

# Crannog 8 spring/summer 2005

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## **And So I Am Not**

**Fred Johnston**

---

*(to John Montague, Monaco, October 2004)*

the man sleeping on a bench at Antibes  
railway station, while the magical boats clinkle  
in a blue harbour  
    nor the other man talking to himself, who  
pulls after him a bag weighted with an absence of things  
and neither am I the twister of thin wire, who,  
    behind his stall, creates, like God, thin men  
out of base material,  
    and yet with small unwarranted fevers I pursue  
the same sorts of inventions of the mind, a sanctuary,  
a thudding shadow, a gift of remaking the ordinary -  
    as the train inserts itself into the mountain,  
    emerging unchanged but moving  
still, I think in this way I am best described; down  
the gullet of the coast we wheeze, whistle like old lungs  
lost for air, a night-world beyond the window  
    invisible to us. Yet we know nothing stands still.

**Bush And Briar****Fred Johnston**

---

They sharpen in winter,  
Knives out for the season  
Of a wren in a tangle  
Of hedge, the jingle  
Of bells on the heels of a fox,  
The briar-lick and bush-scrape  
At all the flimsy frosts  
And tattery snows –  
The fields endless in flat  
Snow-light that is redemptive  
And damning, too cold, too  
Absolute; Christ in a briar hat

**Winter Song****Fred Johnston**

---

Winter is a fretting dark.  
The leaf is silent.  
The not-quite-living  
Living in the park  
Rat-scrabbling in unforgiving  
Rubbish bins are what is meant  
When we chatter  
About those others and their state -  
We clatter  
Home, hysterical, traffic-late:  
Winter is not comforting.  
A newspaper's for reading,  
Not wrapping your feet in -  
We fear the herald angels at our gate.

**I Wear My Wristwatch In Bed**     **Aine Miller**

---

In dream, time slips moorings,  
drifts on another tide.

All of a sudden what would be  
bobs in its wake; this child

on the pitching slope of my knee  
has his Grandad's grizzled chin.

Sea-sickened, without purchase,  
desolate for the rhythms of memory,

place, distance, unwavering  
pulse of a life lived in sequence,

I loose the kite string of a poem,  
chancing my arm in the rare,

lolling at ease until air's  
edged with fire, what's next

aeons more than allowed for,  
and I eddy, dip, touch down

in the hour I started from. Here's  
urgency of seasons, node

and leaf, bud and bloom,  
wave on wave, and warranty

of delivered milk, dustmen,  
Eilis' kids on Tuesdays,

bi-monthly cuts and colours,  
soap opera's half-hour comforts

big time. Awake, I circle  
the rim of the safest sea,

held on course for home,  
a coastal city, children

waiting, Shandon's clock face  
twitching lifetimes by,

chimes that needs-must couple  
with my heart-blood's rhyme,

holding lines to the earthly.  
But dream's the great two-timer

letting in the infinite.  
Uneasy in unmeasured flow

I strain my ears, desperate  
for the sound of a ticking watch.

**Queen Meaves Apparition**      **Katie Raissan**

---

*For Marie-Claire*

Each night you stood, black-cloak billowing,  
waiting upon that playground mound  
outside our house,  
with the moon,  
our usual go-between,  
twisting thistles beneath your toes.

we waited to watch from the bedroom window,  
ducked down behind twitching blinds,  
that soaked up our four-year old fright  
with your falcate sister,  
and plunged us,  
readily  
each night,  
into the light-skimmed shadows of your tale.

You came to us, so clear in those fairy chants,  
that fell upon our secret ear  
and shared duvet huddles.  
Kisses planted like clams  
upon cheeks and dollies,  
pillows and teddies;  
a warmth that could not reach your forlorn form  
that stayed, reflected back to us, beyond the landing  
light.

**Firstborn**

**Sean Donegan**

---

Memory,  
the diary of my daughter's birth  
and early days.  
Reluctant at first even to make an appearance;  
a ploy to keep me in suspense,  
or hone my joy at her arrival?

This tiny thespian was soon to put on  
her first one-woman show;  
hold centre stage.

Glazed, bruised and purple, the anguished mite,  
convulsed and yowling shamelessly,  
is then quieted suddenly and strangely silent,  
weaving a skein of blatant magic  
before my astonished eyes.  
Today I watch enthralled  
as from behind the footlights off Broadway,  
she stages yet another one-woman show.  
Words spill from her lips,  
she gestures, moves, is still;  
the audience in her thrall.  
Whatever makes me think  
that she was born to this?

**Helen**

**Ciaran Parkes**

---

Writing a letter to you  
from hospital,  
quoting Edgar Allan Poe:  
'Helen, thy beauty is to me...'

I was nine or eight.  
I never sent it.  
I remember a warm glow,  
saying your name to the child psychologist.  
'My best friend, yes...'

A star that didn't move or fade all night,  
watching it through  
the big window; the sleeping beds  
all around me  
like ships at sea.

**From Russian Folklore**

**Ciaran Parkes**

---

The witch  
who walks behind us  
and falls  
to make us fall

but falls soft  
when we fall hard

walks away  
when we lie still

**Emily**

**Ingrid Wall**

---

You came to me in a vision  
as I stared up at the ceiling  
and made palaces out of cracks.

I want to show you the magic tree  
at the bottom of the garden,  
the blossoms that pop into pink  
and white and cream each time  
you say please and thank you.

But there is no you,  
just an electrical impulse somewhere  
behind my eyes.

You weren't made this month.  
Outside people talk  
I shut my eyes and wince  
while my stomach cries its tears alone.

## Night Duty

Aoife Casby

---

we two are awake in the dark  
i knowing that the laws which harassed his  
growth  
could lurk latent in my tired cells  
and in me there may be  
the agitated repetition of unseen dramas -  
fingerprints of strange logic hidden

it is quiet  
outside night ages into grey  
sun keens  
pink and cherry gold  
in ancient melting

i see his head-rocking-tick-tock  
a weird and desolate dance -  
the constant cast of hand-shadow animals  
flicker from his white fingers

he makes a smile

and behind it i wish a thinking sufficient for itself -  
that owns the symbolic techniques  
and mathematical methods of truth

the clock marks to a ward waking  
breaking our self-absorbed silence -

solitude is corrected -

the sound of relief opening the door

**Right Hand****Mary O'Rourke**

---

In my right hand I caress my father's pen,  
A Parker, black with fine nib and silver casing  
I've written with it for thirty years  
Creatively, pausing before committing each word.  
He wrote school notes with it,  
Cheques for family bills,  
Short letters (*Dear Mary, Here is your fare home, Love,  
Dad*).  
His crooked thumb guided his slanting style.

On my right hand I wear my mother's ring  
A smooth band of yellow gold  
Placed on her finger sixty years ago  
Worn with love for a lifetime  
Its lustre still not faded.

Pen and ring - a fine inheritance.

**Amnesia****Olivia McCarthy**

---

I know you-  
you stand in a doorway  
waiting for someone,  
check the driveway  
for a car, listen to voices  
that pass on the street.

Sometimes you stand at a gate-  
slippers on your feet,  
a red cardigan draped  
over your shoulders,  
frail hands plucking  
at your crimplene skirt

**It's For Your Own Good      Gerardine Burke**

---

Buz-z buz-z-z. The doorbell rings insistently. It drones in my ears, shrilly. My next-door neighbour no doubt. She is a widow and since I have become a widower myself she is always bothering me. I take the cup from my lips. Tea dribbles from my moustache onto my chin. What does she want now? To collect the plate from the rhubarb tart she forced on me last night, I suppose. She'd said, "Good for the bowels is rhubarb. Roughage you know." I eye the last of the angina tablets sitting, where I always leave them, beside the clock and sigh.

The bell rings again. Maybe it's not her after all. If I don't answer soon, she'll go round the back and peer in the window at me having my breakfast. I shuffle to the door. When I open it, the blast of air, cold and damp, makes me step back into the hallway. "I thought you were asleep Willie." The postman hands me the letter. "Special delivery. You have to sign for it."

I grope for the envelope and biro held out to me. Before I write my name on the dotted line on the form, I peer at the stamp and seeing it's from the U S whisper, "Praise be to God."

The envelope is in one of my hands as I close the door carefully behind me. If I know Mrs Busybody Mahon, she will be over in a minute. She is like a magpie when it comes to garnering information. I have barely slit the envelope when the bell starts to sound again. "I'm deaf," I mutter as I go into my bedroom out of sight of windows.

There is a letter folded around something. I put on my reading glasses. It doesn't say much. "Here's the airplane ticket Dad. Please use it." My daughter Sheila has always been a woman of few words.

I tilt the ticket towards the light and read 'Shannon - Boston' one way. One way- what was she thinking? The do gooder in her dying to take care of me. As she would say herself "No way!"

