant's
breaking police barriers,
charging buildings
and eyewitness accounts
of how they stormed the lobby
were stopped by a secretary
who requested :

"Patience. Please wait,
the bigger animals
are eating."

They sat with patience
that pleased.
Thumbing through magazines,
while the bigger animals
were eating.

Aideen Henry

Space

It starts with schoolbags on the stairs.
'I'm not having this' she says,
out they go, pegged out the landing window.
Lunchboxes disgorge sticky apple butts,
black bananas skins and silver wrappers.
Schoolbooks splay, words spill across the paving.
The pencilled scrawl of sums and handwriting
flitters in the breeze, notes home about cake sales
holidays, speared by brambles
then sucked under the privet into that windless place
where small birds dart.

Next it's the space around her.
Children, animals, her husband
all rushed out the front door,
no ifs or buts.
The cooker, the fridge, the built-in kitchen.
uprooted to the garden in their original formation.
Soon the rooms are clean of furniture.
She commandeers the kitchen-living room,
whips down the blinds, seals the chimney
squirts foam in the gaps between door and architrave
screeches masking tape around the drafty windows.

'Now', she says 'I'll have a bit of peace.'
And with a look of supreme serene
she inhales all the trapped air in the room,
her body tumescens and every cream pie,
pastry, éclair and doughnut she ever had
mobilises from exile and every chocolate torte,
pavlova, coffee sponge and banoffi she lusted after
joins them, cramming and straining the flesh of her stomach
stretch marking and mushrooming her succulent limbs
until her skin slicks against the sweating walls,
leaving tiny air pockets in the corners.

Cicatrix

The glass eye doesn't double-take when I pass his seat,
then return its attention to his newspaper,
doesn't crinkle when he smiles into his phone
or when he slaps his thigh, laughing.

The glass eye doesn't peer into his coffee as he drinks,
doesn't wink at the waitress to flag her down,
doesn't swing side to side as he pats his pockets,
doesn't squint to pick loose change for the tip.

The glass eye stands proud and cool
sucked into its socket by tepid moist flesh.
Though part of him, it remains apart from him,
unreachable, insentient, imperturbable.

Pocket lint

Dust particles and threads
adhere over time, lint settles and collects.

So at any one moment
we see it as a cluster of something, an entity.

We assume intent as if formed by design,
whereas unplanned and transient, it has settled for a bit.

Like a person and their apparent depth,
a semblance of self, fashioned from an engirdling mould.

It's a stray collection
cast together, in this shape, at this time.

Miceál Kearney

The Removal

Mick, Matty, Jimmy and Frank stand –
the four moons of this dead Sun.
The two remaining daughters
Burka-black on comfort-less chairs.

Alzheimer's relieved her off many things.
But her ace of hearts; that
she refused until the end.
Then the lid was screwed on.
The Department of Suicide Prevention
After Dave Lorden. For Brian.

You woke early, I'd say,
so not to disturb anyone
rope ready, it's what I would have done.
Then slipped into something more comfortable.

Naked as the Snowdrops.

Daily

As a child Cinderella would recoil in fear
from the dentist's anaesthetizing prick.
How apt she grew up to chase dragons
under the bridge by the river
where nobody cares —
no politician's electoral area.

Sure as a sailor to a siren
her prince will arrive
on his china white steed;
whisk her off to the ball
were she is the belle
reeking of vomit and piss.

This manky princess
a toad would not kiss.
And well she knows
when the clock chimes
Dawn will ride off
with her man.

Pd Lyons

Soon Like Crows

and would I know
the winter
still sliding down
silvering the window
soft whispers
smoke secrets
between
the kitchen fire
and all those winter fires gone before
each ghost arrives upon the gale
welcomed here beside the hearth
each breath of my own
rare and gifted by such drifters
visible in smoke
audible in flame
never alone

How You Look Today

you ask for
softer clothes
something
complimentary
to nudity
you remember
types of
warm
lips
firm fingers
drapesing rhapsodly
you think of time
patiently
savouring lozgenly
past loves
live moments
even regret
luxurious
soon wrapping
silk confidence
check mate your way out
silver day bright
sheer white
high altitude blue
a waiting

Sarah Clancy

Hitting every note on the reader's emotional register

"You are too quick to find solutions"

"Excuse me?"

"I prefer not to solve things so quickly.

It's easier that way. Never solve one problem until you have another one ready"

(Dave Lordan from First Book of Frags)

The characters in Alan Mc Monagle's short story collection *Psychotic Episodes*, are at no risk of running out of problems anytime soon; 'My cousin was having a bad summer. His best friend had died in Mexico. His cat had died in his arms. At any moment his mother was going to die. She was paralysed and had lost her mind.' from *The Mega Million Lottery*

Psychotic Episodes is a trip. It is a blindfolded confused, unsettling and often hilarious trip into the minds of a cast characters who either have no idea what is going on or, in the few cases where they do have a grasp of events, they have no idea what they feel about them.

The collection hits every note on the reader's emotional register by enlisting an unusual literary 'device'; that of creating totally clueless and emotionally illiterate characters. Because of the strength of characterisation in the stories it took me several readings to pinpoint this technique or craft. At first reading I only knew that the stories unsettled and simultaneously beguiled me. I was immediately reminded of Nabakov's memorable and eminently pitiable character Pnin, a middle aged Russian refugee who blundered his clueless way around the world of academia in the US. Like Pnin, many of Alan Mc Monagle's characters are very very nearly mainstream or conventional. They miss by a whisker, and Alan makes extraordinary fictions from the whisker they miss by.

Psychotic Episodes celebrates marginalisation. It probes exactly how staggeringly close people can be to belonging, whilst not fitting in at all. Though certain of Alan's stories do deal with more conventional ways of opting out such as drinking, drug taking and escapist travel the writer is at his best when he explores the far more interesting territory

of people who have done little to participate in their own alienation. The few drink/drug/mental illness focussed stories do remind me of other writer's work; of Ablutions by Patrick De Witt, of On the Road by Kerouac, of Ben Lerner's 'Leaving the Atocha Station'. (In Lerner's novel a hapless constantly stoned emerging poet who suffers from depression is on a year-long writer's junket to Spain. He is medicated, dispirited and disconnected from everything. He is as terrified of recognition and success as he is of failure.) However, other than poor misunderstood Pnin, the characters in the sober stories in Psychotic Episodes remind me of those of no other writer. Perhaps the closest comparison I could make is to the minor players in a Coen Brother's film.

This book is almost but not quite dystopian. In most of the stories we are aware that there is something better, we just can't see it too clearly. Reading it, I can imagine that his people inhabit a world where they can't ever quite get themselves at the right angle to the pavement. They are tilting forward, too eager for something too slight, or too slight for something substantial. I love them. Each time I read it I fall for them, head over heels, whilst simultaneously despising them.

Alan's book is steeped in loneliness, and there's always someone either protagonist or cameo player to feel sorry for; there's the poor toddler being babysat by a hapless and unfeeling couple whilst disaster looms like an old friend. In 'Women drivers on Taylor's Hill' there's a gentle nameless cyclist who becomes smitten by the numerous women who knock him down with their SUVs and injure him. The worse the injury the more he seems to fancy them.

There's nine year old Vanessa in 'Runaway' coming up with a near perfect solution to her own heartbreaking predicament and though her eight year old messenger-friend participates, he remains oblivious to the real situation and renders Vanessa even lonelier than ever. There's a child being led away by the hand from a street market by another older child who has a stolen knife in his pocket and I loved both of them.

What matters in this collection is imagination and weakness and Alan never lets up with either. He constructs some of the bravest weaknesses imaginable, several of his characters (cowards to a man woman and child) commit semi-suicides; suicides masquerading as accident, as rescue, as

escape. Alan writes without ego, brilliantly sparsely, with the language never straying from that which would be credible from each character. There are no virtuoso paragraphs of luminous writing here and if there were they would not ring true. I have the comfortable feeling reading this collection that Alan would write this way however his stories were eventually received. At some stage when I am feeling sufficiently connected to the world myself to cope with it, I would love to read a novel from this talented and compassionate writer.

PS: On my third go at Psychotic Episodes I suddenly understood that my uneasiness at reading this collection was because I found the characters too similar to me, and indeed to others I know. Read this book, it may be about you.

Boris A. Novak

Alba

Beyond the reach of sleepy dawn
in an unmade bed of half-light, fearful
of morning coming down from white mountains
between us with the sword which will not wait,

we lie, one against the other, still warm,
making a poor pretence to sleep,
while my palm, ever more breathlessly,
seeks to hold the willingness of the skin,

that melts beneath a starry touch.
Every instant takes you farther into the distance.
All that remains with me is your hidden picture.

Through the long but all too short night,
your warm head lies upon my shoulders.
And I hide my tears, my miraculous vulnerability.

Translated by Erica Johnson Debeljak

Borders

We gaze at the same full moon ... horizons
far away, too far from each other. Mountains
rise between us. A soft, mossy crust
grows over our footsteps. All alone

you crossed all borders and came to a foreign country,
to the homeland of my arms. Dangerously alone
I crawl past the keepers of borders: I travel to the
Northwest, where I am bitterly ashamed

of the screeching of the soul among smooth, horrible walls.
I stand before them, a dark man from the Southeast,
with a conspicuous name, shuddering, as naked as prey.
I cannot escape. Border is destiny.

Now you know: although you cross the border, you don't erase it.
Rising even higher it will measure your steps, like doubt.
A map is not an illusion. So speak more softly.
Beyond all borders your lips are my home.

Translated by Lili Potpara

Your Little Bottles

I like to be with you in the bathroom.
Hundreds of scented bottles smile down
from the shelves: creams, lipsticks, shampoos,
mysterious little bottles that hold the condensed

memory of flowers with names unknown.
You borrow their aroma. In the evenings,
your soft breasts exhale their fragrance
and I rinse away with my lips the scent

from the flowery bottles. Then you paint yourself
anew. You make yourself beautiful for me
again: you blacken your brows so they are like birds

flying above the lakes of your eyes; you redden
your full lips so they are even more full, more perfect ...
I know that women like to be alone at the hour

of their mysterious ablutions. But
I am your only witness. I enjoy watching you.

Translated by Erica Johnson Debeljak

Your Scent

Your scent wells up from the opulence of milk.
Your scent is milky mild and fresh and thick.
It washes over me like waves from distant rivers,
unseen air, the secrets of soothsayers.

You are dressed in it. Your scent is a robe
that never falls from you. A forest so thick
that even time cannot cut through it. Your scent
connects me to you: it is a delicate bridge.

When your own scent is concealed by the smell of flowers,
fragile and rich, I strip them away from you with tender
embraces. I lie inside of you: final and eternal.

The aroma of two bodies is a measure of happiness ...
That is why I don't wash myself and your scent
steals furtively inside of me, mysteriously enduring,

timeless and placeless, stinging me.
I recognize your beauty and your

unseen trace as the most fatal of all words.
How far away you are. It is all in vain.

Translated by Erica Johnson Debeljak

Our One House

We lie, after love, on a wrinkled
bed, intoxicated with the smell
of nearness yet already breathing
distance and we sketch on the last page

of a scribbled notebook: a wide garden,
a big kitchen, dining alcove and a room
flooded from a high window with the light
needed to write. Walls rise up from the

awkward letters, the colors will be bright,
in the bedroom a magnificent double bed,
the same one where we lie now

awake and dreaming and knowing – each
of us knowing but neither of us saying it aloud –
that this will be our one and only home,

our one safe and warm hiding place
in a jealous and lethal world,

this bed, this raft floating through time,
through the unfulfilled light of days...

Enough for love. Enough for death.

Too little for life ...

Translated by Erica Johnson Debeljak

The Hairclip

You are a prophetess, Ariadne, in the story's labyrinth:
all day you search for the thread behind the plinth.
After sweet hours of love, golden slumber
vanquishes your weary head. Feather light

curls fall upon your brow. The first shadow
sends a faint trace across your heavy lids.
Your skin, the color of milk, softly breathes.
The murmur of your blood finds its slow reprieve.

And now you ask me to take the clip
from your plaited hair. Your sleepy voice
sounds girlish. Moved by this sign of intimacy,

I carefully unlatch the hairclip so as not to prick you.
Your hair pours out over the pillowcase. Stay
that way. I lie beside you, humbled by the silence.

Translated by Erica Johnson Debeljak

Intimate Things

My suitcase is at your place, your travelling bag
at mine. Chaos. You find my socks in the laundry
basket. Your nightgown is my eternal hostage:
it smells of fresh soap...

I often look for a shirt or a pair of pants,
in vain, because they are with you, twelve hundred
kilometers away. I'd like to live life differently,
to focus the world in only one place,

but it doesn't work: the world is too large. We share
a temporary roof, each with our own suitcase,
reaching out for a new place. Nights are together, days divided ...

If we part from each other, let our things
remain as they are, let them turn to
stone:

mine at your place,
and yours at mine ...

Translated by Erica Johnson Debeljak

Dušan Šarotar

Watercolour

Now that everything has settled down, as among brothers, and the last birds had flown away far into the heart of the country, it all appeared all the more unreal. Poppies blossomed in unmowed acacia groves, the stone glowed in the early summer sun, the bees grazed elder blossoms and the water of the forgotten brook flowed persistently into the unknown. Everything was as it had always been, and yet, in that tiny grey cloud floating in the stillness of the afternoon, there was something about it that could be grasped by the attentive eye. All that seeming loftiness, false absence sketched into this beautiful landscape, bore witness of pain, of the loneliness of man who created these perfect colours.

Whirlpools

There is no echo here, and nothing comes back. Here everything slowly drifts towards the horizon. Only now and then would someone let it slip that he had seen the river stopping, slowing down its eternal current and for a moment, as if lost in thoughts, turning against the current. They say that's where whirlpools form. All that is above, the shimmer of light, the shadows of clouds, is pulled down towards the dark and cold ground. And all that the river has carried and hidden in itself for a long time suddenly floats to the surface. Those who have witnessed such beauty know they have to keep quiet about it.

