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Crannóg 17 spring 2008

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Published by

**Crannóg Media
Galway Language Centre
Bridge Mills
Galway
Ireland**

editor@crannogmagazine.com
www.crannogmagazine.com

ISSN 1649-4865

*Cover images: Debi O'Hehir
Cover design: Sandra Bunting
Typesetting/Layout: Wordsonthestreet*



Printed by e-print Ltd. Dublin

Crannóg acknowledges the assistance of:

Galway City Council Galway Language Centre Mill St Study Centre



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The Long View

Clare Sawtell

Above the valley,
Pedalling out of the hazel
To where the eye takes the
Long view, sees where the year's
Heading: summer's moving out,
Her grey filigreed progress reflected
On rock, dappled, mother-of-pearl,
She slips her moorings, the space
She leaves watery blue,
Thinner, brighter

Thallabawn

Ciarán O'Rourke

We are kept
With Thallabawn
In the shells
We hold.

We kept them
For ourselves,
Kept the Atlantic
Hulled in a bowl.

A boat of shells
To carry back
The wind, to bring
The ocean home.

We dropped jackets
And belongings to
Hold the shells, heard
The sand move.

We keep a bowl
Of shells to listen
To dropping
Waves on shore.

We belong to
What we keep:
I shall be left
In Thallabawn.

Phantom Limb

David Musgrave

My enemy reminds me of my father:
the smell of smoke and newsprint, and the eye

behind the lens. I cannot understand the likeness:
my father was kind,

but he, my enemy,
deceives me from his empty office;

besides, my father has been dead for fourteen years.
I haven't seen my enemy for one,

but a semblance persist. He is a length of mind
which has no end. He harvests anger

and his name is myth.
His limbs hang loose and powerless,

his reasons, features, falter into word-mist,
but still he hurts me with his snarling smile.

I dreamt of him the other night –
rust is metal's dream of being whole –

and when I woke, the only clue
to what I'd lost, like a tingling nose before the lie

was an itch where nothing itched before,
a phantom absence: the limb I never knew I had, excised.

Confession

Daive Trame

Here we are again, where the inescapable route
is most evident.
End of August, a little rain is enough,
the darkened wet sand on the beach, a slight
film of grey in the sunlight.
And what as a child marked
the end of your time at the farm,
outside the barn in more persistent mud
bits of sinking, soaked straw.
A little rain and the stinging sense
of what must be done, school:
the days rolling into thin bells of rhythm
with father's echo like a knife "no more fads now".
And the necessary melancholy coming over,
school with a squaring world of asphalt and glass
and before the horizon the dutiful
layers of concrete.

The re-starting sky that couldn't be
and that can't be now, nothing has changed,
a student then, now a teacher, that's all I am.
The start was for years October 1st.
when you felt blood and grapes grow thick,
heady and dark. Like a teacher's pulse.
The coagulating you have always had to be part of.
Squeezing skylight with white fingertips.

Yes, now you would just break through all this.
Be done with it simply sliding through the grid. Come out.
And smelling the margins of the known world like a dog,
face the real plain, by the real sea.
And with fear and desire, the waves.

Gort Inse Guaire

Deirdre Kearney

You came with your wife and child
from the banks of the Corumbá
to a curious disappearing river
from a four lane highway
to limestone grykes
and turloughs
feeble imitations of your Pantanal.
A time-warped Main Street
not yet by-passed
genuine old style shops
selling now, passion fruits
manioc and cans of lo-cal Guarana.

When you first came
they welcomed you
with warmer clothes
and recycled bicycles
your puzzled smiles
confused the locals
this place where king and pauper
were famed for the lámh fhada
the long hand of friendship.
the old church over-spilling
and country folk overwhelmed
to find the Mass in Portuguese
but Monday morning
still brought the hiring fair.

Footprints To The Sea

Edward O'Dwyer

It's like sand with footprints to the sea,
the still cobalt rippled, spread apart before.
Someone clearly has been here already.

Your love is true, that's why this seems so silly,
but though your body heaves to the shore,
it's like sand with footprints to the sea,

just like well trodden grass stretched out before me
while Robert Frost's words chill at my core:
Someone clearly has been here already;

*this penetrated way, or other, you must be
sure, which will make all the difference more.
It's like sand with footprints to the sea.*

Does it matter at all, this thing: virginity?
Is this just male pride? Something in me is sore
and deep-down I know I should be happy

you swear the only one you want is me,
but your passion rising like waves seen from shore,
it's like sand with footprints to the sea;
someone clearly has been here already.