Maybe she doesn't mean it like that. My heart palpitates. It's her way of saying I can stay as long as I

like. I might take her up on it. It would be a means of getting away from the menace next door. It mightn't even be that bad.

Six years ago Sheila moved to Ashland, Massachusetts with her American partner. "A sculptor, imagine," my wife Cathleen used complain. "And they not even married. I don't know what the world is coming to." When Sheila persuaded her mother to go to America three years ago, Cathleen had kept up the façade of the shocked parent but I think she enjoyed herself. Sheila is a social worker at Framingham General and Trev. has his studio beside the house. I loved chatting with the arty types who came to collect their pieces and Cathleen used keep the customers' children quiet.

The new baby hadn't been born then. Of course the baby is the reason for the invitation. Sheila, heavily pregnant hadn't come to her mother's funeral. I feel my eyes wet. Pity Cathleen hadn't been able to live long enough to hear about the birth of our grandchild. If I go over, I'll see her. I stifle the outburst of sorrow threatening to overwhelm me by concentrating on Sheila, herself the baby of the family and, God forgive me, my favourite.

She is unpredictable, almost whimsical, not resolute and conventional like my older daughter Alice or my two sons Raymond and Liam. A wave of ardent love for my daughter sweeps through my blood making me feel tender, and strong. Whenever I'm with Sheila, I feel youthful. Like the world is a benign place and love is magical.

I have barely finished my cold tea when Alice arrives. "Dad, Guess what. You know how I've been visiting nursing homes lately. To see what they're like. Remember we agreed that we would."

"We?" I feel cross. "I thought it was you who agreed."

"Oh what difference does it make whose idea it was." She plants herself in the centre of the doorway between the living room and kitchen and fists her hands on her hips. "Thing is. I've found one that I think you'll like. Liam and Raymond took a look yesterday and they think

it's grand too. Best of all they think they will have a vacancy in two weeks."

In the long silence following this revelation, neither of us move. Alice's gaze finally locks with mine.

"Do you know how lucky we are?" Alice pushes her hair back from her face, defiant. She shifts from foot to foot. Even as a child she went on the attack when she felt pressured.

Her angry tone falters. "The good ones are always full" she finishes lamely. She rummages in her Gucci handbag. "Raymond took a photograph of it from the outside and the matron gave us this. It's one of the inmates having their tea." The word inmates drops into the conversation like a splat of sauce on a pristine white tablecloth.

"That explains the vacancy. An inmate on the way out no doubt."

I am still sitting at the kitchen table. I know I should feel sorry for her. Her neck is covered in red blotches.

"Don't you want to look at them Dad? See there are chairs to sit out and you can see the road." Her voice trails off. She begins again. "There's a pilgrimage to Knock each month and every Sunday the locals come in to sing and dance for the residents." She enunciates the word residents clearly.

"To hell with praying, singing, dancing and watching cars," I say. "Maybe I should just go back to national school and play with *máirta*".

"Well people like it," Alice murmurs. "Old people need routine."

"I'm perfectly able to amuse myself thank you very much."

"Yes of course. I'm sorry."

"My *routine* involves finding ways to fill the gap left by your mother so I suppose singing and dancing would keep me occupied." My voice is devoid of intonation as I look, implacably at her. "I want to be left on my own."

"But aren't you lonely? I mean you are here all by yourself. There you would have other people."

I feel *alone*. When Cathleen was alive, though we had seldom been apart, there had been many times when I felt lonely. I miss the routine of my life with her.

I could have timed my watch by the breakfast dinner and tea she served me daily. Sometimes my heart used cry out that we could have hired someone to serve meals. "I have all the friends I need, thank you."

Alice tut tutts. " Raymond and Liam think the same. They think a nursing home would be best. You'll have regular meals, you won't have to cook or clean, if you get sick you will be well cared for. It's for your own good Dad," she adds staring at the tea stain on my jumper.

I've been well cared for all my life. "A man can enjoy doing things for himself." I think of the airline ticket. Sheila is a useless housekeeper. Thank God.

I watch Alice play with the photographs not knowing whether she should take them with her or leave them.

"Sure there's no harm in looking."

She shows me a picture of lots of old people smiling and waiting in front of a blank TV screen. Probably waiting for "Live At Three." The photographer has told them to say "cheese."

"Here's another one. This was taken outside."

"Leave the bloody thing there. I'll look at it later." I feel her alarm.

"I'll phone you tomorrow. I have to go now." She is out the door before I can rearrange my face into amiable lines.

I leave the photographs lying on the table as I start to clean up. I have washed a cup and saucer when I sink back onto the chair, the stuffing knocked out of me. Until today I haven't fully understood that I will be alone from now on.

I feel again the admonishments of my children the day of the funeral. They blamed me for not making Cathleen go to the doctor sooner.

Later I walk into the sitting room and sit in silence with my thoughts. As it begins to darken outside, I soften into tears and go whimpering to bed. Cathleen seems near to me and, forgetting the reality of what she had become, I visualise the woman I used love. I kiss the pillow on which her head has lain for so many years and whisper her name.

Sheila is a carbon copy of Cathleen before she had curdled into complaining and withered into martyrdom. I

sleep and spend the night in a dream fantasy. But next morning when I awake and find an empty place where she has slept beside me, my anguish returns with greater force. I pass the day sitting quietly by the cold hearth.

That night I feel my limbs heavy as I make my way to bed. I have spent the day waiting, waiting for Alice to phone as she said she would, waiting for Mrs Mahon to ring the doorbell, waiting for memory to create a pleasing picture of Cathleen inside my head. But all I can see is her scowling face, all I can hear are her barbs. I guess that this is what old age is about. Waiting for your children to visit. Waiting for . . .

How sincere is my daughter in America? She is impulsive. She has probably not thought about what it will mean to have an old person, her father, in the house. What did Trev think of her invitation to me.? How can I, after so many years, pack up and go to America? All that 'have a nice day' baloney.

Yet a nursing home offers a worse fate. Another routine drawn up for me. And for all the other nursing home people. To meet the needs of old people. How can a young healthy person like Sheila cope with the wants of an old man. Funny. I never really thought of myself as old until Alice came with those photographs.

Why can't I stay in my house? Under the watchful eye of Cathleen, I had done all the maintenance. At her insistence I had painted it every five years, even sanded the wooden floors when she got rid of the carpets. What was it all for? The house is empty now. I think of Mrs. Mahon wandering all over the neighbourhood forcing herself and gifts on acquaintances just to hear a human voice.

As I get into bed, the house resounds with laughter. The children are young, Cathleen is carefree. My blood races. My arms close about her waist but there is nothing there.

I am too weak to answer when the phone rings three times the next day. That night Alice stops by.

Vaguely I hear Mrs Mahon say; "I haven't seen him since you were last here. I thought he went home with you."

Alice fumbles for her key. I listen to her go into the kitchen. She will find the fragments of torn photographs littering the table.

"Daddy," she calls. "Daddy are you here?" She appears in the bedroom door with the remains of my angina tablets in her hand.

I feel a wave of excruciating pain sear through me. Death rattles in my chest. I sense rather than see her pick up the faded photograph of her mother, which looks so like Sheila, lying on the floor, the express mail envelope containing a one way ticket beside it.

**Unending Winter****Catherine Heaney**

---

*For Donough*

The turlough\* flood is high,  
Lapping at the branches,  
And through the shattered image of the castle tower  
Wild birds move  
With heads drawn downward  
Towards the mesh of weeds in the under tow.

You look out,  
Finding, maybe, with your restless eyes,  
That knot of anger in your brain  
Reflected in the twisting pool beneath the blackthorn  
shadows;  
Or the panic in your tangled thoughts  
Glinting in the swallow-hole  
That sucks down every lost and broken thing.

But soon the turlough waters will retreat  
Into their subterranean caverns,  
Be still again and cold  
While bird songs will carry across the awakened plain  
And echo off the rocks.

Your days, too, once were easy  
Pools of time, dream-like now,  
Before the red dam burst inside your head  
And left you changed.  
Now you will never again hear summer sounds  
Nor piece together your image in the quiet light;  
That dark flood in your brain  
Has trapped you  
And locked you in unending winter.

*\*Irish word for a seasonal lake in a limestone region*

**He Visits His Father's Home**      **Liam Guilar**

---

*(Laytown beach, January 2005)*

I know this place. Your stories were my fairytales.  
The road side names that seem to sing themselves  
as landscape and my memory of your memories  
dovetail  
and then begin to drift apart.

This bridge should be much higher  
and the sea? surely the sea is never calm.  
How could these stolid houses know desire  
facing the littered strand?

You grew up looking out across the sea,  
the whole green island pressing at your back.  
A childhood framed in stories you'd tell me  
hung on the single syllable of home.

When you left here, for reasons I can still recite,  
I don't know how it felt to leave.  
I heard the others say, so what the work is shite  
at least here in the factory a man gets paid.