Expecting

When you're not here and return so very rarely, you feel that nothing ever changes here. You can still feel the bygone wind blowing balloons on Sundays, spreading the fragrance of corn on the cob and gingerbread from behind the old church. You carry within you images of funny old men and the sparkling eyes of old women in their old-fashioned blouses. Their clenching wooden hands watching over tiny purses where they keep a penny for mass and another one for candy. Lonely old ladies, gathered for the sermon, marvel at children as they play boisterously at cat and mouse among the crowd. Beside the road, on the other side, market stalls with black dresses, water pistols, plastic jewellery and battery-powered watches. With gypsies behind the counters, dressed in their Sunday' best, counting money with cigarettes hanging from their mouths. From the speakers, hanging in the trees, a dull voice rings out, disturbing no one, least of all those looking around for children lost in the crowd. In the first row someone mourns the loss of his relative, and, on the other side, men stand under a tree drinking beer, behind the church boys chat bashfully with girls from the neighbouring village, high above in the belfry pigeons sit, bobbing their tiny little heads as if they were the only ones who understood the words carried by the wind into the sky.

Suzana Tratnik

Oil

The girl stood in the middle of the workshop on the ground floor of a large two-storey house. The workshop seemed to have been built first and the living quarters upstairs, still unpainted and stairless, added later. Her mother and the hostess climbed up the wooden planks laid from landing to landing. Walking on the planks instead of a staircase with a banister reminded the girl of a nightmare in which she was forced to jump from balcony to balcony, or dive from the terrace of a skyscraper, as if that was possible. But her mother neither tried to make her walk upstairs nor picked her up to carry her. The two women hit on the idea that the child had better stay in the workshop with the men, who were enjoined to take care that she would not stray near the shaft above which the car under repair was parked. Then they withdrew for long hours to the dizzying floor upstairs, which was reserved for adult women alone, as it seemed to the child deserted in the middle of the workshop. Socialising with the workshop owner and with her own father was, of course, out of the question. They were engrossed in their work on the dismantled car above the black shaft. As soon as the girl came too near a machine part or container, or took a step toward one of the four walls lined with tool-laden shelves, the two mechanics, roused for a moment, would wave their spanners at her in irritation, signalling her to move away at once, but otherwise they took no notice of their surroundings. They examined the engine closely, dismantled it one way and another, took up individual parts, turned them around and whistled through their teeth on discovering a serious defect or their predecessors' sloppiness. People will tinker with something all day long and even go to work for one single purpose: to discover mistakes. They're impatient until they've found some, the girl reflected. And when they do, they become so wrapped up in them that they're interested in nothing else at all. Until new defects turn up, that is.

Every now and then the girl would edge toward the black shaft, on the stairless side of course, stopping before the mechanics could notice that she was not standing still all the time. Then she would edge toward the tool shelves, testing herself again in her quiet game of progressing

toward the workshop edges. She won the first round, coming close enough to the shelves to snatch from the first a lovely greasy little can filled with machine oil. Just as imperceptibly, she managed to return to the centre of the workshop. It was only when she was swinging the can, spilling a drop of oil on herself every now and then, that the men finally noticed her. They raised their worried heads from the engine, looked at each other, and smiled. Her father, waving his hand, told her to go ahead and play with the can as long as she didn't touch other, more dangerous things. The little can was enticingly dirty, as were all things in workshops and in the streets. Her mother certainly wouldn't let her stand in the middle of the workshop swinging a greasy can. But as the women were upstairs drinking coffee, the girl had the opportunity to make a striking discovery. If she gripped the can tight and swung it forcefully around the axis of her shoulder, not a drop spilled from the large upper opening. Which seemed quite beyond belief.

But a mere few months later it would be the child's mother who stood in the middle of the workshop, her eyes reddened, trying to draw attention. The workshop foreman would bolt up the planks for the lunch always fixed by his wife in the upstairs living space. The child's father, on the other hand, would go on rummaging through the spanner kit.

'You've got to come home so we can talk this through,' the mother would start, shaken but still calm.

'I can't, I've got heaps of work,' the father would reply, entrenching himself in the engine over which he was leaning.

'But you can't just leave after almost thirteen years of marriage!'

At this moment, the father would finally locate the right spanner and start busily screwing around the engine. There would be a sense of the conversation stalling.

'Come home, will you!'

No answer.

'Come home.' The mother's voice would crack and she would edge,

imperceptibly, toward the black shaft. 'The child's ill!'

'Take her to the doctor, then.'

The mother would return home by herself and tearfully repeat for days to come how her marriage, once so solid, had suddenly hit the rocks. Her women neighbours, too, would try to determine why such things should happen. They would often closet themselves upstairs, throw tarot cards bought in Austria, turn their coffee cups upside down, and generally try to divine in all ways possible why families keep falling apart. It would seem quite beyond belief to everyone. At one point the mother would embrace the child, enfolding her in the smell of coffee wafting from her mouth, wailing: 'Your father told me to take you to the doctor, as if he didn't care a jot about you.' The girl would be disturbed by the wetness of her mother's cheeks, although secretly relieved that she was in fact so well that it had been months since she last needed to hang around the overheated children's waiting room, always hoping that there might be no needles.

'It's all those sluts' fault,' the first neighbour would repeat. 'It's always the sluts' fault.' And the women would pause for a few moments, apparently satisfied that they had detected a defect in marriage again. To the girl alone, everything would seem the same as before. Sluts seemed to her like little oil cans, unclean and threatening, but yielding nothing at all once you grasped them and swung them around the shoulder axis.

'Don't touch greasy stuff,' the mother told the girl, unexpectedly coming from upstairs to re-knot the wool scarf firmly around the child's neck as the workshop was cold. 'Because I can't ever wash it out.' The girl had grown used to no longer nodding assent at bits of advice or orders as nobody expected it of her, and her oil can was tucked away under her coat. Besides, she could not always tell which stuff was greasy. All she knew was that some was not, or at least should not be, for instance soil, fresh bread, people's heads, good beef, hair. 'Stay here and don't go out in the street,' her mother added before retreating up the planks again, back to the workshop foreman's wife. Although the main street was still quite far away at the time.

The girl no longer remembered when they had finally left the workshop

that evening. All she knew was that they returned home on foot, trudging through the dirty street snow because it was Sunday and because mother liked to say that a family was there for going places.

When the two of them were actually packing up at home about twelve months later, the mother stressed that the girl should collect all of her stuff because they would not be coming back in a hurry. But the girl was fitting into her bag only what her mother had meticulously spread on the bed, mostly clothes, shoes, books and notebooks. Since her grandparents were sulking in the large family kitchen, it was obvious that her toys, stored in a wooden chest near the stove, were out of reach. It was safer that way. The girl could not stand the reproachful glances of grandpa and grandma, who had been angry all winter long with the young family, now really gone to the dogs, as they indignantly told the neighbours. Besides, she was sure that their fury had been fanned by her mother not taking her to the doctor, as her husband had advised. And because they hadn't gone to the doctor, they probably had to move out themselves now. Still, the girl would rather move out than be treated for an illness she didn't have. Although she didn't care a bit for the cellar room on the other side of town where they'd moved. It was murky, with a pervasive smell of sodden moss, and when they brought in all their belongings, the room turned out to combine the kitchen, sitting room and bedroom. They had no corridor, toilet or bathroom of their own at all. Nor their own backyard. All these were to be shared with strangers.

'Once you've put your stuff away, you can go out in the backyard, just watch out for grease,' said the mother. The girl had little work to do. The clothes went into the closet, the shoes into the common corridor, the books and notebooks on the shelf above the sofa. It flitted through her mind that there was not much to tidy up. She hadn't been able to bring all her stuff anyway, neither the toys from the kitchen chest, nor the hen coop, nor the ribbon of grass in front of her house, nor the large stones on the edge of her former backyard, among which lizards used to dart in the heat. All these, as well as the wide state-owned plot of land, had been left there, and since she was gone, they had served nobody else, most certainly not her grandparents and other angry people.

Having donned the coat that jarred on her mother because of a mysterious, lye-resistant oil stain on the inside, the girl stepped into the

open. Crossing the backyard, which she didn't care for as it didn't belong to her but to that large brown house of many temporary lodgers, she headed for the main street. She had to learn the strangers' ways.

She relished every day when she could leave that house for school. She took to lingering at school even after class, attending singing lessons, the traffic safety workshop, gym. Thus she discovered a free time which had the advantage of not having to be spent where one didn't like it. And always she was very pleased because she was so well throughout the winter that she wasn't laid up with a single flu in the big brown house.

Ever since their move, the girl's way to school had been a long one and her mother had been earning a labourer's wages, which meant that they could not afford electric heating in their room. The workshop foreman's wife had given them a used oil stove, which wafted a pleasant smell once you tossed a lit matchstick inside. Once a week, the mother and the girl would don their winter coats, take a ten-litre can, and make their way down the main road to the petrol station. As the can in the mother's right hand was greasy, the girl had to walk on her left. Years later, she could no longer remember what they had talked about on all those long walks to the petrol station and back again. All she knew was that while a morose assistant was pouring heating oil into the can, her mother would glance surreptitiously towards the workshop. Never again did they enter the half-built, unpainted, stairless house, never again did they approach the boards leading to the women's upper storey, or the black shaft where cars were to be repaired and sworn at. 'At least they gave us the stove,' the mother would comment. It must have been the very oil stove which used to stand in the workshop, unlit. But the girl prudently never mentioned it to her mother, knowing only too well that people will grow unreasonably angry on learning that they had been given something of no use to others. The proper gifts were only those which were equally needed by everyone. Just as the serious damages were those which equally hampered everyone.

The long winter of that year did not spare them the Christmas celebrations. Although the only festive feature was the cake at school, and then it was time to go home because the school emptied out at once after class. What awaited the girl at home was the big brown house and an afternoon visit to her grandparents. Her mother rubbed her

cheeks with red lip grease so that the old people wouldn't think they were starving. When they came to the house of their birth, grandpa was piling wood into the stove, rubbing the small of his back, while grandma truculently repeated to the girl: 'You don't like my cake anymore, so I haven't baked any this year!' But the old woman's teasing was all in vain, as a cake had already been baked for the girl at school. She left her mother with grandma in the kitchen and slipped out. In winter, the wide state-owned plot of land was always so white and so empty. She stood by its edge, gazing into the whiteness until the nearest neighbour called to her in a whisper, and when the girl ran up to her, the woman thrust a bag of still-warm cake into her hands, telling her to hide it under her coat so that grandma wouldn't notice. Then the neighbour hastily asked if she ever saw her father. The girl shook her head violently, for her mother's words about her last meeting with her father still reminded her too vividly of seeing the doctor in spite of perfectly good health.

When mother and girl returned to the brown house inhabited by all manner of people, 'cripples, paupers, and street folks', as grandpa had said earlier that day, they were in a dreadful hurry to fetch heating oil from the petrol station, for the holidays were at everyone's door, including theirs. So they had to fetch oil and trudge all that way not once but twice because everything would close for the next few dragging days. The second time, the way back was even longer. The mother shifted the full ten-litre can from hand to hand several times, and the girl accordingly changed sides. She was not allowed as much as to touch the handle because she might ruin her mittens, while her hands would continue to reek even into the new year. Anyway, it never occurred to her that a ten-litre can was several times heavier than an empty one at the end of the long walk back. Applied problems of this kind were still beyond her ken. Suddenly, her mother dropped the can, with a lively splash of the oil inside, buried her face in her oil-greased hands, and said how terrible it was to have everything slip from your hands. But then she grasped the slick handle again, and soon they were home.

When the fireworks explosions had unmistakably proclaimed the coming of the new year, the girl slipped from the spacious lower porch frequented by the paupers and cripples from all walks of life, including an aging snob or two, and ran down to the cellar room. She pulled out the drawer of the rickety sofa, where she kept at the very bottom,

next to a notebook filled with juicy swear words, the can of machine oil wrapped in newspaper. Ever since she'd snatched it from the workshop a year ago, she liked to carry it with her, preferably under her coat. To school, too. When necessary, she would pull it out and oil her fellow student's bicycle chain. She gave herself airs particularly on pouring a few drops on the teacher's brakes. When the teacher thanked her and rode away on her bicycle, its brakes no longer screeching, she found herself surrounded in the school playground by a host of children, all asking her to oil a bike, or a schoolbag handle, an unyielding shirt button, or even the metal buckle on a trouser belt. She learnt to grease whatever creaked or refused to yield. But when she was alone, she gripped the handle of the oil can tight and swung it around the axis of her shoulder, without spilling a single drop. Which had already become a routine.

Translated by Nada Grošelj

Esther Murbach

Local Colour

I'm not from Galway. I'm not even Irish. I like to describe myself as Swiss going on Irish though this sounds a little weird. Never mind, it's just how I feel. One evening I became part of the local colour in Galway. That's the story I'm going to tell you now. Except for a few names I'm changing for discretion's sake, it's entirely and honestly true.

The second time I visited Galway was in September 2011. The wind blew from the West and the rain pelted down when one evening I walked through the Latin Quarter. I took refuge in a pub which was crammed. A young band was fiddling merry reels in a corner, the beer flowing and everybody having fun. As I peeled out of my wet jacket, a guy pushed to my side saying, 'Oh, yer takin' yer clothes off!' 'Not all of them,' I replied politely and concentrated on ordering a Paddy at the bar.

As a helpless woman, you wouldn't want to vex a guy like this. His big round head was shaved to a shine, his stomach spoke of many beers, his huge biceps wore wild tattoos, and his right hand carried the obviously umpteenth pint of Guinness.

The band took a break which made him loose interest in me. He pushed forward towards the musicians' corner, threw his head back and began to sing. From his apparition, you would have expected him to launch into 'The Wild Rover'. But no. In a husky, mellow voice he rendered a romantic ballad speaking of love unfulfilled. A real crooner! The excess of Guinness made him occasionally slip a bit out of tune, but still his performance drove tears to your eyes. Everybody went immediately quiet and listened.

When he had finished, the din in the pub rose again. I ordered a second Paddy, nursing it for a while in the hope of another song. But then the band resumed to play. The guy ordered another pint. I finished my Paddy and left. My mood for merry reels had gone.

At the time I was writing a novel, and I decided to include the scene I had just witnessed into it.

April 2013 saw me back in Galway for the Cúirt International Festival of Literature. It was a busy week full of personal and literary highlights. On my third last day I dove into my favourite pub again for a proper musical

and spiritual goodbye. Over the rim of the counter hung a familiar moon, the round pate of the singer with the husky voice. The stomach, the biceps and the pint in his hand were the same too.

'Is it you who sang this romantic ballad here in September 2011?' I asked him.

'Might very well be,' he said gruffly, eyeing me with suspicion.

'I described the scene of you singing in the book I was writing at the time.'

The moon began to shine. 'Ye described me singin' in yer book?'

'I did.'

'Are ye a writer?'

'I am.'

'Hey, everybody, have ye heard? I'm in a book!'

He turned towards me again. 'Would ye like a glass of wine?'

He climbed from his seat and offered that to me as well. The instant transition from sourpuss to perfect gentleman was breathtaking. I reminded him of the way we had met the first time, how he had expected me to take my clothes off.

'I apologize for that!'

Obviously he was at his first Guinness of the evening.

Then he introduced himself formally. 'I'm Dan. A pity I'm not free anymore. I'm getting married next month and moving to Illinois. My bride is from there. But this here, my friend Kieran,' he pointed to an elderly man sitting next to him, 'he's still free. He might be the man fer ye.'

How very considerate! Had I written 'I'm a cougar on the prowl' all over me? Probably Dan just meant well. A woman by herself hanging around in a pub solely for the music and a good drink seemed a thing inconceivable to him.

He asked about my book. 'Where can I get it?'

'From Charlie Byrne's Bookshop,' I said.

'Where's that?'

'Right in the centre of town, ask anyone.'

'Know what? I have a better idea. Why don't ye get it for me and we meet here again the day after temorrer? Temorrer I'm out of town. How much is it?'

'Twelve Euros. And the day after tomorrow I'll be on my way back to Switzerland.'

'What a shame! Know what? I'll give ye the money. Get the book fer me and deposit it here in my name. Andy!' He yelled to the barman. 'The

lady will deposit a book fer me temorrer!’

He turned to me again. ‘I’ll give ye ten Euros.’

‘It costs twelve. I have to buy my own book and I don’t want to lose money on it.’

‘Alright, eleven.’

A real bargain. He handed me eleven Euros. I decided to take the glass of wine he had offered me into account, plus the seat, and took the money.

‘Please note the page I’m on!’ he advised me.

‘Of course.’

Clearly this would save him a lot of unnecessary reading.

Then I thought he might at least give me another song to warm my heart.

So asked him what other songs he knew. Isle of Hope, Isle of Tears? The Rose of Tralee? Galway Bay? He seemed suddenly kind of embarrassed and nearly shy.

‘Maybe if you give me the tune,’ he finally said.

So I hummed the first bars of ‘Galway Bay’. Astonishingly enough, the quiet Kieran joined in, and he even knew the words. Then it turned out Dan knew the song after all. So did I. We ended up singing it together, all three of us. Right then the door opened to let a few tourists in, amongst them an middle-aged American couple.

‘How nice, some local colour!’ the lady twittered and got her camera ready.

That’s how I finally ended up here, where my soul had been craving to dwell all along. In a pub in the middle of Galway posing as local colour for tourists on the quest for their Irish roots.

As to Dan, I did as he wished. I went to Charlie Byrne’s to buy my own book, deposited it in the pub, marked the page of his appearance for him and even wrote a heartfelt dedication.

Tony Hall

Ode to My Rugby Boot

Thou warrior of Connacht's battlefields,
Thou tattered relic of the season past,
As thou repose upon my recycling bin,
So thou beget great imagining.
What maroon-clad legends haunt about thy shape?
Lo! Wings, and centres, props and locks!
On College Road or the dales of Dangan,
What players, what gods are these? Heroes true, legends all!
What song, what backline call?
'The West's Awake' and Munster ball!
What mad pursuit? Behold the break, through the line!
What wild ecstasy? To see the College score a try!
Penalty goals are sweet, but converted tries are sweeter,
Therefore, legends of College, always tap and go;
Never to yield, succumb or falter, playing only to prevail,
Until the referee's whistle herald's final play.
Place kicker, never dost thou despair,
No matter how far from goal - thou dost never doubt;
Thine kick will never fade, thou hast done thy best,
For ever wilt thou strive, to kick o'er Everest.
Our forwards offloading, and for ever strong;
All breathing rugby passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-joyful amid the throng,
Along the Corrib's sacred rugby grove.
Who are these now playing on the hallowed patch?
The College Cú Chulainns of the past,
Lions, internationals and the greats uncapped.
To what endeavour, O glorious captain,
Lead'st thou that team running the ball?,
Decked in maroon and white,
Lovely little offloads, a majestic sight.
The half backs step, the cover parts,
The full back straightens, and the winger darts.
The forwards heave, ruck and maul,

The props keep alive and spin the ball!
O oval shape! White pill of wonder
For thou, the defence we scythe asunder.
With fend most fierce, and drive most dire,
Our collective spirit a fiery pyre.
Though thou rest now in my bin,
In the oval-shaped cathedral of our hearts,
Is thine memory eternal interred within.
A symbol of our sporting life, a sole of soul,
For ever to remind, thine silent message thou bestow:
"Rugby is truth, truth rugby," - that is all
Ye know in Dangan, and all ye need to know.

Austerity

It appears with such urbanity,
to grant grand authority,
adding to your words 'ity';
an impressive 'suffix-ity'.
As though to connote clarity,
A deeper, abstract verity,
Bequeathing meaning, like charity,
To enlighten our 'ignoramity'.
'Austerity programmability'
'Resource additionality'
'Fiscal governmentality'
'Risk rectitudinality'
Is this mere jollity,
To rhyme with such alacrity?
Surely, more than levity
Becomes this mouthed monstrosity.
'Political orthogonality'
'Mechanism stability'
'Bank indemnifiability'
'Sovereign unviability'
With ever more ubiquity,
And linguistic impunity,
This semantic stupidity
Finds acceptability.
For really its mendacity,
The bombast of barbarity,
To speak with such vacuity,
Phonemes of empty ingenuity.
So, please, desist with acuity,
From this bastardised iniquity.
Speak plainly with humanity -
The world needs your honesty.

Emily Cullen

Playing House

Today I'm in between
the wall and the armrest
in a kind of intertext,
playing house with my son
while trying to set up
our real-life home.

After phoning the 'Good Guys'
about delivery of a dryer,
I visit him beside the sofa
in our mise-en-scène,
he rings an imaginary bell
under the colonnades
of the kitchen table, where
we pipedream domesticity
in our newly adopted city.

I feel like a figure from metafiction:
the French Lieutenant's Woman
or a reverie of Flann O'Brien
befuddled in the aisles
between slatted beds,
flat and fitted sheets
(Egyptian only fits a Single -
polycotton left for a Queen).

Even a toddler, not quite two,
manifests an edifice.
He grins with pride
at his brand new coup
of dragging the coffee table
from one end of the room,
while I run the gauntlet
to stop him flicking switches,

my head pondering over
the virtues of a condenser
or that cheaper top loader.

Mummy Fantasia

i Prams on the Prom

Sunday on Salthill Promenade:
we are out with our babes,
high-tech push chairs on parade.
Your pram pivots round
on shock-absorber wheels
as you display its gadgetry:
USB port, cable for phone,
holders for sippy cups
and skinny lattes,
built-in generator
that charges as you walk.
'Never mind the Origami',
another Mum exclaims,
'mine has a custom-built MP3 player,
hairdryer and cocktail mixer.'
You're pushing with one hand,
shaking with the other.
'Make mine a mojito!'
I holler, looking round
for the improbable stroller
with a waffle maker.

ii *School Run Fashionistas*

When did the school run
enter the style lexicon
as a plausible mise-en-scène?
Fashion-forward mums
teeter on heels,
pour coins in parking meters,
accoutred in Armani,
toting Gucci, cascading wipes
from couture catsuits.
They throw appraising glances
at other designer-clad mummies,
rain and wind buffeted
in Vivienne Westwood,
leaking indiscretions at school gates,
bantering in Blahniks, channelling Versace.

Magazines market with phrases:
'there's no excuse to be a slummy mummy'.
Should we take them quite so seriously?

Ndrek Gjini

The DNA test

Alex Muddy is a taxi man. He is living alone now. The marriage break-up was such a disaster for him. 'A happy father of three children', he thought he was, for more than fifteen years. He was a hardworking man trying to keep everything in order and everyone happy. 'A taxi man, yes I still am a taxi man, but not a father of three lovely children as I thought', he whimpered.

Last year on September 27, around 2:30 am, a lady in her thirties raised her thumb asking him for a lift to the maternity hospital. 'As soon as you can please, please', the lady pleaded. In further emotional talk, she told him to which hospital she wanted to go to. Alex remained silent. 'A lovely baby is on the way', he thought as he sped towards the maternity hospital.

When they arrived there, the lady asked him if he could give her his phone number and address. 'Just in case', she added in a soft voice. 'Maybe I will need your help again when going home...with my baby', she explained after she paid the fare. 'Ok' he replied and gave her a small printed card with all his details on it, without thinking that this card was going to bring disaster to his life

Three days later, his home phone rang. 'Hello, is that Alex Muddy', the voice asked. Without waiting for any answer, the voice continued to explain that he was to go to the maternity hospital to take home his wife and their lovely baby girl.

Alex was asleep. It was his wife who answered the phone. She rushed into his bedroom. 'Get up you bastard', she shouted at him. Waking up in hurry he was very confused. What on earth had he done wrong?

Days and weeks passed. His wife kept screaming and blaming him saying that he was unfaithful to her. His life became miserable. Alex wondered what he should do to remedy this awful blow that had happened in his life. For a long time it was a dilemma not knowing where to start. 'I sold some land and my parents' house', Alex moaned. He said he needed the

money as he had decided to do a DNA test for himself, for the little girl who was born that fateful night and whose mother claimed him as father, for his three sons, and for his wife

‘The DNA test proved that’, Alex whimpered in tears, ‘the little girl is not mine; the DNA test also proved that, none of my three sons are mine either’.

Moya Roddy

Leftovers

Nora's face caved in, 'It's awful', she cried, 'awful, awful.'

Five pairs of eyes turned to stare at her. She saw them through a mist: her oldest friends, powdered and painted, gathered together for one of their dinner-parties.

'I can't bear it,' she continued, on her feet now.

'What is she saying?' Laura enquired loudly.

Nora fled from the room and it wasn't until she found herself in a narrow hallway that she remembered she wasn't at home. 'Oh God!' she wailed scuttling through the nearest door. It was Theresa's bedroom, pale and wan like Theresa herself these days. Mortified, Nora threw herself on the large bed. Did they ever listen to themselves? "Don't you look wonderful! Doesn't she look wonderful? What's your secret! You must give me the name of your hairdresser, your masseuse, your acupuncturist." Your bloody undertaker! Nora thought bitterly. Her fists formed tight balls, the carefully lacquered nails digging into her palms. She felt wretched. And foolish. As the sobbing subsided, she buried her face in the duvet. A moment later she sprang up, stared miserably at the smudges of black spoiling the sea of cream she'd been lying on. So much for waterproof mascara! Theresa would have a fit. She'd always been the finicky one, had grown worse with age. Hearing a light tap, Nora threw herself on top of the offending stains, curling up so her face was out of sight.

'Are you alright?'

It was Molly. She knew it would be Molly, sent by the others to 'humour' her.

'You seemed so upset.'

Against Nora's will the sobbing started up again.

'Oh dear! What is it Nora? Is something wrong?'

'Everything,' Nora gasped. 'Oh, stop acting like you don't know,' she continued, 'you know quite well. We all know,' she shrieked.

Glancing up she encountered Molly's puzzled eyes.

'It's... awful...' Nora repeated lamely.

'What is?'

'We are. Look at us, we're disintegrating, bits of us falling off all over the place. Teeth, hair, both of Theresa's hips, one of Eilish's heart muscles,

withered away as if it was a branch of a tree!’
A veil dropped over Molly’s normally curious face.
‘We’re all getting on I suppose.’
‘Getting on! I detest that euphemism!’
‘Nora! It happens to everybody, sooner or later. Best keep busy, not think about it too much. That’s my recipe.’
‘I can’t stop thinking about it, it’s all I think about.’
‘Bad for the health, darling. Maybe you need to get out more. I’m off to Dublin next week for a couple of days. Want to come?’
Nora shook her head. ‘It’s the knowing I hate.’
The corners of Molly’s mouth sank.
‘I hate knowing anything I’m going to do in the future. It’s probably why I hate leftovers.’
‘Leftovers?’ Molly pounced.
‘From meals, even good ones. I can’t bear knowing what I’m going to eat next day, or in two days times. If I know I have to have leftover spinach quiche on Friday I do not want spinach quiche on Friday. I’d rather starve.’
Nora was so worked up she forgot the mascara stains until she saw Molly raise an eyebrow.
‘Oh for heaven’s sake, it’ll wash out!’ Nora got up and crossed to the dressing-table to survey the damage to her face. Theresa won’t mind,’ she added, helping herself from a tube of tinted foundation. Did Molly understand, really understand, she wondered as she squeezed out a dollop.
‘There’s a time for dying,’ her friend murmured, leaning over and kissing the back of Nora’s head. Then she was gone.
Nora stared hard at her reflection, the words settling in her heart.