You never spoke like that.  
My questions surface like The Rising of the Moon  
It's time to pack the car and go.  
I'll never learn your words,  
just someone else's version of the tune.  
Like shattered headlights scattered on the road  
We know that something happened here  
But no one's left to say exactly what.

**Mother's Day****Kevin Donnelly**

---

Mesmerized. All is well.  
"Lulled" sounds good :  
A mother's arms;  
A mother's face;  
A mother's love.

I must have slept through that.  
I don't remember it at all.  
I can't see that woman  
I called 'mother' being such a one,  
All sweetness, warmth, love.

She told me "Take him back"  
Is what she said when first  
She saw me,  
Her private depression  
Rising to meet the world's.

Too big emotionally for a family  
She widened it with intrigue .  
Subtle meanings in chance  
Remarks or in a look.  
Her enigmatic knowing smile.

Too bright for her ignorant world,  
Discontented, she bred  
A discontent in me :  
No suburban competence;  
No fitting in. But the cancer

That wasted her body could not  
Waste her sense of self, eat at  
Her dignity, her quiet reserve:  
One last, unnoticed breath  
And she was gone,

There is something to be said  
For the wary eye and  
Softly cutting tongue :  
The world may sometimes forgive.  
Life never.

## **Finale**

**Martin Gleeson**

---

"Have you the yoke for squeezing?"  
He enquired.  
"He'd need to be castrated"  
He said with intent.  
"I'm afraid he'd bull the red and  
I'd never manage her come calving"  
He reasoned.  
While the conversation on preventing  
Bovine reproduction continued  
The beast in question grazed the pasture  
Happy to be in the vicinity of the red.  
Throwing occasional furtive glances  
He was unaware that their union  
Would never be consummated.

**Two To A Desk****Michael Massey**

---

The pair of us try to distance ourselves  
from the creak of the hinged seat, ease it  
down, then, rigid between cast-iron,  
press patched elbows into scarred oak,  
socks rucked round ankles, damp  
in over-sized wellingtons, thighs  
ired from corduroy friction.

Teacher's little helpers, busy, busy,  
busy concocting in a corner  
the day's blue ink, rationing it  
into enamel ink-wells.  
From the smooth groove I take  
the wooden-handled pen,

dip my nib, drag morning along  
between parallel lines, a fine  
strand of wool trailing blue  
spider legs. The room heats up,  
fills with wet animal smells,  
home-knitted jumpers drying out.

**Knowing My Brother      Susan Millar DuMars**

---

*(Excerpt)*

This can't be the place. I'm in a ritzy apartment building on Nob Hill in San Francisco. I'm looking for my brother. A bald, lisping doorman presides over the foyer. In his spare time he could be a Truman Capote impersonator - the doorman, not my brother. He waves me toward the elevator, which carries me to Rob's floor. Like every other floor in the building, it is beige and mirrored and thick with the fat, slip-covered silence of the rich. I hesitate as the elevator doors thunk shut behind me. This just can't be right. How can he possibly afford it? Then the door opposite the elevator opens, and out steps Rob. His height is awesome; he is 6'6" tall without his boots, which he has spray painted black. Gone is his unruly helmet of brown hair. The sides of his head were shaved clean moments ago, he explains, by his best friend and roommate Matt. The hair that is left has been pulled back into a quarter inch pony tail and shellacked into place. He sports a threadbare goatee that looks like it itches, and round midnight blue sunglasses. He catches sight of himself in the full length mirror and starts to laugh; a throaty sound that punctures the padded quiet of the hall. It is the first thing about him that I recognize. He laughs harder and harder. "Look at me," he says. "Something has gone horribly wrong." He leans against the wall and cackles.

My brother is twenty-four, and this is his first visit to the West Coast. He and Matt plan to spend their last summer before graduating college bartending and exploring San Francisco. What has paid Rob's airfare, and the rent on this Nob Hill suite, is a credit card which some ill advised bank has issued him. The card is up to its limit, as is Matt's, and as they have no jobs and no savings they are wondering where dinner will come from. But there is a bottle of white wine in the fridge (it came with the suite), and they have an excellent view of the city and cable television too. They are not complaining.

They ask me eagerly which neighborhoods they should check out first. I smile a competent older sister's smile and pull out my SF street map.

I haven't seen Rob in...three years? Four? Since we last met, he has become a philosophy major with a bartender's license, a prescription for Prozac and a habit of disappearing for weeks at a time. Our mother refers to him as "(sigh) Robert", or sometimes, "the prodigal son". My own habits have not been deemed colorful enough to warrant a nickname, nor labored sighs. My brother inherited most of the color. I inherited the map-carrying gene.

In my adult life I have had many close male friends, and I have fondly said of each of them, "He is like a brother to me." Thirty minutes in the company of my actual brother disproves this assertion. Or rather, if "like a brother" implies many shared confidences and a deep familiarity and understanding of the other...then my brother is not like a brother to me. I love him, but don't understand him. And the things that are familiar about him (his smile; his fondness for repeating Monty Python routines; his anecdotes, labyrinthine in complexity and told in sputtering firecracker bursts) are familiar because they remind me of me. As I watch him, watching the lights of San Francisco like a prince in his tower on the hill, I think that I don't really know who he is. And I'd like to.

So I ask him if he'd like to have dinner some night next week. Just us, my treat. "Ho! Sounds great," he says. When is he free? "At the moment, I'm free pretty much all the time."

"Free as birds," Matt echoes, laughing.

Rob flops down on the bed and stares up at the blinking Christmas tree lights he and Matt have ringed around the suite. Blink. Blink. "Nothing in the date book," he mutters sleepily. "No plans."

A few days later Rob calls to say he can't make dinner on the evening we had scheduled. He will be taking inventory in a lamp store that night. He and Matt have had no luck finding bartending jobs. The field is closed to those with no connections and no union card.

So, they have registered with a temp agency - and because they are both in the "no special skills" category, they get jobs like the one at the lamp store, where they work alongside chattering grandmothers and men with 1970s haircuts and socks that don't match. In fact, for the lamp store gig, Rob is asked to be in charge of the temps, which he guesses is sort of like being chosen head lunatic; flattering if you don't think about it too hard. Being in charge means walking around with a clipboard, and he notices that every time he picks up the clipboard the other lunatics besiege him with questions...about lamps. It is as though they don't recognize him as one of their own, a temp who knows nothing about lamps and doesn't need to know anything except how to count them. With the clipboard in his hands he becomes an authority. He wonders if he has stumbled on to a life lesson here. Perhaps one does not need courage or wisdom to be respected as a leader. Perhaps all one needs is a clipboard.

When my brother was a teenager he had a poster of Martin Luther King Jr. on his wall. It was to the right of a poster of Cheryl Ladd, of "Charlie's Angels" fame, kneeling on a bed in a satiny blue slip. On Martin Luther King Day Rob taped a smaller picture of the leader to one of our living room windows, so it could be seen from the street. This was when we lived in South Philadelphia. That evening we found, scrawled in white chalk on the brick front of our house, the message Robert is a nigger lover! Robert put his hands on his hips, threw out his scrawny fourteen year old's chest and laughed. "Better than being white trash," he said, in a voice so fierce my mother shushed him, although it was dinner time and there was no one else out on the street to hear.

I don't remember what year it was that Robert was institutionalized for the weekend. I remember it as happening in winter. But I may be remembering a different time, when Rob was pledging a frat, and got drunk with some of his new friends, and ended up with a concussion. The way he got the concussion was that he was stumbling through the woods, alone, at night,

and he slipped on a patch of ice, and that is how I know that happened in winter. I imagine I remember what it looked like; Robert lying in the perfect, star kissed darkness among pine needles and the bony roots of ancient trees, dazed and alone. But then I remember I wasn't there. I was living in Massachusetts, and he was in school in New Hampshire. I wasn't there to witness. So many important family events happen off camera for me. I weigh the varying reports that come in by phone and letter, and I reconstruct the way it must have been. So I see him, alone for an immeasurable length of time, noticing the fog of his breath in the moonlight and not knowing what had happened, or what would happen, feeling separate from the before and after, and the cold, and everyone. Lost, in the purest sense. Maybe that is why I put the concussion and the institution together in my mind. I can't picture the inside of a mental institution. I have some vague ideas, which Rob has corroborated, about medicated patients who are not allowed belts or shoelaces; of a place without mirrors, because mirrors can be shattered and the shards used to cut; of locked doors and windows and alarms. But I can't really see it. I can see the woods on a winter night. So every time I think of the institution weekend I picture my brother shivering in the woods at night, lost to everyone, to us, to himself. And that is the picture that makes the most sense.