Back in the dining-room, Nora resumed her seat.
‘We’re about to have pudding,’ Eilish piped before turning to Theresa. ‘I hope you made your crème brulee. It’s my favourite. You must give me the recipe.’
‘You ask for it every time,’ Theresa laughed.
And they have the same conversation every time, Nora thought. Then to her surprise a wave of compassion swept through her.
‘I love you all,’ she blurted, ‘all of you.’
For the second time that evening five pairs of eyes stared at her.
‘I wish- I just wish ...’

‘What do you wish?’ Eilish asked impatiently. ‘Hurry up, I want to eat my pudding.’

‘I wish none of us had to eat leftovers. Ever.’

‘What are you talking about?’ ‘What is she talking about?’ Laura looked round the table.

The only response was the scraping of spoons.

Vincent Holmes

Gamins

(To some active gamins in Knocknacarra)

What did I do to you
to cause you
to take a newish moped
of some 635 miles done
from my front door
and smash its front
rip out its wiring and panels
wantonly tear its seat
and break
its lights?

Nothing.

What did you gain
and contribute to
your community
by stealing
and destroying
and laughing
aloud at your
“heroics” and
dubious know-how?

Nothing.

What does a future
hold
if your paths
continue to follow
a destructive
abusive course
against decent

neighbours?

Nothing.

What's the contribution
to your family reputation,
avoidance of
criminal record
that denies access
abroad
where you might
broaden your minds?

Nothing.

My gift to you
Is a silent fervent prayer
That in your life
It will never be said of you
"He was worth....

Nothing"

Orla Fay

Bloodline

O pro equo alato!*

From the deserts of Arabia
my forefathers raced
with the Bedouin
past pyramid and dune

and when the prophet
called me back from the oasis
I answered, faithful Siglawi,
one of the Al Khamsa,*

brown as an ant's belly,
capable of wingless flight,
a creature of the wind,
the drinker of the wind.

As the hands of the clock sped
my name lived on dispersed,
great brethren and sistren
flashed in the dark.

I was called to serve
in times of labour and war.
Before the curtain's fall
the battle was lost.

I was called to serve
in peace and grace,
in times of hawthorn
and holly, carnation adorned.

My worn hooves shod anew
from the forge of the past

platinum from the anvil,
molten lineage,

geneology wrought,
trail-blaze a route
marked by thunder,
hocks, lightning bolts.

Looking to the stars
my constellation is mapped;
Pegasus striking his foot
at Hippocrene's birth.

**O for a winged horse!*

**the five horses chosen by Mohammed for their loyalty*

Kingfisher

By The Ramparts waiting.
I steal a glimpse of this prince
to be blessed in an early hour
Where the water has risen,
joined by melted snow and ice
and surface flashing stands this one,
rainbow all surveying.

Like Christ on Galilee our souls
he is waiting for lest
we fall off the edge of the world
to penury from days Halcyon.
Hungrily the Boyne goes to the Backwater,
then on to the sea in stiff January's motion racing.

From amber to green the lights usher the bus.
We are pointed south east to Dublin
where addicts sit barefoot and perished
begging on Henry Street,
where love is sold in the bottom of a glass
and where desolate passion is spent
having never been owned.

Remembering all he is the shape of the river
through times of feast and famine,
not yet extinct the pharaoh's gold
and cerulean blue garb.

Black Swan

Wanderlust and self-preservation at twenty one
had taken you from Adelaide to Europe –
to garbage strewn sands in Sicily ,
hashish fumed cafes in Amsterdam
and beer stained restaurants in Glasgow .

Arriving here you witnessed our tiger,
flailing and flawed. With pragmatic
Aussie thinking and just a dash of colour
you did not quite understand
how we had ended up “up the shitter.”

It was far to go across the world,
from surf and heat, city lights
and Southern Cross to rural Ireland ,
to find days of endless rain
and bitterly cold winter snaps,

to find love and friendship,
community and home.

Trevor Conway

Adam White's 'Accurate Measurements' would likely enchant any man

Reading Adam White's first collection of poems, published by Connemara's Doire Press, it struck me that this is the kind of collection you could give to someone who doesn't have a huge interest in poetry, expecting to kindle in that person a new passion. More specifically (and appropriately, considering the approach of Father's Day), these poems would likely enchant any man in his 40s or beyond, though they're certainly accessible to any age or gender.

White writes best on "manly" themes such as construction, DIY, carpentry, fishing and boating, as well as the setting of Connemara. These are the subjects with which he appears most comfortable, and are perhaps his most successful efforts. Wisely, these themes reappear again and again, dominating the book. Many of White's poems deal with a process, a series of actions embracing one aim. He also opts for poems that describe a moment, a short scene or a character. These are, for the most part, less remarkable, though the approach offers a suitable contrast to those mentioned above.

Inevitably, comparisons will cite the work of Seamus Heaney. The first poem, "Roofing", is very reminiscent of Heaney's work. Though a good deal of White's poetry recalls Heaney, he doesn't linger over the flavour or words as Heaney does. He knows when to offer a taste and move on. Nature and the touch of human hands come together brilliantly in "Dam", about a third of the way into the book, and one of the highlights of the collection. He describes the effects of "This thirty five-metre high cast belt of concrete". The rhythm shifts abruptly with "The/ river lay around and turned into a lake. A/ river that used to pitch past and spit in your face/ is now a sheet of still water". A stark turn of imagery towards the end takes us away from nature versus the artificial. The dam, we hear, "turns out enough electricity/ for you and I to leave on twenty five thousand/ televisions all day for a year. Yes, that many/ televisions left on necessitates stopping up a river".

This poem is followed by "English for the Workplace", a prose poem most likely intended for a slam poetry event. While this offers some interesting

insight into the life of an English teacher, it appears too concerned with wordplay, led by the need to rap, tangling a web of internal rhymes. Reading it, it's hard not to speculate that a very fine poem might have resulted if White had tackled this subject in a more natural style. This natural style, which pervades most of the poems here, is highly articulate, exhibiting a certain ease with language. It is quite casual in tone and structure, in the most pleasing way.

Some poems adopt a more prose feel (though not presented as prose poems), such as "A Bad Fall", which reads quite like a story. Such moments are much less successful than lines like: "Sometimes, in the rush of things, scaffolding/ stood like pairs of roofers' high heels, has/ to be quickly stripped, and will be off bringing// out potential in a new house". "In Sheffield" boasts a great, original opening line: "A steelworker with a four-storey face".

When White explores the world of manual labour, gems appear. "Strike!", which could've been given a more interesting title, describes the hammering of a nail: "the shock of an inaccurate hammer/ could leave it on its back, frolicking down off a roof". The next poem, "Graduand", begins with "From the ground up this house was teaching me". "An Awakening", set on a boat off Connemara, perfectly blends the manual (fishing) with the abstract/emotional. Though White writes very well on fishing, a series of consecutive fishing poems five or six poems strong feels like an overload. Elsewhere, however, a good balance is maintained.

The abiding sense here is that there is something very charming about these poems. They tackle a set of themes, all related in terms of their hands-on manliness, from various angles. It would be impossible to become bored of White's descriptions of men at work, no matter how many times he describes this. Most of the poems in *Accurate Measurements* strike true, leaving the reader with a sense of having savoured the experience of hanging a door or cutting a piece of wood. It'll be interesting to see what other subjects will be laid bare on Adam White's work bench in time.

Barbara McKeon

Farewell

From the depths of sleep she hears her name being called. Softly, gently. Slowly rising to the surface of consciousness, straining towards wakefulness, like an exhausted deep sea diver drifting upwards from the murky blackness of the ocean's bowels towards flickering dashes of sunlight. She moans because the smallest movement is painful. Even opening her eyes is like tearing skin off a wound. A watery vision hovers close by, something floating towards which she is drawing nearer. Her name is called again; a muffled sound that comes from the diaphanous being gradually taking the shape of a person. She knows who it is and whimpers; she cannot see him clearly but she recognises his voice. She wants to call out to him but her voice drowns in her throat. The shimmering vision gains form, like when saline water washes from the swimmer's eyes and the beach becomes vividly real. The figure moves to her bedside, repeats her name once more and she cries out in perfect joy, "Alan!"

He is standing by her bed smiling down, gazing into her eyes, love flowing from him like warmth from a blazing fire. He puts his hands to his face and brushes away his tears.

"Alan," she murmurs, the effort to speak hurts her face. "It's really you. You've come back to me." Now she is crying, her tears slicing her cheeks like tiny scalpels. But she is so happy to see him that pain means nothing. He looks so handsome, his face radiant with love. "They told me you were dead," she whispers. "The told me you'd been killed. But you weren't. You're with me here, now, in this room."

He pulls a handkerchief from the breast pocket of his blazer and presses the silk fabric to his mouth. He is always so particular about his clothes, my darling Alan, she thinks smiling even though it is agonising to move any muscle, even the tiniest ones.

With great effort she raises her hand and reaches out to him. But he does not take it. He just smiles sadly and weeps, whispering her name over and over. Her other hand is tethered to a drip. The room hums with the low throbbing of life-support machines.

"Don't be afraid, my darling. I can suffer all the pain in the world just to have you hold my hand." Her hands are bandaged, her body is held together with pins and plaster of Paris. Her face is covered in gauze with just slits at her eyes and mouth. She knows she looks hideous to him, that he is afraid to touch her on account of the pain. Her fingers reach out for him but he recoils, the smile sliding into grief. He calls her name again but there is so much anguish in his voice that she must comfort him and she grasps his hand, the one holding the hanky. He howls like he's been bitten and frantically pulls away. She holds on, begging him just to let her hold his hand, when to her horror, his hand comes away from his arm. She screams. The amputated hand drops to the floor, the handkerchief fluttering after it. He is sobbing convulsively, not in pain but in sorrow. He picks up his dismembered hand, slowly backing away out of her bed-ridden reach, moving not as a person would retreat but drifting as though carried through water.

She screams and screams as he withdraws, his shape disintegrating, becoming an elusive phantasm, reducing itself into the coiled nothingness of a foetus drowning in the womb.

The door flies open and the nurse rushes in, followed by the doctor who injects a sedative into his patient's arm. As she slips into unconsciousness she murmurs, "He was here. Alan was here. He was with me in this room."

"You were dreaming," the doctor says soothingly. "Alan wasn't here. It was a dream, that's all, just a dream."

As he leaves the room he sees a handkerchief lying on the floor. He bends down and picks it up. It is silk and monogrammed A.F. He knows the initials are those of her husband who was drowned when the car he was driving careered off the sea cliff road and crashed onto rocks far below. He looks at the woman in the bed who survived the crash but with horrific injuries, from which she will never properly recover, and wonders if death wouldn't have been a better option for her too.

He notices the hanky is damp, and smells faintly of seawater. But how, he starts to ask himself, then dismissing further speculation hands it to the nurse to be laundered.

Tim Dwyer

Raking the leaves

You would think I was a sea captain or a farmer, the way I monitor changes in the weather. No wind, but dark clouds threaten rain. Clear skies, but remnant gusts from the Virginia hurricane blow the leaves from their piles. Times like these I feel my father close by, in his 19th century world of horse and plough. The man of few words, the bartender who never took a drink. At his death, I find J&B in the cabinet unopened, a wedding present, from the time of George VI.

My lawn is far from the Gurtymadden farm. On my first visit, a gentleman on the train wrote my Gaelic name, handed it to me. Welcomed by my relatives, they told me it was my first time *back*, though they knew I had never been there. Walking the farm was my pilgrimage. Yes, it was my first time back.

Fifty years ago, my New York lawn was a cow pasture. Today, the farmers are receding, the trees are going bare. Houses here and in Gurtymadden sprout like mushrooms. Snow in tomorrow's forecast, general all over Ireland and the Hudson Valley.

Mary Madec

First Kiss

*"Maybe this is what a friend means
When she says there is a pair of lips
In the air, maybe this is desire and need too" Mark Cox*

Those lips in the air move like velvet and sponge
to make words, round up vowels,
explode plosives into the quiet morning;
backed by gutturals they do the labial stuff
your tongue peeping to lick them off
and reward them for their work.
The angle in your eye which brings your gaze to mine
sends my lips off to float too like a red line
in a white sky, a kite let loose on a summer's day.
You put your fingers up to cover them
as if to hide your secret intention,
as if to restore them back on your face
and me mine on mine;
a pause for thought, a breath—
not ready yet for that first kiss.

Soon it will be Winter

and Demeter does not know what she hates most
about the change—her straw hair, her broken nails,
a shriveling up inside, no blood rain,
insomnia as she tosses her tired head this way and that.
She thinks of Persephone, the daughter she fed
and is jealous of those pert little breasts,
those eyes, reminding her of another bed
where she was desirable as a wife.
She can feel her sagging eyes
stretched into crows' feet as she smiles.
There is no sap inside her anymore,
a grayness rising up through her thighs.
Persephone is wet with smiles
her soft legs parting for Hades.

Afterthought

Is this age, not knowing
if you are still fit for purpose
when purposes change?
You wonder what remains
when love is force of habit,
forgotten immortelles,
each morning's doily of burnt milk,
the knife wounds on the bread board,
the dry crumbs
remind you that
you value too little ordinary sustenance,
distrust the thin lip of your teacup,
the mouth's need of them,
your embarrassed, tired, empty arms,
your thighs' rawboned descent,
the skin falling ever so slightly away
from your arms,
separating muscle and fascia.
If this is wisdom, you think, it is only
the echoes of voices gone
and insight gained which remains.
And blood might halt your thoughts
when you tilt your head
so you can't remember,
as you struggle across the river
to the other side of the kitchen.

Autumn Evening

*"God does not leave us
comfortless so let evening come" Jane Kenyon*

Now I wonder why I kept telling her to go,
that she had my permission,
why I ever thought it was mine to give.
I was the midwife for her soul,
coaching her through the labour
of breathing, her lungs filling up
like a tidal pool full of seaweed.
I gave myself to the intimacy
of her clammy hand and her sweaty head
on the pillow; somehow it seemed
like I was wiping up a great athlete
on the homerun
I didn't think very much of how it would be
when it was all over
as one thinks little of the closing of day,
the sun slanting through the window
from behind the alder
the wind rising; the leaves trembling
the darkness chasing all living creatures
t search for comfort.
It will come. It will, I tell myself
Which is why I said, Go!

Pete Mullineaux

Fiddle Fox

Because we live in a small house
not to be too annoying
I practice my fiddle in the bathroom,
where sitting on the toilet seat
the angle between wall and cistern
is such, I have to tilt my elbow
and tend to use only the bow's upper half.
Perched on the edge of the bath
offers more freedom but
isn't so good for my back.
So today I change tack and stand,
looking out the window -
am rewarded immediately by a fox
poised at the wood's perimeter.
A thought fox? No, what I see is flesh
and blood, it sniffs around
in circles, just like real foxes do.
A fairy fox I wonder - would it dance
to my tune, if only I could really let rip?
Then again, perhaps we are both
hesitant beginners -
this one too has yet to try
more than a slow waltz -
venturing beyond
its first rough field.

A Musical Bridge

In a north west corner of Ireland
near the town of Bellacorick
County Mayo, not far from
Ballina and Crossmolina,
there is an infamous bridge
that sings a rebel song.
Incomplete: the cap –
or final copping stone
cannot be fixed in place
until a stubborn curse
is lifted, an epic story
finds conclusion.
Built under the 1830's
Poor Laws by the stricken
unemployed, continued
through the famine
amidst starvation and cholera,
many died in the making
until finally, finished in '47
none left had strength
to lift the last huge block.
Ever since, those who chose
to ignore the forewarnings
have come to sticky ends.
Even now the legend goes –
when a small stone is rubbed
along the northern parapet
melodious sounds can be heard:
the bridge will have its broken
voice, its persistent lament.
The place is Bellacorick
County Mayo, not far
from Erris, Rossport...

Michael Farry

Studies

My mastery of geometry
was tested by the tangents of her ready smiles,
her angled eyes and straight-line conversation.
When she challenged the compass
of my calculations, the degrees
of my interest
I went back to basics,
studied Euclid
and in one overheated night
got as far as the penultimate theorem
where I stumbled over the precision of facial signals,
intersecting planes of interest,
signs and co-signs of affection.
Chastened
I am going to take up geography
explore the darker regions to the south.

Michael Gannon

Unbearable to hear just yet

Not the Irish way,
my reaction since the first day
and through the second and third,
turning away from the word.

Not joining the crowds who gather
as for a neighbour
not going to the bog or hill
to be pensive, still.

Not wanting to hear or know,
quenching the TV, the radio,
full of his voice, calm and slow
from the past, the ago

Unbearable to hear just yet,
the news not sunk to the heart,
still a fog in the head,
Seamus Heaney is dead.

Anne Irwin

A Feda O'Donnell Bus Journey

Letterkenny to Galway

Lamb chops munch the golden twilight
 at Knockaree I put on my rose tinted sun glasses
 making tomorrow, a shepherd's delight.
 From Balleybofey to Grange
 The Red Hot Chilli Peppers rock the dozing bus.
 We pass sycamore, oak, and hazel
 clustering shadows on the Mayo hills,
 cattle grazing into the disappearing night.
 At Tubbercurry the news reports
 "Greece votes to stay in the euro zone.
 The left congratulates the right"
 A strip of red, lights the horizon
 the Nephins turn navy and fade into sky.
 A sleeping girl in a maroon jacket stirs.
 Near Claremore's rte announces a breakthrough
 "The first Irish person received a frozen embryo.
 Freezing increases the possibility of survival by 20%"
 House lights dot the darkness,
 and in the blue glow of the bus
 I wonder if the frozen embryo children
 will have delusional ice disorders,
 Sleeping Beauty vacuum packed on ice
 or Oisín frozen in the moment of his return?
 Somewhere between Ballindine and Tuam
 the grey head of the man in front rolls
 onto the rain streaked window.
 The talk show plays "Small Bump"
 Ed Sheeran sings
 "With Finger nails the size of a half grain of rice"
 I wonder if the frozen embryo children will dream of
 mammoths, belugas and narwhales.
 The bus rattles down the N17
 soft, like a cradle through the night.
 At midnight we reach Galway.

Christmas at Rockfield

Outside, the naked apple tree
drips crystals
in the morning thaw
winter and green algae
flake the shed
in the flower bed geraniums
crisp and brown.
Inside we baste the goose
funnel sloe gin
roll damson Truffles
and together sing
“Ar son an am fado mo gra”
to the lighting Christmas pudding.
Next door Siobhan’s hens stop laying
and spend more time in
the hutch built by
the French aeronautical engineer.
At Noor’s we light the solstice candles.
All is still,
Bethlehem
As Catherine’s three paw cat slinks along the garden fence.

The power of black

My granny was suspicious of fun
she thought it was too modern
frivolous , irreverent.
She wore black
not risqué black
but sombre black
Mother of sorrows black.
Every day before dusk she took her
constitutional walk to the mile bush
when we saw her coming
we hid behind the Cyprus hedge
at the bottom of the garden..
One day she nabbed me.
To make her laugh I said
“Granny there’s a fly on your nose”
with a flick of her middle finger
she swiped the air
“April fool” I said.
She stopped in the middle of the Knock road
stared down at me with wounded eyes
“Do you not know what day this is?”
“Yes” I said “April Fools day.”
“Did your mother never tell you that your grandfather,
her father, my husband, died on this day in 1934”
“No” I said, ashamed.
“It’s typical of them,” she confided
“It’s the way the world is going, her head’s turned,
it’s those pictures from Hollywood,
in The Parochial Hall too
don’t know why the priests allow it,
but sure they’re just as bad.
There’s no knowing where it will end”.
She said, shaking her head all the way
to the mile bush and back.
I walked in silence beside her.
Guilt, a boulder heavy in my head.
After that my auntie bought her a lilac cardigan,
and the world changed.

Robert Jocelyn

Old Goibert

Skins of damp mist clung to the hillside
Extenuating the granite crags that
Guard the old booley huts
High up on our land.

Unseen, a raven challenged my presence
In the aerie stillness, as I pictured
The ragged herdsmen sheltering
Behind their stone redoubts.

Suddenly, with a spring-released bound
A russet-brown hare sped ahead,
A powder-puff scut incongruously
Testifying to the Pintail's Irish ancestry.

While the Ring-o'-the-Hill measured his
Distance with athletic ease, his eyes
Never left mine until he stopped,
Paused monetarily, erect, ears cocked.

Stock-still I returned the Way Beater's gaze.

For now this Stag of the Stubble will not be
Bagged to Ballyshannon, or
Screaming like a mortally wounded child,
End up on a game-larder's slab

Long may the White Spotted One survive
And remain the symbol of our bond with
Nature and the archetypal contract
Between man and his gods.

Part universal myth, part folklore, he is
The eastern Hare in the Moon, even

A sign of potency (but beware the
Expectant mother whose path he crosses!)

The Hare Being recharges the associations
Buried deep in our subconscious past
Surpassing the booley huts back to
The ancient lands of legend.

Dismissing my random thoughts, the hare arced up
Into the mist towards Lettershanna
And was gone.

*(In the English language alone there are seventy seven known names for
the hare.)*

Freedom recalled

Only an interfering porcupine
Disputed our right to the hollow trunk
That spanned the neck of the narrow ravine.
No movement slipped our gaze, and
How the scrub or bamboo shimmied
Told us a karkar, the barking deer, or maybe
That self-important wart-hog were coming in to drink.
High above, the watercourse drained from the broken scree
That spewed below Nilkanta's icy cliffs
Where Tibetan storms force the burrel down.
A langur called as we stretched in the fading sun,
Although it was early yet for the evening kill.
The leopard yawned and with an inner rage
Sloped off once more to pace his cage.

Patrick Deeley

Taken with Gooseberries

Over at Shiel's old stone house, with its low roof
and the long chimney lifted from a fairytale,
a clutch of scratchety bushes. Their fruits feel solid,
resiliently pneumatic. The hispid skin
is yet translucent enough to see through to the seeds.
They burst jelly-sweet between the teeth,
roll a rusty taste around the tongue. Ever after

I dote on gooseberries; let them be red or yellow,
green or white. But there in childhood
amid lodged grass a smothered bee-buzz, the world
whispering behind my ears its 'constant now'
of matter and scatter and breeze. I dream
nature's 'good deed' - the growing of gooseberries -
as my own endeavour. I want them heavier

than any other body's, a nurturing to be ensnared by
as I lean over net wire deep in some
slow shire. I go to sleep with berry secrets. Weep
to find the biggest berry weeping; blame
frost; blame hand-heat - my unmet wife's or my own.
Turn nervy, act stand-offish as I watch
the scrupulous witness seal the few I've plumped for
in a box. And dream of prize-giving day,
a tiptoe towards where the scales balance the berries
singly up - clomp of pennyweight counters -
while about me autumn conducts its slow lapse,
each side-tracked thing tangling the next, thistledown
filling an old sandpit, growth and die back
and such rag trees in mind I'm never done shaking.

Sweeping the Chimney

You work rods and brush, knacks, angles, tactics.
A tarpaulin sheet with a hole in it splits.
Granite fire-bricks peek. A wrought-iron grate
at your heel upends. Downpour of soot
commences. Twig-clatter, tumble of jackdaw eggs
won't deter, nor yet the sweat breaking
on your brow. For you delve in a reverie
of discovering the first fire; you dream the nights
that charm, a cosy hearth to which, safe
and sound, you and yours always return. But still
the whispering soot insists there's a limit
to the number of nights. Your children
grow away. Their shoes and books and CDs,
casually scattered as if no greater displacement's
ever to happen, soon must be tidied for good.
And fret takes root, making you push through
to the top sunlight, the give that happens when you
least expect. So you collapse forward,
whistling softly to the thin chimney listening out.

Seamus Scanlon

My Galway German Girl

In Galway I can't forget.
 I flee often. To Ragoon.
 High above Galway City.
 The limestone Burren across Galway Bay is shrouded. Rain squalls race
 towards me. The smell of sea air reaches up. More black clouds wait off
 shore. Deep-sea bound trawlers leave the docks, slowed by the heft of
 swells from the Atlantic.
 I cry.
 No-one sees it.
 The rain hides it sure.
 My sorrow lies low and cruel within me. Everlasting. A fine polished arc of
 pain through me.
 I think about my German baby.
 Dead long ago now. Cancer ate her up. Beauty and the beast.
 Ate her up before me while I looked on.
 While I looked away.

While I tried to soothe her in the Regional Hospital. Stretched out on
 stark white linen sheets. I snuck in at night while her mother dozed on a
 chair.
 Victor don't visit. It is wrong to be here.
 She cried. I lay my hand on her skin, etched with a patina of pain and
 slick from fever. Blue white veins under her translucent skin mocked me.
 I hated her.
 I loved her.
 Before me she was dying.
 Sixteen only.
 Fucking not fair.
 She was fair.
 Adored her sure I did.
 Met her by accident in Galway City Library. I was reading Mein Kampf.
 I was a little Nazi neophyte. She walked up. She knocked the book from
 my hand. It skittered across the floor. Das is pure shoite (she had a mix of
 Galway and German accents and phraseology).

Read something real why don't ya?
Like what I said.
Like me. Read me.
She stared into my eyes.
Read me she said pointing at herself. Me. Me.
Her bellicose invitation startled me – thrilled me.
Her harsh laugh echoed far in the City Library.
The circulation desk staff member looked up and scowled.

The female German blitzkrieg kicked my Mein Kampf under one of the stacks. I was afraid to retrieve it. Even though it was my personal copy.

Outside we walked down by Woodquay where swans nested all summer with their five signets. They drifted below the granite legs of the Galway to Clifden railroad bridge fighting the strong current. They sat like moored Spanish galleons once did in Galway docks centuries ago waiting for the wind to shift to carry them home.

She sat on one of the benches looking across at the university grounds. Rushes bent over with the strong breeze blowing down from Lough Corrib.

I am real but soon I won't be. Kiss me.
She pointed at her lips. I did my best. She pulled back after a while. She cried. What's wrong – did I do it wrong?
She lit a cigarette.
No – dying I am. Cancer. She pointed at her chest.
I jumped up. I knocked the cigarette out of her lips.
It's too late!
She was right.
She is buried in Ragoon cemetery high above the city. She looks across the bay towards the Burren and the grey clouds heavy with rain that huddle off the coast until they eventually drift in over the town and cover the narrow grey streets with fog, mist and then rain.

Laurie Allen

The Green Man

My name is Joeen. A good old fashioned Conamara name. I was called after my grandfather, my dad; he was dead when I was born so I took on his name and probably a lot of his traits as I was named for him. You see in Conamara a lot of the incoming generation is called after the outgoing generation. I always thought that the pattern of the world was circular instead of steadily marching forward on a linear progress to some point in the future most people think we actually go round in circles like the seasons and the pattern is actually circular with our ancestors coming back regularly taking our place in the world.

My family consisted of mum dad and me the baby. We had the local post office and the pub, which was an attached to our house. So our family home was always busy, we lived beside a hive of activity. People coming and going, cashing their dole cheques or posting letters. Of course we spoke the native tongue but in our home we spoke bearla as our mother was from the east coast. My dad was a tall and kind man. He manned the post office and knew all the local people intimately.