He was locked up for the weekend - it might have been three days, I'm not sure - because his school counselor thought he was a danger to himself. He was having vivid dreams about suicide. He was putting out cigarettes on his arms and hands. I guess he was drinking a lot. My brother vehemently denies that he was a danger to himself. He was furious with the counselor, who, he says, tricked him into going up to this place to begin with. He claims he did not know the papers he signed were voluntary commitment papers, and the first he realized this was not some kind of ski trip he tried to split. The reason he was there so long is simply that the doctor who has the power to evaluate and release people was away for the weekend. That is how I know it happened over a weekend.

It was my stepmom who first told me the institution story. Large parts of it made no sense to either of us. I have since talked to my brother about it, but he won't help me understand it. I don't know if he is telling me the complete truth about it. I think he is, but I don't know. Robert and I are self invented people. We both have the feeling that we are making it up as we go along. When I tell the stories of my life I do not lie. I omit and exaggerate, but I don't lie. This is not because of some deeply held moral conviction. It is because I find the truth confusing enough. I am always trying to make sense of it, to drop it in a pot of water and cook it, boil it down to its essence. My brother, on the other hand, lies. He lies to our parents, and I can't prove he does not lie to me. His lies work in the opposite direction from the lies most children tell their parents. They are not placating but disturbing. He makes up awful and bizarre things to tell them. I first suspected this when my stepmom told me Rob had phoned her one evening and told her he believes he is a lesbian trapped in a man's body.

Rob gleefully admits that he has been making things up since he was a teenager. So who knows which parts are true? The concussion was true, because there are doctor bills to prove it. And the basic institution story is true, because the counselor phoned my stepmom. Beyond that, I don't know. I don't begrudge my brother his fictitious misadventures. I envy his nerve, to be honest. But I can't tell the person from the myth.

Rob and Matt come by the café where I work one July night at midnight. They have just left the club across the street. They are dispirited. They went to the club because the girl of Matt's dreams, who they met in another bar earlier in the week, works there. But tonight is her night off. So they drank Budweiser with rednecks for no purpose. And they have to be at work tomorrow morning. The temp agency has placed them at a bank, where their main function seems to be to amuse their supervisor with tales of their exploits while she works. Every so often they are called upon to lick envelopes or Xerox something, but mostly they recount

and regale. It's a sweet deal, except that Rob feels ill every time he is in the bank - something with the fluorescent lighting, or the re-circulated air. Anyway. Matt wants to head home, but Rob persuades him to stop in an Irish pub down the street for a pint of Guinness, to kill the lingering taste of Bud. I need to close the café and set up for tomorrow morning. But I suggest that I might meet up with them in the Irish pub later, and they can regale me with tales of their exploits. Okay, Rob says.

When I get to the pub, they have gone.

## **Nothing Thrills**

**Eoghan Garvey**

---

No soil is as rich as the rich soil  
in your big flowerpots at the start of summer.

No air chills like the August air  
when the leaves first shiver in your small garden.

No grass is as tough as the tough grass  
you pull from beaches almost smooth with snow.

Nothing thrills like your green fingers,  
as the rain gets louder on a spring morning.

## **A Stretch In The Evenings**

**Eoghan Garvey**

---

They nod as they pass.  
The prayerful woman up the street.  
The shopkeeper's wife.  
The security guard.  
They're on nodding terms with one another  
and even swap a few words,  
walking by the canal,  
this cool evening,  
the world in colour again.

## **Concert at Bantry House To The Uninitiated**

**Sandra Bunting**

---

She says that if you close  
your eyes you can imagine  
the garden outside is ours.

The house too, with its gong,  
flings its doors wide open  
to a week of chamber music,  
delight for well-tuned ears,  
discovery for those of us  
ignorant of quartet and trio.

We sit on hard-backed chairs  
in this candlelit corridor of  
wigged and powdered ancestors,  
the air soaking up sounds of  
piano, bass and violin by  
characters with wild hair,  
living up to their stereotypes  
around a black grand piano.

The audience is reflected  
in pillars of black marble. Their faces don't say allegro.  
What does a cough mean?

Out in the bay in another time,  
a plane went down,  
a ship went down.  
Was it in the third movement  
the phone went off?

**Arodiada**

**Sandra Bunting**

---

The snow made her think of a  
long-forgotten lover  
who knew her only as Arodiada,  
Romanian Queen of Elves,  
in tunnels of icy white  
deep in a Canadian winter.

When he left in the middle  
of a frost-painted night,  
part of her was buried,  
her memory numbed  
until snowflakes whispered  
and called it back again.

**A New Calendar****Kevin Higgins**

---

The Sunday papers and then  
the packed lunch, the polished shoes  
work hanging over everything, like a news  
report naming a hundred and twenty different types  
of tumour, tempered only by bright  
intervals in the south and west.

Even your dreams, less the usual array  
of dazzling blondes wandering through  
like lush metaphors for something else,  
than an inexorable walk down by the hospital  
past telephones ringing in empty houses.  
And waking now

to an alarm angry as a black-backed jackal.  
You there, with your grim cheese-slices,  
your tar-like tea, not liking the look,  
smell, texture or sound of anything; as outside  
a new calendar's first Monday comes,  
like a dentist's drill, screaming to a start.

**On Hearing You've  
Donated Your Body  
To Medical Science**

**Kevin Higgins**

---

*after Stevie Smith*

Your shoes commonsense clip-clop shuffle,  
that voice like seagulls and muscles clenching,  
those small, manageable, flat-chested dreams;

how you remained upstanding  
as a novice's nightdress while all around  
were losing theirs; and someone comparing you

to a wet Tuesday afternoon. Then the kitchen tiles  
one by one tumbling, the peeling linoleum.  
The father who took forever to die. This is what

They'll think of, what they'll remember  
the day Death finally waltzes you  
down the corridor to that dark  
laboratory.

## **I've Lifted The Ban**

**Maureen Gallagher**

---

You can sing now.  
Go on! Sing!

I've just given the birds permission to sing,  
though the little bastards were singing already,  
since they know nothing about grief.

And trees - you're allowed to breathe again,  
even if you were already,  
turning CO<sub>2</sub> into oxygen.

I've lifted the ban on dragonflies whirring,  
now the wind is saying yes, yes,  
and we are kissing. Again.

## **I've Just Had Our Relationship Laminated**    **Maureen Gallagher**

---

and it looks quite well.  
I held out for a while  
in case we might work on it some more

but then I thought, what the hell  
leave it, it's done.  
Fixed forever, we'll never work on it again.

I have it hung in the front room  
crisp and fresh as memory  
exuding dynamism and life.

We stopped in the nick of time  
before laziness or complacency set in:  
I'd have hated it if laziness or complacency had crept  
in.

But, strangely, now it's finished I notice flaws.  
They were barely visible at first  
but when you look hard enough

as *I* do since I have the space,  
they leap right out at you:  
the balance of give and take is definitely wrong.

I see the whole thing now in a different light  
and can't help but wonder why  
I worked on this relationship so long.

I see you got *your* copy into the exhibition: well  
done!  
But I'd like to raise one niggly point –  
did you really have to airbrush me out!

## Stained Glass At Samhain

Patricia Burke Brogan

*Excerpt from script published by Salmon Publishing Ltd.  
2003*

The play takes place during Samhain, when boundaries between living and dead dissolve. SISTER LUKE, a former Superior of Killmacha Magdalen Laundry, returns to her convent, which is being demolished. She writes her stories on her starched guimpes. SISTER BENEDICT, the white-veiled novice, who looked after Sister Luke, enters from the cloisters. She has decided to leave the novitiate.

*(Sister Benedict takes a book from her pocket.)*

**Sister Benedict:**

I've brought you a book of poems. Your nephew's poems. His photograph is here on the cover..

*(Sister Luke examines the book and looks steadily at the photograph)*

**Sister Luke:**

Bless you , Benedict. My nephew the poet! Grandson of the golden-haired woman from the North. Alleluia Alleluia! –

**Sister Benedict:**

You resemble him. Around the eyes. He has extraordinary eyes. Hasn't he?

**Sister Luke:**

Yes! He must see Angels and Archangels too.

*(Sister Luke kisses the photograph.)*

**Sister Benedict;**

Angels and Archangels.

*(Sister Luke opens book and turns pages.)*

**Sister Luke:**

My blessings go with you, Sister Benedict.

*(Mother Victoire enters and stands downstage facing audience.)*

**Sound:** The Angelus Bell tolls.

*(Sister Benedict moves centre stage, faces downstage.)*

**Mother Victoire:**

Go straight to the Blue Parlour. Fold you habit and leave it with your guimpe, coif, rosary beads, belt and veil in the side-cup-board. Your lay clothing is on a chair near the door. When you have dressed, go out immediately! Out the door! On no account are you to return to the cloister or speak to any of the community. Your father and sister are waiting outside at the gate. –

*(Mother Victoire stares at Sister Benedict.)*

I hope you'll be happy!

**Sister Benedict:**

Thank you, Mother Victoire! But, I'll keep this veil! My veil.