He kept an eye on their mail, which has always held a curious fascination for postmasters in times gone by. Letters from America etc. usually heralded a bountiful load for the lucky recipient. My dad told me that in times gone by he used see his grandfather disappear in to the kitchen with such letters and place them over a steaming kettle, he did wonder what happened to the bounty was it always delivered in full to the right recipient. Sure in those days the post office was the eyes and ears of the community almost like the gateway,

Anyway there was auld Johnny who lived up the boreen and still rode a Honda 50, he made for quiet a curious sight with his hat fixed pointedly on his head and his pipa clamped in his gob coming up the road on the Honda 50. The bike made an alien sound as it cracked the stillness of a country afternoon it was almost like a cow arrested in its moo. He had a long face, which could look menacing, but when he smiled his face cracked up in to tiny rivulets of valleys and mounds, I was fond of him. He kept a good garden neat and tidy with plenty of spuds and cabbages growing. He lived with his sister who kept 'smacht' on him. Thursday was the day he would usually appear as that was dole day and the pub was

busier than usual those days. The Honda 50's journey home was usually as resolutely straight as it was when it appeared in the morning. Of course there was Maura, she was quiet mad. I used to hear them whispering about her in the shop. Maura was steady for years then she just seemed to surrender to the nub of neurosis that was inside her. She had a severe hairstyle with grey sides, which was always brushed back with no gentle wisps caressing her face; no Maura was plain and inclined to develop certain obsessions about events or people. She was accused behind her back of course of leaving the villagers garden gates open which around out area was a transgression to far as it allowed the cattle to get in and trample all over your garden or it allowed the cattle out to wander the roads. She had it in for poor Mrs. Stafford a blow in from Wicklow. Mrs. Stafford used to sit at her window with a view out on to the road and beyond that road, the sea which kept to its own laws sidling in on quiet days or moving more vigorously in windier weather. Mrs. Stafford used to tap away on her computer writing her books. I liked Mrs. Stafford as she used give me some money for carrying her bags of groceries from the shop or watering her flowers when she went to visit her daughters who lived in town.

Mrs. Stafford endeavored to keep order on her garden which was difficult in an area like yours where the wind blew in from the Atlantic and salt was in the very air that you breathed so close to the sea we lived.

I wandered these gullies and inlets around our home there were pools of black bog water, sea weeded rocks with green tentacles spreading all over. No day was ever the same in our little village the light changed from day to day and the sea seeped beneath our skins.

Maura's husband Padraig was a skinny man. He rode a high Nellie bike. I remember the vision of his retreating back and arse in the air as he rode his bike at a fast pace. He was like a Jockey who was suspended in a race that never reached its conclusion. That backside rarely sat on the saddle of the bike in fact I used to think it resembled a man's rear cleavage as it retreated down the road. Padraig used to frequent the little pier, which edged into the sea on the opposite side of the road. He used it for fishing and bringing up some seaweed.

One day Mrs. Stafford asked Padraig "is it okay Padraig if I avail of some sea weed for my roses. I believe the seaweed has lots of rich properties and it does an excellent job on the roses. Mrs. Stafford had met Padraig in the shop when he had set down his bike outside. You had to be quick

because once Padraig mounted on his high Nellie he was off. Famine? Padraig said in the old tongue. "Yes Padraig just a bit to feed my roses." "yes tá sé sin ceart, better still I will get you a wheel barrel full. "Ohh that's marvellous" Mrs. Stafford replied.

Our shop sold groceries and some fresh fruit; we also did the papers sweets, cigarettes and lotto. Papers were important as it kept us up to date in our little village. My dad was very strict about selling tobacco and cigarettes to the younger ones I think it was because his dad has died of cancer as did his sister. There was a little graveyard in our village right down near the sea. It was dedicated to all those little babies who had died unbaptised. The priest father Brennan had held a special ceremony for these lost little souls in the graveyard one day and most of the village attended. I used to love listening to Irish been spoken. That beautiful language which jostled beside the English tongue, which still managed to break over the ear like the gentle sea. It held hidden depths of local lore which was difficult to penetrate if you were a blow in and "Béarla" was your first tongue. Me, I had both languages so I moved quiet well between the two worlds. I liked to hear about old stories and old suspicions and superstitions. Yet our little village was home to lots of survivors, people who had emigrated to England or further afield places like America and had returned home bringing with them many diverse knowledge's. I used to hear them singing in the pub about digging railways and humouring gangers and sub contractors.

Mind you many years hence I heard talk now and then of a dreadful happening which had occurred more than 100 years ago. A house which was perched right near the Atlantic which had been raided one terribly windy night. Its contents sundered from their presses and the old woman killed in mighty awful way. The sea was boiling that night and the wild wind was rapping and pulling at anything which was not tied down. The woman's chest had been opened and her lungs pulled forth, they were never recovered. They say the woman was suffering from pneumonia. Oxygen, the breath of life. Oxygen that pervasive unseeing unsmelling unadulterated substance that gives us life. I am the breath of life no one gets to the father but through me. Even the great God in heaven spoke of the precious air. You see as I became older I suspected that terrible thing that happened to Mrs. Stafford had happened to that other old woman. I saw the god awful creature one night when I was staring out of my bedroom window towards Mrs. Stafford's house. It was rainy and the sea spray was alive in the air. The wind was getting up

and the tide was unusually high. I often stared out my window towards Mrs. Stafford's house as my dog gypsy used to wander down and be fed by Mrs. Stafford. There was a side light on the end of her house, which was sensitive to any presence that was moving. It would switch on if movement were sensed. I knew Mrs. Stafford was not very well at the time she told me she was suffering from a lung infection. Her light was on and beneath it was a sight which made my breath gasp. There was a green slithering wet creature peering in her window. I had never seen such a creature; it had the shape of a man yet it was not a man. I looked again keenly. Yes it was a green dripping man of the sea. He was like a green gelatinous tumour sending out his antennae for his blood supply. A thought struck me no not his blood supply but his air supply. He was a sea creature and he smelt Mrs. Stafford's lung infection just like that other woman who had pneumonia. He wanted their lungs to breathe here on earth. He could smell them and both these women were non-smokers. He probably did not like smoker's lungs as they had probably damaged the silica. He wanted to mutate. The green man!

I did not tell anybody as I was scared and terribly confused; I had decided to keep my sighting to myself until I was sure of my ground. There had been talk now that Pdraig was beginning to dismount from his bike outside Mrs. Stafford's cottage for a chat quiet often now. He had even been seen bringing up a wheelbarrow full of seaweed for Mrs. Stafford's roses. It became obvious that his wife Maura had got wind of the word of Pdraig's dalliance with Mrs. Stafford as there had been some queer events which had happened in the garden. Seaweed and rags had been thrown in and I myself saw Maura riffling with her roses pulling them up by the roots.

So when the green man struck and pulled out Mrs.Stafford's lungs all the local people were none the wiser they said it was auld Maura. Her madness had finally caught up with her and she was incarcerated in the local psychiatric hospital. I kept my sightings and thoughts to myself and decided to move further inland.

Maeve Mulrennan

Funeral Story

There is always a suspension of time and space during a funeral. A nuclear warhead could be launched and you wouldn't know it. A funeral is immersed only in itself, it is a complete entity. When you accidentally stumble across a funeral, or one progresses down your street, it is like watching a film. You can tell the age and how tragic the death from the faces of the mourners. When you see young people not wearing black because this is their first funeral, surrounding a shell shocked and aged mother you feel like you are flaunting your youth in their faces. When you see the small white coffin followed by grey ghosts being propped up by the neighbours you feel guilty for never knowing that pain. They have experienced something that permanently sets them apart.

When you are in a funeral, working in one I mean, it feels like a performance. People respect you; they see you as the framework around their wild sadness, holding it all together. It's hard to not feel sad every day but it's better than not feeling sad. To not feel sad as you look at the living left behind would mean you have gone too far down this road. I looked at the patterns the damp made on the ceiling. It was ok in here, not as comfortable as one would expect but I suppose the dead don't need much comfort. I traced my ring finger along the lace that Daisy has recently stitched onto the side. Daisy was the favourite, my lace was only ever put in places where the bodies covered them up.

The shop door opened. My father thought it vulgar to have a bell on the door so he deliberately rusted one of the hinges to make it squeak. The Catholic undertakers at the other end of the town had automatic doors which my father thought very presumptuous.

"Mr. Grimes?"

"He's out Simon," I replied. Simon appeared over me, nervous.

"Howya Simon"

"Hello, em...Sally isn't it? What are you doing in there? You shouldn't mock the dead."

"Oh Simon, come ON. My back was at me again and there's nowhere else to lie flat."

Simon cleared his throat. "Em well I might come back when your father in here Sally, I prefer to conduct my business with him you know." He

nervously touched his Adams apple and cleared his throat again. "Oh for Fuck's sake Simon everyone KNOWS your paying off your mother's funeral in installments, everyone's doing it these days, it's GRAND, really Simon."

I took a small receipt book out of a side pocket in the lace, a pen from another. I had a packet of Chewits in another but I wasn't going to show Simon Furlong that or he'd want one. He made these awful sucking noises when he chewed.

"The usual is it?" I wrote down one hundred Euro. "You know your mother would kill you if she knew you were paying off her funeral before she died. She's not even sick like"

Simon cleared his throat, rubbing his Adam's apple and glancing behind him. His face grew the kind of red only farmers sons were capable of.

"This is why I prefer to deal with Mr. Grimes" He growled, voice cracking on my father's name. I handed him the receipt and tucked his hundred euro in beside the Chewits.

The rusty hinge creaked. I did my favourite thing, stretching each muscle from my toes right up into my back. My favourite thing since I messed my back up anyway.

A familiar thumping noise, my mother walking across the floor upstairs, above me, above the shop with the damp on the ceiling. A smaller noise, our cat Arthur jumping up on the coffin, looking for head rubs. He purred and showed me his backside in appreciation. He walked along the middle of the coffin, to the end, above my feet and then came back, peering over the half lid and into my eyes. He settled on the lid, ignoring the lacy bedding. He had jumped out of coffins a few too many times for my Father's and the customer's liking and knew not to even try it with me. The hinge squeaked, immediately bringing in loud excitable voices that bellowed over it.

"He's definitely going to ask you out Daisy, I FEEL it in my waters, a woman's instinct is never wrong! He's from such a good family"

"Stop I know! He's such a ride though, SUCH a ride!"

Jesus they sounded like a cross between Jane Austen's Bennett sisters and the fucking Kardashians.

"Hello Sisters!" I sang, raising my upper half out of the coffin. Arthur sprang up, hissing.

"Lord in heaven Sally!" Lily shrieked and fall back on top of Daisy, who at the same time screeched ' Fucks SAKE Sally"

They walked past me and upstairs mumbling under their voices for a few

steps before resuming their inane gushing. Before I settled back down into my spot the subject of their gushing caught my eye through the window. Between the letters e and s in "Gore & Grimes Undertakers" was Richard Stone. I nodded in that backwards country way that means 'Come here til I want ye'.

In he came.

"Well Rich"

"Well Girl"

He leaned against the coffin and offered me a fag.

"Sound thanks"

The cat settled down, keeping one eye on the young lad.

"You look like you're in a Jacuzzi Sal" He nodded at my arms, lazily draped over the edges. I blew smoke up to the damp patch on the ceiling and then tipped the ash into the lacy pocket. (Removing my Chewy sweets first, of course.)

"How's your Mother Richard?" I asked quietly. His posture changed, he looked his age again. We were in the same class in school the whole way through. It was assumed he would follow his father's footsteps into veterinary. It was a complete surprise that I also wanted to follow in my father's footsteps. Apparently it wasn't lady like. Well I'm sorry men have taken enough without laying a claim on death, too.

He looked at me, the way a small child looks at a grown up when things don't make sense.

"She's not really my Mam anymore Sal, you know?"

"I know Rich."

People think that you get used to death. You can't. We haven't evolved that much. You either let it put its arm around you and whisper in your year or you try and beat it down. You see it in hospitals, the vets, on TV. People put death in a box and bury it. It'll rise up and get into your head though. Like the drizzle every Autumn is swirls around you. You think you are fine, you can keep it away from you. Then you go inside and realise you are drenched. The inside of your sleeve, between your shoulder blades, the backs of your knees. Soaked. And then you become colder than you ever thought was possible.

"Thanks for being around Sal. It's much better having you around than that miserable Marcus Gore. Jenny always liked you, you know. She loved those horses too." He gestured to his cigarette. I nodded to the lacy pocket. We were the only undertakers in Leinster still using horses. Some people said it was even more miserable looking than a hearse but I didn't

think so.

"She preferred the black ones to the white though. I'm sorry I couldn't convince Dad to use them instead. He has a rule of using the white boys for children."

I was sorry. It's not that she didn't like the white ones, they were just a bit wilder from not being used so much. I tried to tell her that was a good thing. I think she understood.

"It's ok." He sighed. "I used to be afraid of the grey ones when I was little too. They look so cold, Sal."

"Don't call me that, makes me sound like a big old sow." I stubbed my cigarette out on the underside of the coffin and put the butt into the pocket. No one ever looks on the underside of a coffin. I shuffled back down into the coffin. Rich leaned over.

"Sorry. If you were a sow I'd have to put you down, you'd kill any piglet that came near you."

"Only ones called Daisy and Lily." They really annoyed the shit out of me.

"Ah they love you really."

"I mortify them"

"They're jealous that you look hotter at a funeral than they do after a whole day getting ready to go down the Rugby Club."

"That sounded really lame Richard. Fuck off would you? My back is killing me and unless you got me some more of those tablets you're no good to me."

I closed my eyes. I felt a kiss on my head. Light and warm.

"Thanks Sally. You stopped me from going mad."

"The trick is to let it embrace you Richard. Death's not going to let you feel nothing you know."

The hinge squeaked.

Richard's little sister's funeral was my first one in my new professional capacity. I was the order in a town of madness. The knot that tied everything together so they wouldn't slip away. I am on the inside of a funeral. People looking in don't know how to act. They are embarrassed by the family's loss of inhibitions. I am their dignity. I hold death at a civilized distance so they can accept it more readily.

When Richard couldn't sleep the night after the funeral I was waiting for him. We walked though the town together and stopped at my father's paddock. The horses dosed, twitching under their rugs. Soon they would be in for the Winter.

I hopped the fence and walked towards C'est Bon, the oldest grey

gelding. I nodded over my shoulder to Richard. He followed.

“C’est Bon” I whispered. The horse flicked his ears and grunted. Richard stood beside me. I took his left hand and put it under the horse’s blanket, on his shoulder.

“He’s warm”

I didn’t laugh at him or call him a thick eejit for saying it. I backed away as Richard leaned into C’est Bon and cried.

FUTURE TENSE

Grainne O'Connor

Sandy's story

Though, Mum never actually said how awful my illness was. She just said that I'd be sick for a long time; this to me was good news since when I have the flu or a cough and get to stay home from school Mum always takes loads of blankets out of her Miscellaneous Cupboard and made a bed out them on the big squashy couch. Then, she would put on a DVD and make me hot chocolate "for my throat".

So, being seven, I was sure Mum meant that I would get this every day for a long time.

But it wasn't like that at all.

In the first few months, I had to go and see a doctor every month. Doctor Eliza May Richardson, or Doctor Cocoa, as I called her because when I left she would always give me a Cocoa Drop, some sort of foreign sweet that exploded in your mouth with an overwhelming surge of chocolate. Dr Cocoa would make you wonder if appearance counts as a doctor. Her hair is bleached white with rainbow highlights and she wears it up in a loose bun tied with black ribbon. Her face is home to thousands of freckles. It looks like she's caked in foundation from a distance. She's only thirty-something but she wears these fantastic pink spectacles. She told me before that she thinks they make her look sophisticated even though she's madder than an elephant after a litre of Coca-Cola.

Doctor Cocoa would give me anaesthetic injection, or in my terms, Sleepy Syrup, into my arm and then I would wake up with a sore throat. The doctor used to stick a pipe down my throat and examine my stomach, where the cancer was. I wasn't allowed to eat before these examinations.

I was admitted to hospital for my first operation at the age of eight and three quarters. I had to stay out of school for a long time so Mrs Thompson, the hospital tutor, would come round at half past nine for an hour and a half seven days a week to do work with me. Thursday was the best. On Thursday, we would do English and for the half an hour before

'school' ended I was allowed to write a short story. Every week, I would write a new chapter for a book I was writing about what I would do when I grew up. I managed six chapters before I had to get surgery. They took me in early for extra examinations just in case something went wrong. I was too weak afterwards to do anything except sleep on and off for three weeks after. I was getting food through a tube every six hours and medicine every three. Codeine, so I was drowsy.

I spent my ninth birthday at the hospital and had a cake in the playroom with Lucy, my friend who was in with Leukaemia. Lucy looked a bit like how I imagine Angelica from Rugrats looking in real life. She had cute blond plaits to her shoulders and swimming pool blue eyes. She loved ballet and Barbie and the colour pink. She always wore little pink nighties and dresses. Lucy was nine the day I got my operation so there wasn't much a difference between us. I could eat at that point so I had a nice fat chunk of chocolate cake and three glasses of Sprite and a bag of crisps. And heaved it all up that night.

Joshua Hill-O'Driscoll

Her

I miss her so much
We're starting to lose touch
She isn't who she used to be
Now she won't even look at me.

She goes off with the wrong friend
Has our relationship come to an end?
I just sit there and think about her
Hoping things would go back to the way they were.

I keep thinking whether I should move on or not
But every time I try, I just cannot
I think of her walk, her talk, her laugh, her smile
And by staying, it makes it all worthwhile.

But when I think, I must think smart
Not to go with my head but with my heart
I know leaving you is a bit crappy
But all I want is for you to be happy.

Girl I love everything you do
But more importantly, I love you
All this thinking has my head wrecked
But girl, you are perfect!

Cyberbullying

Inspired by a discussion in class about the dangers of Cyberbullying

It's not fair
I want to leave, but where?
It's too much, but they don't care
What can I do but say a prayer

It's kinda depressing
Even though they're only messing
It's funny how now they start confessing
Maybe it might teach them a lesson

I just wish all the pain went away
The bullying just continues each day
I stay home, cry and pray
Wishing it will all go away

Every day it kills me inside
There is nowhere to hide
I have no one by my side
I'm thinking of suicide

Jenny Carberry

Transition year

As it comes towards the end of the year
I'm asked for a reflection on Transition Year
I've so much to write but such little space
How do I describe a year in this place?

Strong friendships have been made,
New places explored,
Challenges laid,
Class rooms and white boards
Homework, tests, outings and bogs
In Delphi we came across little green frogs

As you can see
Much has been done
That's only a little flavor
Not the whole sum

It's been an amazing year
One not to forget
Always to be remembered
And that's a bet.

Áine Ní Cheallaigh

I gCuimhne m'Athair

Ag cuimhneamh 's ag cuimhneamh
Is fós nílim in-ann ciall a bhaint
Cén fáth ar tógadh uaim é?
Ní thuigfidh mé go brách é.

Óg agus spraoiúil,
Cineálta agus lách,
Cainteach, gealgáireach i gcónaí
B'é an fear posta ab fhearr é!

Ní raibh sé chomh sásta 'riamh
Is a bhí nuair a fuair sé an Audi
Is é ar nós a bheadh déagóir
An ceol casta "sky-high"
Is é ag "tiomáil" is ag "humáil" ós ard!

Mo chuimhne is fearr
Ná an lá a bhuamar an cluiche ceannais
Daidí ag ritheacht in éineacht liom
Ar an taobhlíne le bród
É ag inseacht go chuile dhuine
Gurb í a iníon an cailín
A chroch an corn go hard.
Dearmad ní dhéanfaidh mé ar an lá go brách!

D'fhág sé muid go luath
Gan súil ar bith againn leis
Cén fáth ar chaith sé imeacht?
Ní raibh ciall ar bith leis.
Cuirim na ceisteanna céanna orm fhéin go minic
'Raibh sé ag teastáil in áit éicint eile
Nó an bhfuil sé in áit níos fearr?
An mbíonn sé ag breathnú síos orm
Is mé ag cuimhneamh air gach lá?

Ach tá rud amháin atáim cinnte faoi
Is atá mé in ann a rá
Go bhfuil aingeal ag tabhairt aire dhom
Gach uile lá de mo shaol!

Tara Prunty

For Her

A single droplet on a sheet,
Two parts in time that weren't meant to meet.

I don't believe in my reality,
Because this can't be all but imaginary.

"How could you love me if I do not exist?"
Yet the darkness persists.

You were stolen,
Now I'm broken.

Moisture forms as
Desperation cries.

The noise is a constant wish.

Oliver Flanagan

Love Shadows

Chapter 1

Corinne was making her way towards the church when she bumped into Nickohli and she said “Oops I’m sorry”. She had expected to have bumped into a random stranger but, as she looked up she saw a familiar face gazing back at her.....

Nickohli stared deeply into her soft blue eyes, he was captivated by her beauty. She asked him expectantly “Are you going somewhere?” He could hardly speak, such was his admiration for this beautiful vision before him. “I’m going to the Tower of Paris, will you come with me?” he stuttered.

“Oh, kind Sir I would love to, but I have a prior engagement”. “Another time perhaps?” Corinne was flattered by his advances.

She was heading towards the church to meet up with Yuri when this unexpected encounter took place. Yuri was her childhood sweetheart and, at 27, he was already beginning to show signs of ageing. He was not as carefree as he used to be and now Nickohli was looking very attractive.....

Corinne was beginning to wonder had she made a mistake by not accepting Nickohli’s kind offer.... She made her way across the courtyard to the church where she could just make out the silhouette of a young man; Yuri.

Yuri sensed her presence and turned to greet her. She noticed the lines etched on his face; he looked tired, perturbed almost. It was as if he sensed that she no longer loved him.

He said “What took you so long, we are going to miss the Service”. Corinne hesitated momentarily, she could not understand why Yuri was suddenly so impatient. Had he seen her talking to Nickohli? she wondered.

Yuri reached for her hand to guide her into the church. He knew that

today was a difficult day for Corinne; it was the day she would say Goodbye to her beloved grandfather for ever....

As they departed the church the priest said; "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, may the Lord be with him for ever and ever. Amen".

As they lowered his body into the ground Corinne wept as she recalled fond memories of the grandfather who had raised her from childhood.

Corinne made her excuses following the burial and returned home. She could not bear to be with Yuri now, as she felt guilty as all her thoughts were of Nickohli.....

Chapter 2

That night Corinne could not sleep; her thoughts alternated between the loss of her grandfather, her indifference toward Yuri and her love for Nickohli. The poor girl was overcome with grief and frustration.

A storm was brewing up outside, the lightning flashed and the thunder roared, the rain lashed against the window pane, the wind howling fiercely outside.

Suddenly, there was a tap on the window, Corinne was, at first unsure; the tapping continued, each time becoming more urgent.

Corinne sheepishly went toward the window and drew back the drapes. There, before her on the balcony outside was Nickohli.

Their eyes met and their love for each other was palpable. Nickohli's skin was glistening with rain, his hair dishevelled and his clothing damp and soiled. But one could not mistake the lovelorn look in his eyes. Corinne recognised this immediately as she looked into his intense green eyes searchingly.

She hesitated briefly before flinging the terrace doors open and throwing herself into his strong masculine arms.

In the distance, in a wooded area behind the trees lurked Alex, the local paperboy turned informant.

He had followed Nickohli from the city and had been waiting with baited breath for this moment....

Alex at 17 had youth on his side, he was orphaned at the age of 12 when his parents were killed in a landmine explosion in Serbia. Raised by his uncle, a Nazi soldier by the name of Vulkan Rianoff, the boy had grown up devoid of human emotion.

Vulkan Rianoff fought in battle against Nickohli's father. The two men were arch enemies. Vulkan lost his left eye during a duel with Vladimir forty years ago, they had fought long and hard for the affections of a beautiful woman- Anastassia Kinski. Vladimir won his bride and Vulkan vowed to get his revenge....

Chapter 3

Nickohli and Corinne shared some wine to toast her grandfather. As the clock struck midnight they kissed by moonlight. There lurking in the shadows was Alex plotting revenge on behalf of his uncle Vulkan.

Meanwhile Yuri was beside himself with grief. He had returned to the church and was pondering on his misfortune, overwrought with emotion. He had been aware for some time that Corinne no longer loved him but had only now realised that his beloved had strong feelings for another.... Yuri had witnessed the exchange between Corinne and Nickohli earlier that day. For a brief moment he thought of killing Nickohli but instantly realised that Corinne would never forgive him.

Corinne knew Nickohli since her early childhood. There was always a fondness between the two of them however, this affection grew over the years....

Meanwhile in the church, a jindoo dog was getting ready to pounce from behind the altar.

The dog bounded towards Yuri; he looked fierce, then as he approached his eyes softened and, as both he and Yuri's eyes met, the dog could clearly see how wounded Yuri was feeling. He licked Yuri's fingers and then went on to lick his tears.

What Yuri did not realise was that this fierce creature had been sent by Vulkan to tear Nickohli to pieces.....

Alex prepared to plot revenge on Nickohli Rianoff. He assembled the poison arrow on the bow and aimed toward the terrace where Corinne and Nickohli stood transfixed by one another. He shot the arrow and within seconds he heard a shriek and saw the silhouette of a person fall from the balcony. He had succeeded in ending the life of Nickohli or had he?

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

(Endnotes)

Máire Holmes is author of *JOY Selected Poems*; *Kenny's Bookshop*, Galway, and *DÚRÚN* (1988). Coiscéim, Dublin. She holds MA in writing from N.U.I. Galway, and Education Award in Psychology, Counselling and Therapy. She is Editor in Chief of *The Galway Review*. Máire Holmes is a bilingual poet, playwright, writer, and songwriter.

Des Kenny, a member of the Kenny bookselling family in Galway, is one of the four sons and two daughters of Des and Maureen Kenny, who opened their first bookshop in 1940. Educated in Coláiste Iognáid, Gaillimh, University College, 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.

Bernard Kirk is the Director of Galway Education Centre. He is co-Founder of Robotics Ireland, The All Ireland Primary Schools Debating Competition and Space Camps Ireland. In 2010 he was nominated to the Trinity Science Gallery Leonardo group. He is Committee member of National Education Committee, Science Gallery, Trinity College, Chairperson The Galway Music Residency and a Committee Member NUIG Research Ethics Committee.

John Kenny is a freelance writer, editor and creative writing tutor. His short stories have appeared in *The World SF Blog*, *Jupiter*, *First Contact*, and *Woman's Way*, *Emerald Eye* (an anthology of the Best of Irish Imaginative Fiction), *Transtories* and many other venues. He is currently hawking his novel *Down and Out* to publishers. John lives in Dublin, Ireland, with his wife, two daughters and neurotic cat.

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 and many of his short stories and articles have appeared in newspapers

and magazines both locally and nationally. His first novel “Dance of the Mocking Birds” was published in 2010 and in 2011 he designed and published a book on his wife, the artist, Marja van Kampen. He is currently editing a book of short stories. He lives in Galway, Ireland.

John Jennings is a Haiku writer from and in Galway. He has had haiku published in Asahi Shimbun and the Mainichi Daily News in Japan, Ropes, the Bray Arts Journal, and Old Moores Almanac, in the USA Static Poetry 5 Anthology. He got Honorable Mention English & French the 15th Mainichi Haiku Contest International Section. At the beginning of this year he was listed in the The European Top 100 Most Creative Haiku Authors 2012 by Haiku Euro Top 100.

Natalia Krause is a relaxation coach, qualified tai chi trainer and NLP practitioner. She has been training in Chen Style with Niall O’Floinn & master Wang Hai Jun since 2007. She got her NLP training certification from John Stanley PhD, at Harmonic Wave Training seminars.