**Sister Luke:**

Benedict's veil will spread and spread like Brigit of Kildare's cloak! Taking my book with it on all its journeys.

Benedict's people are in the book-publishing business for generations! --

Her great uncle, Eugene Francis O'Brien, was very critical of Central Powers. His book were all banned in Ireland. I've a copy of his very first book. Banned too. A banned book in a convent. Shhh!

And Benedict's great-great uncles, Thomas Lewis O'Brien and Denis O'Brien, studied for the priesthood in St. Omer, a French seminary. During Penal Times.

But Thomas Lewis turned Protestant – At one time he was Protestant rector in Templemichael, while his brother, Denis, was Roman Catholic parish priest in the same parish. In Ireland of course. – Strange but true. Thomas Lewis wrote a lot of books. Plays and religious tracts.

You can find them all in the Big Dublin Library.

He finished up as a Protestant Bishop in the North. --

*(She turns and moves towards cloisters.)*

I wonder will my new book be banned?

**Act 2 Scene 6**

*Lights up slowly to show the Lamentation of the dead Christ stained glass window upstage left.*

**Sound:** Crashing sounds of demolition. Thunder of destruction..

*Sister Luke moves quickly to left of stage, as she tries to stop the collapse of walls and stained glass window.*

**Sister Luke:**

Stop! Stop! That's my favourite window. My window! My window! (*Screams*) Stop! Stop! Father James help me. Help! Help. Save our window --- Sister Benedict! Sister Benedict come back and help me. – Angels and Archangels help – Where are you, my Angels, my Archangels? God help. Please, God. --- Help save my window. My window! Help! Help!

*(She raises her hands towards the window as a bulldozer approaches.)*

**Sister Luke:** (*Screams*)

No! No! No! Stop!

Stop!

*(SISTER LUKE falls on floor as the window-wall begins to disintegrate. Use of special coloured lighting as broken plastic pieces fall from drop-box above stage. Sister Luke picks up pieces of shattered glass.)*

**Sound:** Up slowly of *Lux Aeterna* from Mozart's *Requiem*.

**Sister Luke:**

Job! Job! Help me now!

Now! Now! Nobody comes! Nobody! Nobody!

*(The window-wall crashes on top of SISTER LUKE. She lies covered in stained glass. Noise of demolition fades.*

–

**Sound:** Fade *Lux Aeterna* from Mozart's *Requiem*.

**Act 2 Scene 7**

*Lights with shadows.*

*Very little of the convent walls are still standing. Sister Luke sits on her chair-copter with guimpe-wings attached and takes pieces of stained glass from her pockets.*

**Sister Luke:**

Epilogue . From my favourite window. the colours are gorgeous. – French ultramarines, crimsons, viridians, magentas! See how the light shines through them! -- For Father James, when he returns – Together we'll make a Resurrection Window from these broken pieces.

My Angels and Archangels promise to help us.

*(She holds up pieces of stained glass to light.)*

Mother Victoire is in a Rest Home. There are no young novices to look after her. – But, she's happy most of the time.

*(Pause)* They built a new wing for the convent museum.

My photograph is displayed there beside a photograph of my nephew, the poet. Both in silver frames. ---

Alleluia! Alleluia!

His Lordship himself came to perform the opening ceremony. All the way from Rome! Maura Ber from Harvard brought her book with the story of Katie and the rose medal. – A lovely party! Lots of talk, photographs and plonk Champagne! But, a Bollinger Grande Année '76 Rosé for His Lordship!

*(Pause)* They've cleaned up the convent cemetery. – That commercial builder couldn't get planning permission to exhume our remains and build another multi-story car-park. – So far! Alleluia!

*(BENEDICT/BRIGIT O'BRIEN, dressed as a business executive, moves through cloisters and paints SISTER LUKE'S name on the front of the small black cross.)*

Sister Benedict, now Brigit O'Brien, Managing Director of O'Brien and Co. Publishers, Dublin, London, Sydney, Auckland, Toronto and New York, came here to transfer my name, SISTER LUKE CAREY, from the back to the front of that small iron cross. She painted my name with her own hands.

(BRIGIT O'BRIEN moves from cloister and places cross with name centre downstage, kneels, makes sign of the cross, pauses, stands and waves goodbye to grave as she exits.)

Father James lives in Paris. At the Irish College in Rue des Irlandais. He's busy writing a book about those women, who ministered to Christ during His public life. He has a first edition of my book.

(Highlight on Sister Luke.)

**Sound:** Fade in sound of *Benedictus* from Mozart's *Requiem in D Minor*

But, every Easter Saturday Father James sends me a bouquet of flowers, blue and crimson edged with yellow and magenta. Colours of the stained glass in La Chapelle. By Interflora!

From Paris! --Alleluia Alleluia!

**Sound up:** *Benedictus* from Mozart's *Requiem in D. Minor*.

THE LINES:

*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.*

Repeated by:

Soprano, alto, tenor and bass with orchestra.

Highlight on *SISTER LUKE* in chair, then fade light as tableau forms showing Father James down left beside stained glass window, *THE BISHOP OF KILLMACHA* upstage from window, *MOTHER VICTOIRE*, *BRIGIT O'BRIEN* and *MAURA BER* stand in spaces between cloister-columns. Lights up for two beats then fade to black.

END.

## Four Poems

Brian McNamara

---

### Mantle

My grandfather used to religiously watch the evening news  
and it was so boring.  
Now it is I who keep vigil.

### Tadpole

Such a highfaluting title on the little fella:  
Yet, for all your airs and graces,  
Apostrophe, you're only an upstart of a comma.

### Bulgarian Lullaby

High in the clouds  
in broad daylight  
ships almost collide.

### Freedom

A good and honest word  
degraded  
in Lexiconal Quantanamo Bay.

**e.g.****Stephen Shields**

---

This morning,  
for instance,  
we had two oranges  
for juice,  
one small,  
one large;  
so we shared,  
halving each.  
As the citrus  
cascaded  
down my throat,  
the palm plant  
you had cut back  
to get into shape,  
the primitive  
blue bowl,  
a present  
from my sister,  
and the cats,  
waiting for news  
of our night,  
suddenly gelled,  
like snowblocks  
corbelled on an igloo.

**Charmed**

**Stephen Shields**

---

On the coldest day,  
you go to buy  
goat's cheese  
and return  
with a bunch  
of daffodils  
and another  
at half price:  
the florist  
doesn't have  
the right change

**the road to your door**

**Jarlath Fahy**

---

the road to your door  
is littered with limbs  
are you giving me a hint  
do you want me to dispose of them

it wouldnt be hard  
i wouldnt need acid machetes  
black plastic bags or a mass grave

and if i got rid of those body parts  
wouldnt you miss them about  
the heads and legs of your enemies

are you hoping your mate  
that drowned the other morning  
will return well he wont

he's gone the way of all flesh  
down the toilet bowl of history

you know what you should do  
travel over to your cousin  
above the bath an tell im whats  
happened

an you and he can have a funeral  
an maybe he'd pity you  
an maybe yee'd marry  
an have young ones  
yee'r an inbred lot

shur what am i thinkin of  
you probably ate him  
after you'd had your satisfaction  
and you'd eat your cousin too

have you planning permission  
for that construction  
if i took a notion  
i could tear it to pieces

and you along with it  
an the same goes for your  
cousin over the bath

so keep your mouth shut  
an mind your own business  
in the morning when i perform  
my ablutions avert your six eyed gaze

**Julius Caesar**

**Jarlath Fahy**

---

we were the black articles  
the neer do wells  
the latinly challenged  
the hopeless causes  
the saint judes gang  
in doc martins  
you were Julius caesar

in a soutane  
and you put on a special  
class for us so we wouldnt  
fail latin in the inter

we learned nothing  
but we had a laugh the day  
you appointed us lictors  
and told us to walk  
two in front of you and two  
behind around the schoolyard

it was like the corpus christi  
procession without the canopy  
you were the emperor  
and we were the slaves  
the crowds cheered in the forum  
and you responded with your  
imperial wave

**Under The Skylight****Breid Sibley**

---

Wool cloud beneath our fingertips.  
The ebb and flow of our hands.  
Gentle pressure, water, soap.  
It is a ball, now a leaf,  
Now a Jacob's cloud  
In a cornflower sky.  
Golden light suffuses the room.  
The enchantment of felt making.

**Awakening****Breid Sibley**

---

I wake from an afternoon siesta  
To hear children's voices mingle  
With bird song and Chopin's Raindrop Prelude.  
The white voile curtain billows.

A damselfly with blue muslin wings  
Is caught in a web. Transfixed  
I watch the spider at the outer edge.  
The wings are becoming enveloped.  
My hand reaches out to free him.  
The web plunges to the patio below.