Luke Morgan is an Irish poet. His work has been published in the Poetry Ireland Review, Cyphers, The Moth, and Crannóg among others. He was the winner in his category for the inaugural Poetry Ireland/Trócaire competition for his poem “Atlas”. In 2012, Window’s Publications featured a small collection of his poetry as part of their tenth anniversary edition. He lives in Galway.

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 H Dip in Applied Communications (Journalism) from NUI Galway.

John Walsh was born in Derry but now lives in Connemara. He’s published three collections of poetry, including, *Chopping Wood with T.S. Eliot* (Salmon Poetry). He has read at events in Ireland, the UK, Germany, Sweden and the USA. He is organizer and MC of North Beach Nights in Galway, Ireland’s leading monthly performance poetry event. *Border Lines* is his debut short story collection.

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-ordinator and manager in various anti-poverty and community sector programmes. She has managed a variety of communication networks and enjoys working with local people. Kate writes poetry and short stories in her spare time.

Eileen Bennett is an experienced writer, editor and teacher. Her career spans over 25 years in media with an eclectic focus on lifestyle, business and spirituality in a number of private and public sector organisations. Eileen has a keen interest in Social Media and technology and is responsible for all Solved System's social media activity.

Laney Mannion is an artist studying in Cork, from Roundstone in Connemara. With a fascination in the science of speech, and development of accents and slang in Ireland, began writing poetry and stories as a child, as a way of explaining the world around her to herself and to others.

Angela Byrne was born in Dublin. Her training includes City and Guilds Printing, Guildford College of Technology, Surrey, UK. She worked with The Pauper's Press Printing Cooperative, an east Oxford community printshop, Oxford, UK. In 1987 she set up Pirate productions, Design and Printing. Angela returned to Ireland 1997 to settle in Connemara with her children. Currently, she is working on a number of projects locally including painting signs and windows for Festive days, Murals in private houses and an exhibition of Prints and Paintings of her own work.

Stephen Byrne is originally from Dublin and now lives in Galway and is a chef for his sins. 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 2011's 'Over the Edge' Poetry competition 2011.

Jack McCann is a plastic surgeon, poet and playwright. 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.

Eamonn Wall is the author of six collections of poetry: *Sailing Lake Mareotis* (2011) *A Tour of Your Country* (2008), *Refuge at De Soto Bend* (2004), *The Crosses* (2000), *Iron Mountain Road* (1997), and *Dyckman-200th Street* (1994), all published by Salmon Publishing in Ireland. His next collection, *New and Selected Poems*, will be published by Salmon in 2014. Individual poems have been published in *The Shop*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Cyphers*, *West47*, *TriQuarterly*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *River Styx*, *The Recorder*, *New Hibernia Review*, *Eire-Ireland*, *Nebraska Review*, and other journals. *Writing the Irish West: Ecologies and Traditions* was published by University of Notre Dame Press in 2011.

Visar Zhiti is the Albanian writer whose life and works perhaps best mirror the history of his nation. He was one of the many to have suffered appalling persecution for no apparent reason. But Visar Zhiti survived – physically, intellectually and emotionally, and he is now among the most popular poets of present-day Albania. Despite the paucity of literary translations from the Albanian, Visar Zhiti's verse has been appreciated abroad and he has received notable international recognition. In 1991, he was awarded the Italian "Leopardi d'oro" prize for poetry and in 1997 the prestigious "Ada Negri" prize. He is a member of the Alfonso Grassi International Academy of Art and has taken part in many international poetry festivals in recent years. After a long career as a cultural attaché, in April 2013 he was appointed Minister of Tourism, Cultural Affairs, Youth and Sports.

Kevin Higgins facilitates poetry workshops at Galway Arts Centre; teaches creative writing at Galway Technical Institute and on the Brothers of Charity *Away With Words* creative writing programme for people with disabilities. He is also Writer-in-Residence at Merlin Park Hospital and the poetry critic of the *Galway Advertiser*. He was a founding co-editor of *The Burning Bush* literary magazine. Kevin's fourth collection of poetry, *The Ghost In The Lobby*, will be published by Salmon Poetry in early 2014. Kevin is co-organiser of *Over The Edge* literary events. *Mentioning The War*, a collection of his essays and reviews was published last April by Salmon.

Fred Johnston was born in Belfast in 1951 and educated there and Toronto, Canada. Co-founder of the Irish Writers' Co-operative in the

'Seventies, he is founder of Galway's Cúirt literature festival (1986) and of the Western Writers' Centre, Galway. In 2013 he received literary bursaries from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Arts Council of Ireland. In 2004 he was writer in residence to the Princess Grace Irish Library at Monaco.

Liam Duffy grew up and studied in Galway. He is now compiling an Artistic Atlas of Galway, studying Urban studies and working towards his first collection of poetry. He has also read at the West Cork Literary Festival in Ireland as part of a reading dubbed: Irish Poets: A New Generation, was short listed for the Over the Edge New writer of the year award 2012 and has work forthcoming in The Poetry Bus, Kerouac's Dog Magazine as well as Can Can.

Aideen Henry lives in Galway and works as a writer, physician and lecturer. Her poems have been published previously in several literary journals and magazines including Crannóg, The SHOP, Ropes, The Cúirt Annual and Southword, and she has given many poetry readings around the country. She was shortlisted for the 2010 Hennessy X.O Literary Awards. She is working on a 2nd collection of poetry. She also writes plays and short stories.

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

Pd Lyons's work has appeared in many magazine and zines throughout the world. two collections of work have been published by Lapwing Belfast. originally from the US has been a resident of Ireland for years now.

Sarah Clancy has been shortlisted for several poetry prizes including the Listowel Collection of Poetry Competition and the Patrick Kavanagh Award. Her first book of poetry, Stacey and the Mechanical Bull, was published by Lapwing Press Belfast in December 2010 and a further selection of her work was published in June 2011 by Doire Press. Her poems have been published in Revival Poetry Journal, The Stony Thursday Book, The Poetry Bus, Irish Left Review and in translation

in Cuadrivio Magazine (Mexico). She was the runner up in the North Beach Nights Grand Slam Series 2010 and was the winner of the Cúirt International Festival of Literature Grand Slam 2011. She was an invited guest at the 2011 Vilenica Festival of Literature in Slovenia and in Spring 2012 her poem "I Crept Out" received second prize in the Ballymaloe International Poetry Competition.

Boris A. Novak is a Slovene poet, playwright, translator, and essayist. He is a Professor at the Department for Comparative Literature and Literary Theory at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana. Novak was President of the Slovene PEN (1991-1996) and Chair of the Writers for Peace Committee of International PEN (1994-2000). Novak organized humanitarian help for refugees from the former Yugoslavia and writers from Sarajevo which was one of the biggest humanitarian efforts in the history of the world writers' organization. From 2002 he served as Vice-president of International PEN. Novak has published many volumes of poetry including: *Still-Life-in-Verses*, (1977), *Daughter of Memory* (1981), *Echo* (2000), *Glowing* (2003), *Rituals of Farewell* (2005), and *LPM: Little Personal Mythology* (2007). Novak's poems have been translated into many languages and Novak translates French, ancient Provencal, as well as American, English, Italian, German, and literature written in Dutch and South Slav languages.

Dušan Šarotar was born in Murska Sobota, Slovenia in 1968. He is a writer, poet and screenwriter. He studied Sociology of Culture and Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana. He has published three novels and three poetry collections. Šarotar also writes puppet theatre plays and is author of fifteen screenplays for documentary and feature films, mostly for television. His poetry and prose have been included into several anthologies and translated into Hungarian, Russian, Spanish, Hebrew, Polish, Italian, Czech and English. In 2008, the novel *Billiards* at the Hotel Dobray was nominated for the national Novel of the Year Award. There will be a feature film based on this novel filmed in 2013.

Suzana Tratnik was born in 1963 in Murska Sobota, in Slovenia. She obtained her BA in sociology from the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana, and her MA in gender anthropology from the Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis in Ljubljana, where she lives and works as a writer, translator, and publicist. She published six collections

of short stories. Her books and short stories have been translated in about twenty languages, while she herself has translated several books of British and American fiction, non-fiction, and plays.

Esther Murbach is a Swiss writer living in Basel. She studies of languages, history, philosophy in Basel and Berlin. She is a journalist, and translator. She is author of many book published in German and English.

Tony Hall is a lecturer in NUI Galway. He is a graduate of the University of Limerick (BA Physical Education and English, and PhD Computer Science) and NUI Galway (Master of Information Technology). He recently completed the Postgraduate Award in Teaching Shakespeare with the Royal Shakespeare Company/University of Warwick. He is a former post-primary school teacher of Physical Education, English and ICT. Tony writes poetry, fiction and non-fiction.

Dr. Emily Cullen is an Irish writer, harpist and arts manager, currently based in Melbourne. A long-time Galway resident, she was the inaugural Arts Officer of NUI Galway between 1999 and 2002. Emily was awarded an IRCHSS Government of Ireland fellowship for her doctoral study on the Irish harp, completed at NUI Galway. Her second collection of poetry, *In Between Angels and Animals*, has just been published by Arlen House.

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*.

Moya Roddy attended the National College of Art and Trinity Arts Lab. Her stories have been published by Penguin, *Serpent's Tail* and Arlen House. Her latest collection *Other People* has recently been published by Wordonthestreet. She collaborated with Pete Mullineaux on *Butterfly Wings* which was broadcast on RTE Radio in 2010.

Vincent Holmes 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 formerly 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.

Orla Fay is a member of Boyne Writers' Group. She has been published most recently in Boyne Berries 13, Abridged Primal and in The Artistic Atlas of Galway. Her poetry chapbook 'Drawn to the Light' was published in June 2012.

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 (see trevorconway.weebly.com). As a writer, he concentrates on poetry, fiction and song writing, but has also worked on scripts, plays, non-fiction and journalism. In 2011, he was awarded a Galway City Council bursary.

Barbara McKeon, a Dubliner living in Galway since '98, was for many years a journalist with the Irish Press Group, at which time she had many short stories and plays broadcast on RTE Radio, as well as many more published in newspapers and magazines. She now teaches TEFL English, proofreads at the Galway Advertiser and continues to write fiction at her home in Kinvara, which she shares with her husband and two cats.

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.

Mary Madec has a B.A. and M.A 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.

Pete Mullineaux has published three collections: Zen Traffic Lights (Lapwing 2005) A Father's Day (Salmon 2008) and Session (Salmon 2011.) He has been anthologised widely in Ireland, UK, USA & France including Poetry Ireland Review 100 (Ed. Paul Muldoon) the websites poetrydaily.com, about.com/poetry & Van Gogh's Ear in Paris. He has also had a number of plays produced for the stage and RTE radio.

Michael Farry, a native of County Sligo has lived in Trim since 1970. He has had poems published in poetry magazines in Ireland and the UK and was selected for Poetry Ireland Introductions 2011. In 2009 he was awarded third prize in the Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Competition and was shortlisted for the Bridport Poetry Competition (UK) and longlisted for the Plough Poetry Prize (UK). 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.

Michael Gannon is from Renvyle in Connemara and now lives in Galway. He is married and has two daughters. He writes sporadically in Gaelic and English. He works in international aid and community development. He has been a volunteer radio presenter and producer of social and historical documentaries.

Anne Irwin was born in Ballyhaunis, Co Mayo, and moved to Galway city. She studied English and Philosophy in the National University of Ireland, Galway and is a practicing homeopath and teacher. Her poetry was published in R.O.P.E.S magazine and in *Emerge Literary Magazine*.

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.

Patrick Deeley was born in Loughrea, County Galway. Five collections of his poems have appeared from Dedalus Press. *Territoire'* (2011) was published by Alidades Books in translation to French, and many of his poems – as well as featuring in leading literary outlets here and abroad and being widely anthologised – have been translated to Italian, Dutch and Moldovan. His novel entitled 'The Lost Orchard', won the Eilis Dillon Book of the Year Award in 2001. He served on the Council of Poetry Ireland from 1984 to 1989

Seamus Scanlon is the author of the story collection *As Close As You'll Ever Be* (Cairn Press, Arizona) and the play *Dancing at Lunacy* (Cell Theatre, New York). He was a 2012 Fellow at the Centre for Fiction in New York and the MacDowell Artists Colony.

Laurie Allen holds M. A. in Health Promotion from NUI Galway, and B. A. 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'. Allen worked as a researcher for Puddle Pictures in creating documentaries on suicide and alcoholism. She acted in two of Margareta D'Arcy's productions, one concerning whistle blowing and as a pussy rioter in Kildare play writers festival.

Maeve Mulrennan lives 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 has been published in Wordlegs and has featured in the 2012 Cuirt international Festival of Literature in Galway. She was long listed for the Doire Press Chapbook competition in 2011 also.

Grainne O'Connor is a 15 years old student from County Galway. She loves writing and reading. She really wants to be a writer and this is a big dream for her.

Joshua Hill-O'Driscoll is a 15-year-old student of St Enda's College in Galway and he enjoys writing poetry in his spare time. He uses poetry as a form of expressing my own thoughts as well as discussing general issues.

Jenny Carberry is a transition year student in Calasactius College, Galway. She loves writing poetry and short stories.

Is macléinn i nGairmscoil Cholmcille, Indreabhán í **Áine Ní Cheallaigh** atá ag cur tús le ábhar dúinn ó mhicléinn don leathanach liteartha. Beidh sé i gceist um deireadh Bealtaine an leathanach iomlán a bheith dírithe ar shaothair ó mhicléinn i scoileanna iarbhuideochais na Gaillimhe. Bíg ag scríobh!

Tara Prunty is an eighteen year old student in Galway. Poetry and drama are her dreams.

Oliver Flanagan is the author of several poems and two short stories, including "Love Shadows", his award winning entry for the Write-a-Book

project run by the Galway Education Centre. He lives in Galway, and in June 2013 graduated from St. Joseph's Special School at the age of 18. Oliver is a young man with autism.