There the spider devours his captive

**In Deepest Grief****Andy Johnston**

---

Was it ill-luck, black artifice, perhaps  
That rained sad beauty on my sleeping hours;  
I saw dear Sophie as if she were alive  
- Her bushy tail arched on her tender pelvis-  
It took only one glance from a passing Mini  
To push her over that razor life/death line.

I saw her walking in mauve coloured seas  
Of ripened wheat; peering as if at me  
Out between blades of wheat- straw - waving - shaking-  
Her green gold eyes like a screech owls steadily looking  
Though bigger than a screech owls as intense  
and full of what I felt -her personal love  
When she roamed here amongst us  
In garden and house.

Such beauty rained within my sleeping hours  
My eyes began to fail;I raised my hand  
to cover up my eyes.  
I woke.

Now I am destitute as when she died  
On Christmas night -  
- The berries of her pelvis rudely crushed  
Still harsh and crude as every young thing is  
While she was still not much more than a kitten.

And will I never see my love again?  
And will my eyes be able to perceive  
The shaking wheat when I again encounter  
Its buff - rust colour and its sturdy ears  
- As it smooths on the gold of a late August -  
That rained sad beauty on my sleeping hours ?

**There Comes A Time****Mary Montague**

---

There comes a time when mourning has to cease:  
ashes, heaped in the grate, are an avalanche  
waiting their blowdown. Time  
to sweep them up, take them out.  
It is safe. They have cooled.  
To keep faith with bereavement  
is to deny the possibility  
of movement. Still, to leave now  
feels like betrayal of the long  
nightwatches. So you wait.  
You study the ashes: variegated,  
like grey tabbies, a vague litter  
piled up. Shapeless, like old griefs.  
If you reach your hand the dull  
plush gives through: fleshless,  
formless, nothing to rub against.  
Already hollow, even as you tried  
to stave off absence; but real enough  
to coat the whole room;  
to choke any new kindling.

**Reunion****Margaret Faherty**

**H**ating brown envelopes, I shoved the envelope with the London postmark under an electricity bill. When, later that night, I got round to opening it, the room rocked. The letter was from the adoption authorities. On Mark's birthday, just three months ago, it had occurred to me that he might get in touch, but I had pushed the possibility from my mind. Walking up and down the living room with the letter still in my hand, I waited for Jim. Although we'd been lovers for three years, I'd never been able to talk to him, or to anyone else for that matter, about my baby. Up to now.

When he arrived, I handed him the letter; then, tears running down my face, I took the locket with my baby's photo from around my neck. Without comment, Jim put his arm around me. I told him of my terror when I became pregnant the first year after I'd left University; of my father's anger when I was forced to give up my teaching post in a Mayo school. Of going alone to London and of spending my first days travelling mindlessly round and round on the Circle Line. Of the night I was waitressing in a Lyons café on The Strand, when a woman from our village sat at a table I was clearing. And of how, still, in my dreams she shouts, 'Ungrateful hussy, after your parents slaving to send you to University, you disgraced their good name.'

But I wasn't able to tell him about how I couldn't stop crying when I spilt milk on Mark's blue Babygro the day I gave him away; or of how my five-day-old son's accusing eyes met mine just as the nurse's large red hands reached out to take him from me. That there were moments that still filled me with yearning when I was handed a baby to hold, or when a mother and child exchanged a look that locked out the whole wide world.

Next day, I wrote to the adoption agency. Exactly four weeks to the day, after I'd posted the letter, a white envelope with a Cornish postmark arrived.

My son's almost adult face looked out at me. His blue sweater emphasised the deep blue of his eyes. His father's eyes. A brief note, in sprawling handwriting, told

me that he'd like us to meet and that he was a first year student at Bristol University.

As soon as I could stop staring at his photo, I rang the social worker and my friend Kate with whom I'd shared a flat when I lived in London. Seven days later, as Kate drove me to the agency, I couldn't stop biting my nails. When she pulled up outside a white building in a cul-de-sac off Vauxhall Bridge Road, my legs threatened to buckle under me. Inside, a brisk, but kindly, woman with short grey hair, promised to arrange a meeting. Afterwards, as we drove to Kate's flat in Finchley Road, I found myself staring at every young man we passed.

For two days, I sat by the phone biting my nails, longing to hear his voice, yet, at the same time, terrified. On the third morning, the ringing of the phone by my bed woke me.

'Hello, may I speak to Barbara Kirby please?'

'Speaking.'

'It's Mark.'

'Oh, oh, how are you, Mark?'

There was a long pause.

'Fine thank you, Barbara. And you?'

'Great thanks.'

The phone was heavy in my hand.

'When would you like to meet, Mark?'

'I'm tied up for the next three days. Would Thursday be okay?'

'Great.' I'd cancel my flight home.

I gave him Kate's address and he agreed to come for a drink before going out to dinner. When I'd put down the phone, panic gripped me as I caught sight of my face in the mirror. I called Kate at work and she arranged an appointment with her hairdresser. In the salon, a boy with a pigtail fingered my black shoulder length hair.

'Very good hair, but it does nothing for your face.'

Silently, I nodded when he produced a photo of a short-haired model. Eyes closed, I didn't talk whilst he worked. When he'd finished, he pointed to my mirrored face.

'Now your large green eyes and your high cheekbones are emphasised.'

Smiling, I congratulated him on a great job.

When I left the hairdressers, it was as though an undertow from the past drew me towards Sainsburys in Kensington High Street. There, one Saturday a few weeks after I'd given my baby away, I'd found myself wheeling a fair-haired baby, wearing a blue Babygro, towards the checkout. Before reaching it, I'd come to my senses, taken my hands from the pram and run out of the shop. Next day, I'd arranged for counselling.

For an hour before Mark was due to arrive, I walked up and down, biting my nails, checking my watch, my makeup, rehearsing my welcome aloud. As he turned in the gate, my knees became weak. I rushed to open the door.

'Hi, Barbara,' he blushed.

'Hi, Mark. You're just.....just... like your photo.'

But the photo hadn't caught his warm expression, or the openness of his smile. For what seemed an age, I stood still, not knowing what to do or say. Should I kiss him? Holding out my shaking hand, I shook his.

'Come in, Mark,' backing into the hall, I tripped on a rug and just managed to save myself from falling.

'Is sherry okay?' In the living room, I picked up the decanter.

'Fine'. His smile was shy.

Pouring the sherry, I spilt some on the table. 'Fool. Idiot. You should have asked your G.P. for Valium,' I chided myself.

'To you, Mark,' I raised my glass and, just in time, stopped myself gulping down its contents.

He looked around the room and his eyes rested on Kate's paintings.

'What a nice room and what lovely paintings.' His voice was soft with just a touch of Cornish.

I tried to stop myself studying him, from his untidy mop of dark hair to his scuffed canvas shoes, as, in heavy silence, we stared at the empty sherry glasses in our hands.

In my bedroom, I leant against the wash-basin. 'Pull yourself together, Barbara,' I told myself, as I wiped

perspiration from my face and renewed my makeup. Walking beside Mark to a nearby restaurant, sudden pride filled me. He was taller than I'd imagined and oh so, so, attractive in shabby jeans and a navy polo necked sweater. Over and over, the words, 'I'm walking down Finchley Road with my son', sang and echoed in my head. And I wanted the short walk to last forever.

In the restaurant, the writing on the menu swam before my eyes.

'What would you like, Mark?'

Over the menu, his eyes smiled at me.

'Why don't you choose for both of us, Barbara?'

My teeth chattered as I sipped wine. I cringed as a little dripped on to my white shirt. Willing my voice to steady itself, I suggested he tell me something of University life in Bristol. I dropped my knife and fork when he told me he was studying English and Spanish for I too had studied English and Spanish at Dublin University.

'Gosh, that's weird,' he laughed.

'Here's to English and Spanish', I raised my glass.

'You're more beautiful than I'd imagined, Barbara. And I think you've got my mouth. Or should it be the other way round?'

Silently, I blessed the pigtailed hairdresser. Taking a gulp of wine, I forced myself to ask, 'Mark, is there anything you'd like to know about my life, about when you were born?'

Crumbling a bread roll, he paused, 'Tell me about my father.'

'His name is Kevin Flynn. From Mayo like myself.'

With his left hand, he made sharp lines with a fork on the white tablecloth before asking if I still saw his father.

'No, I haven't seen him since before you were born.'

'Did you know him well?'

Relief flooded his face when I told him that Kevin and I had gone out together for two years whilst at University. I explained that, when I'd got pregnant, Kevin hadn't been ready for a commitment. Panic filled me as I waited for Mark to ask how could I have given him to strangers. My hand shook as I took the locket from around my neck.

For a long time he looked at it, then with a smile, he asked, 'Me?'

'When you were five days old.'

'Mark', I hesitated, 'Could we see each other again before too long?'

'I'd like that.'

'And would it be okay if I wrote to you?'

Under the table, my nails cut into my wrist.

'Yes, Barbara. Of course it would. I'm not much of a letter writer but I'll answer.'

'I know you can never think of me as your mother. But oh, I'd love to be your friend.'

'No,' he laughed, 'one mother is enough to cope with. But yes I want us to be friends.'

Walking from the restaurant to Finchley Road tube station, I planned to phone Jim to cancel our trip to Connemara should Mark want to meet me next week. At the station barrier, I prayed, 'Please God let him want us to meet soon.'

'When do you go back to Dublin, Barbara?'

'On Sunday but my ticket's flexible. I could wait another few days', I lied.

He blushed and hesitated for what seemed ages.

'Well, that would be too early for a second meeting, wouldn't it?'

'I suppose so'. Oh God, please don't let me cry.

He looked down at his shoes. 'Let's meet next time you're over.'

'That would be great. I always come over a few weeks before Christmas', I lied again. 'Could we meet then?'

'Sure, Barbara, I'd love that.'

I touched his cheek. As I watched him hurry to the escalator, tears streamed down my face.

On the first step, he turned and waved.

## **Inishbofin**

**Tony O'Dwyer**

---

From the top of CnocMor I see how the island rises  
Out of the deep like a cargo of mystery and I read  
The stamped codes of its covering, its tarpaulin

Tied round the edge with rocks like fabulous promises.  
The hill on which I stand is grazed to the bone and  
Bleats with the rawness of pain.

Mountains lay their shadows on the shoulders  
Of mountains, whispering that they, too,  
Can be lonely and need each other.

Below me in Loch Bofin spikes of reeds  
Rise like amphibious ghosts  
Shivering prayers for their frail souls.

The wind curls the sea, brandishing sickles at the quayside.  
The ferryboat, scarred with the blood of rust,  
Bobs and dips, restless for voyaging.

A rainbow hooks itself to the rocks beyond Inishlyon  
Throwing a cord of light across the sky  
With colours like the chanting of spells.

From my cottage an ancient road,  
Carved by the need of beasts,  
Follows the gold of its dandelions.

Tonight a full moon will light my way along this path,  
And I will steal a look through the pinholes of stars  
And see the secrets in the mounds beneath my feet

**Mrs Noah****Betsy Carreyette**

---

On the day she moved from the island  
with three daughters,  
two cats,  
umpteens bags  
and a belly full of angst,  
the Dun Aengus ran aground  
a stone's throw from the pier.

Between girls running circles round the boat  
and cats yowling on the whiff of fish,  
she foggily recalled old seadog talk of dredgers.

Gathering together ribbons of thought,  
flotsam adrift distant seas,  
she realised all her life  
she'd been waiting for the tide to turn,  
anticipating the single wave  
that would lilt her  
out of limbo.

**Phe Zulu Tourist Stop Off,  
Natal, S Africa. 1980**

**Betsy Carreyette**

---

*Lucy is the early humanoid skeleton discovered in Ethiopia during the 1970s*

Away from the dancing troop of Zulus  
hoisting spears for another coach load  
of white-skinned onlookers,  
I follow her gaze  
from ancient furrows of black leather skin  
to the cradled hollow she pinches from clay.

Squatting amid a dozen black-slip pots  
before a grandiose hut  
far slicker than her ghetto home,  
where drips are caught in metal buckets  
and rice is portioned by the day,  
she holds Africa in her hands.

Traces every contour of the continent's formation  
between broad knuckled finger and thumb,  
the million of years before  
the Kingdom of Benin ever thought to trade bronze  
masks,  
before the Egyptians pointed pyramids to the stars,  
before Lucy sauntered through an Ethiopian dawn  
swinging the seeds of a far-flung future.

## **The Day They Decided To Start A War**

**Liz Arnett**

---

Wednesday. Deadlines passed.  
Rouged and powdered faces fill the windows,  
drinking beer and wine from spotless glasses,  
laughing without conviction.  
It is quiet on the sidewalk.  
Cement blocks blush with rain,  
cars splatter in apathy,  
and the street lamps dont blink.

The plaza, lost in shadow,  
seems menacing but is merely  
blank.  
No skeletons of sky scrapers bare their teeth,  
No flags burn or otherwise demand attention.  
Only the liquor store offers a half-hearted  
resistance  
to complete darkness,  
sending out a weak fluorescence  
from the weary mouth of a door propped open,  
drunkard's eyes shut  
on the front step.

All through the town, tongues roll over,  
salivating with assumption,  
and say nothing on Wednesday.

## **Cold Recovery**

**Colin O'Sullivan**

---

Dumped  
the hot lemon powder  
down the toilet bowl.

With my ruler  
flicked tablets  
at the neighbours.

Squirted eye-drops  
at the goldfish,  
but they'll forget it  
soon enough.

It was you,  
wiping the snot  
from my nose,  
made me whole.

**The Attic****Gerard Hanberry**

---

It is the sound of mice  
chewing the discarded blueprint of your life  
while the shadow of an eviscerated rocking-horse  
tick-tocks across the knotted beams  
and memory, that twisting jester,  
cartwheels in the attic  
where all the silent years hang in rows  
like dusty files marked secret,  
the he saids and the she saids  
telling it like it never was.

The dead are here too,  
stored in chocolate boxes,  
their still lives so ordinary,  
like your own,  
no fife and drum buffoonery,  
just frozen smiles on days out,  
at weddings or birthdays and sometimes  
you can be seen, young, furtive,  
off to the side,  
anxious to be away.

## **Driving With Montale**

**Gerard Hanberry**

---

Silver hair swept  
from your forehead,  
sophisticated, a poets face,  
smoke from your poised cigarette  
curling forever towards the top corner  
of the Penguin Classics cover  
on the passenger seat.

War-talk on the radio,  
car-bombs, body-counts,  
another headless hostage  
dumped on a Persian street.

Your poets face still passive,  
as if these were the dreadful things  
you always understood.

## Spell-Check

John Walsh

---

When you say you love me,  
what does it mean?  
Should I run a spell-check or a scan?  
Should I sense it anatomically,  
or just take it as it stands?

Should I recall  
winter nights,  
rain-sogged logs aborted in the fire?  
Accept that your love  
deletes darkness from my soul,  
burns longer, brighter, higher?

Or should I put you on hold,  
until we can confirm  
the date that it expires?

## **Body Language**

**John Walsh**

---

I gave all my phrases away  
sometimes anonymous  
other times generously.

I pinned my hopes on expression  
cheered her on  
then cursed profusely  
when she failed to run.

I turned my hand to texting  
it became a need  
but I never quite got up speed.

I played footsie with silence  
but to my shame  
was caught out  
at that game.

**Bath****Mary Madec**

---

She lies immobile as a crocodile  
The candle, casting shadows in the darkness  
When she moves her limbs  
A tide breaking the silence  
Bubbles disappearing  
In intricate puffs over her skin  
Glistening in the candlelight

When they call her  
She cannot bring herself to utter a word  
She hears their frantic searching of the house  
Mammy where are you?

When they finally find her watery hideout  
In the avocado bath of their seventies home  
They walk away angry at her  
A little afraid that she put the lights out  
Weird they say

When they leave she turns over in the bath  
To warm her underside  
Wonders what besides the darkness possessed her

**Getting There****Kathleen O'Driscoll**

---

Five moves in three months,  
then I found my little garage flat.  
It's gold dust.  
Crossing to the far edges  
of this madly stretched city,  
I still can't buy a tin opener  
in Galway.  
God knows if I'll ever cook again  
on a cast iron frying pan.  
I forgot the old one  
somewhere.  
But Des Kavanagh's of Market Street  
still have heaters  
rather than computers  
and I hope to purchase  
the last mattress in town  
from Tom Dempsey's of Westside  
next week.  
At last I've got a floor cloth  
from John O'Carroll's in Salthill  
and a precious packet  
of cornflower seeds.

**from Occupations****Stephen Oliver**

---

Such forests strewn over Poland! Wintry sticks. And snow. These things I have not seen. The indigene tells of this; those blackened things caught between - like birch trunks, heavy coated soldiers over drift - deepening loss.

2.  
Every night it is the same, greenly spun in the iced-cube light of skyscrapers, the Master Chef dreams he is pitched from the highest viewing deck in all the world: Grollo Tower, down through boiling mist into the river Yarra.

3.  
July is the coldest month; odours freeze on the air, vowels solid as hail-stones can slip centimetres off the tongue in the mouth's burrow. Somebody is pierced by silence as with a bayonet, there! standing hard by the tumulus.

4.  
Snow bound, snow blind, the sleety night, road signs indicate left or right are one breath. Rocket mist settles over Lake Baikal - the forecast promises another successful launch; tomorrow, we extend our sight further yet.

5.  
Nostalgia killed her, my mother, for the Ireland she'd never seen - that, and the harsh realities of family; a catholic cocktail, why it sheered off into a broken dream, drunkenness, children become Priests of the Pragmatic.

**The Grey Glas Song****Stephen Oliver**

---

I am the cold watery current of the air,  
I am the wreathing hand of mists,  
I am the many-windowed firmament,  
I am the coloured winds on the cloth of night,  
I am the cloudy shell around the earth,  
I am the four chief winds of creation,  
I am the speckled winds riding the world,  
I am the beaked-boat emerging at dawn,  
I am the eight encircling servant winds,  
I am a thousand lamps breaking in the wave,  
I am the weight of a waterfall from a cliff,  
I am the red plain of the earth at sunset,  
I am the spear thrust of streams from a hill,  
I am the lake bursting forth upon the plain,  
I am the tall stones circled for strong memory.  
Who counts the stars at the well's bottom?  
Who is it follows the sun in his circuit?  
Who is it keeps the sun fixed on his path?  
Who thrice blesses the tides lifting and falling?  
Who welcomes the morning of grey dews  
knows fiery arrows pierce the breast for vision.  
The poet's breath empties up into the night  
who calls his answer across deep waves.

## **Biographical Details**

**Liz Arnett** is from Miami, Florida but has been living in Galway for two years. She writes fiction and poetry.

**Sandra Bunting** writes in Galway.

**Patricia Burke Brogan** is the author of the internationally acclaimed play *Eclipsed* and *Stained Glass at Samhain*. Her collection of poems and etchings *Above the Waves Calligraphy* was published by Salmon. Her work was the subject of two academic papers presented at the recent IASIL conference in NUIG. Her monologue *Requiem of Love* will be premiered at the Town Hall Theatre, Galway on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2005 and afterwards at the Pavilion Theatre, Dun Laoighre.

**Gerardine Burke** was short-listed for the 2004 Francis McManus Short Story Competition. She read from her work at a recent Over The Edge Series in Galway City Library. Her work has previously been published in *Crannóg*.

**Trish Bushe** comes from County Donegal. She studied Fine Art and Design at GMIT and completed a Masters in Painting at NCAD. She is also the holder of an Iontas award. Trish has had numerous exhibitions here and abroad and her art work is in public and private collections. She is currently developing a new body of work based on a six month trip through India with her 16 year old daughter. Trish lives and works in Galway.

**Betsy Carreyette** has been published in *West 47*, *The Burning Bush*, *The Lantern Review* and other journals. She featured in Anthology 1, the anthology of Galway Women Poets, published by Annir. She is studying Art at GMIT.

**Aoife Casby** is a visual artist and writer. She has been published in *Criterion*, *Whispers and Shouts*, *Northwords*, *The Cork Literary Review*. She lives in Carraroe, Co Galway

**Sean Donegan** has been published in *Crannóg*, *Markings*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Blythe Spirit*, *Time Haiku* and in the USA

**Kevin Donnelly** lives and writes in Galway. He read recently at the Over the Edge series in Galway City Library. He is completing a series of poems set in Craigville Beach, Cape Cod.

**Margaret Faherty** has been published in a number of magazines and has won a number of prizes. She is getting her novel ready for publication.

**Jarlath Fahy**, a native of Tuam, now lives in Moycullen with his wife and three children.

**Maureen Gallagher** has had poetry, short stories, reviews and literary criticism published in Ireland, the UK, New Zealand, Canada and the US. Her poetry has been broadcast on RTE's *Rattlebag Arts* programme. She is a nominee for the 2005 Hennessy Poetry Award.  
[www.maureen Gallagher.net](http://www.maureen Gallagher.net)

**Eoghan Garvey** was born in Monaghan but spent primary school days in Barna before moving to Dublin. He now lives in Galway.

**Martin Gleeson** has had poems published in *West 47, Books Ireland, Poetry Ireland review Departures 5 the Stony Thursday Book, Southword* and *Borderlines*. He lives in Kilkee, Co Clare.

**Liam Guilar** was born in Coventry, England, moved to Australia in 1986. He has two collections published, *The Poet's Confession*, a chapbook, and an award winning book called *I'll Howl Before you Bury Me*, available from Interactive Press. Selections and reviews at: <http://www.ipoz.biz/titles/howl.htm>

**Gerard Hanberry's** collection *Rough Night* was published in 2002 by Stonebridge Publications. He has been shortlisted for the Hennessy Award, Strokestown Competition and Firewords City Award. In 2004 he won the Brendan Kennelly Poetry Prize. His second collection is due from Stonebridge in May.

**Catherine Heaney** is from Galway and a member of Galway Writers' Workshop. She has had stories and poems previously in Crannog. She will feature in an Over The Edge Reading in the autumn.

**Kevin Higgins** has had poems published in magazines and anthologies internationally. In 2003 he won the Cuirt Festival Poetry Grand Slam and went on to represent Ireland in the European Poetry Slam in Paris; in both 2002 and 2003 he was a finalist in the Rattlebag/Dublin Writers Festival Poetry Slam; and he was recently short-listed for the Sunday Tribune/Hennessy Award for Poetry. His first full collection, *The Boy With No Face*, was recently published by Salmon. He is co-organiser of the 'Over The Edge: Open Reading' series for emerging writers in Galway City Library.

**Andy Johnston** is originally from Mayo. He lectured for many years at GMIT. His chapbook, *The Spirit's Too Much With Us*, was published by Poetry Monthly Press in 2003. His selected poems is due shortly.

**Fred Johnston** is a poet, critic and novelist. He has published eight volumes of poetry, a collection of stories and three novels. He is currently editor of *The Cork Literary Review*. He is manager of The Western Writers' Centre. He was appointed 2004 Writer-in-Residence to the Princess Grace Irish Library in Monaco.

**Olivia McCarthy** is a member of the Knocknarea Women Writers Group in Sligo. She has had poems published in magazines and journals. She won 2<sup>nd</sup> prize in the Scriobh Inaugural Competition in 2004

**Brian Macnamara** has been published previously in Crannóg.

**Mary Madec** has lived in Galway for most of her adult life but was born in Mayo. She does research and teaching at Third Level. She has been previously published in Crannog.

**Michael Massey** is co-ordinator of the Clogh Writers Group in Kilkenny.

**Susan Millar DuMars** is American but makes her home in Galway. Her poems appeared in *Anthology I*, a collection by Irish women published by Ainnir last year. In 2004 she was shortlisted for the Fish short story competition and was one of five finalists for the Cuirt New Writing Competition. One of her stories was used in the anthology *Windows: Authors and Artists*, published last year by the Cavan Arts Centre. She is the co-organiser of the Over the Edge Readings Series in Galway.

**Aine Miller** has won the Patrick Kavanagh Award (1992), a Hennessy Award, The Irish Times/ Random House Award. Salmon published her first collection *Goldfish in a Baby Bath* in 1994 and her second *Touchwood* in 2000.

**Mary Montague** is a writer from Derry.

**Kathleen O'Driscoll's** poetry collection is *Goodbye Joe*, Caledon Press. Her short story collection is *Ether*, Caledon Press. She has been published in the anthologies *Pillars Of The House*, Wolfhound Press and *The White Page*, Salmon Publishing. She has had five short stories broadcast on RTE and she wrote and directed the short film *Berlin Blues*.

**Tony O'Dwyer's** collection, *Off Guard*, was published by Bradshaw Books in 2003. His novel, *Objects in the Mirror* was recently long-listed for the Fish First Novel Award. He is co-editor of *Crannog* and editor of the online magazine *WOW!* ([www.wordsontheweb.net](http://www.wordsontheweb.net)).

**Stephen Oliver** has published twelve titles of poetry. Three of these are available as e-books from Project Gutenberg: <http://gutenberg.net/find>. He lives in Sydney. <http://people.smartchat.net.au/jsao>

**Mary O'Rourke** has published two collections of poetry, *My Mirror was Cracked* 1999 and *It's All Happening*, 2004.

**Colin O'Sullivan** has had poetry published in *The Shop, The Stony Thursday Book* and others. His stories have been published in *Staple New Writing, Southword* and *Carve Magazine*. A native of Killarney, he lives in Japan.

**Ciaran Parkes** has been published in *The Shop, The Yellow Crane, Crannóg* and elsewhere.

**Katie Raissan** is 22.

**Stephen Shields** is from Athenry. He has had poetry published in *Markings* and *Crannog*. He has an MA in Creative Writing from NUIG.

**Breid Sibley** lives in Loughrea. She has been a prizewinner in the Baffle and Cathal Buí poetry competitions. She has been published in *Ropes, Crannóg* and *Time Haiku*.

**Ingrid Wall** is from Cambridge but lives in Galway. She has been previously published in *Crannog*. She is working on her second novel.

**John Walsh** now living in Galway was born in Derry and has taught there and in Germany. He has been published in *Flaming Arrows, The Black Mountain Review* and *Crannog*. He is also a singer/songwriter.