Try it

Eileen Sheehan

Leave your shoes and socks behind
They will only impede you

Step outside barefoot
Into the long grass

Late night when you and the white cat
Are the only two awake in the world

You have been failing all evening
To write a poem

Trying again using a different approach
Failing every time

You have been failing gloriously
Paying close attention to the thing you love

The cat understands
Such fastidiousness

And will walk with you
As you climb the imaginary stairs

To the moon
You built it strong enough to take your weight

Until dawn will sit with you
Beside the sea of tranquility

Morning will be morning like any other
Cat tells no one where it's been

Weaver In Afghanistan

Emily Cullen

on viewing a photographic exhibition by Mike Bunn

Lines of natural fibre
weave the *shu**
your people have worn for centuries.
Dyes of walnut, apricot, onion skins
have not changed,
nor the looms nor spinning wheels
that dwell behind
the 'hidden paradise'
of the Hindukush valley
where a mountain is not a mountain
till it reaches 15,000 feet.

In that free-running spool,
an elision of memory:
spinning and carding,
layering all sadness,
laughter, sickness, struggle.
Lines on your face work placidly
into the web of the shu,
and you, valued member
of your mountain village,
weave a lifetime,
knowing it's in the teasing out
that we are all the same.

** Shu, meaning spider's web, is a famous type of felted tweed, produced for hundreds of years in the Chitral valley*

The Plateau, Montreal

Eoghan Garvey

Driving back late from the eastern townships
the Montreal skyline is floating on water
From high on Mont Royal the eye gathers
in city and river and the eastern townships.

On Rue St. Denis the Sunday walkers
speak with the accent of the east of the city.
Over in Westmont, the artisans sell
in both French and English to the Sunday walkers.

In bustling cafes with big, clear windows
ipodded students do their essays on laptops.
Strolling at night by the homes on Jeanne Mance,
there are sculptures in gardens, paintings in windows.

Saturday, bagels on St. Viateur.
The smoky taste of red beer in le Crie du Dieu.
Queues in the rain for breakfast at Beauty's.
Fast stepping to yeshiva off St. Viateur.

The November trees high on Mont Royal
are red, brown and yellow, thinning for winter.
The sun is weak as winter approaches.
The air is crisp at the top of Mont Royal.

A Soft October Night

Kevin Donnelly

An excerpt from the novel, Ash Wednesday

I was indeterminably pissed standing at the urinal in Cronin's that night in the late 1950's when Annie agreed to go out with me for the first time. Coming out of the Johnson Gate from the Harvard Yard, I had bumped into Joe Carberry and his friend, Jake, and had gone to eat with them at a Chinese restaurant. We drank scotch with the Chinese food, Jake's idea. I don't think it was a good one.

The 'pissed' part didn't bother me but the 'indeterminably' pissed part did. I was obviously at the point where I could tell that I was drunk but beyond the point when I could tell just how drunk I was. I wondered if it was time for me to pull the plug on the evening and go home.

As I pondered that, I thought of Annie. After agreeing to go out with me next week, she turned and went off into the night with the Greek guy who sat on the other side of her in class. I wondered if she was being unfaithful to me even before we got to know each other. A gloom descended upon me. I thought of poor Jake. He lost his old girl friend, Gladys, her mother and her cats to Johnny Simeone. He then meets the girl of his dreams, kisses her and faints. Love. Jake and the girl, Gladys and her cats. Carberry. Me and Annie. Maybe I should look up Jake's girl. Wonder if the same thing would happen to me. "She's a knockout," I said aloud.

"Who?" said a voice from the stalls behind my back.

"Her."

"Who's her?"

"The waitress."

"She's not on duty tonight." He flushed and stepped out of the stall. "You OK, buddy?" It was Cronin.

"Sure. It's October and I'm drinking in Cronin's."

"What country?"

"Nova Scotia."

"Close enough", he said and left.

Unfortunately Cronin broke my concentration and I couldn't remember whether I had actually pissed or not. That was sign enough that it was time to call it a night. I wanted to go home and think of Annie.

When I got back to our booth, Jake and Carberry were sitting quietly.

"I've just asked Jake if the world would have been a better place had Adam and Eve been Italian. He's considering it".

Jake considered it some more. "That was a real set up, wasn't it. I mean it was God's snake, too. I could see Johnny Simeone in the role."

"They were everybody," I said which brought all conversation to a halt.

"One for the road?" asked Carberry.

Jake was game. "At the bar." He preceded us and ordered three Old Overholts. "Health," he said and tossed his back.

"Health," said Carberry.

"Health," said I.

The whiskey, straight rye, hit my stomach and suffused health and well-being throughout my body like divine grace soothing the broken soul of a sinner. I saw in perfect clarity that I loved Annie and that she loved me or would, once she got to know me. I, too, would increase and multiply. There was a long road we would walk along, hand in hand, into the distant future and into forever.

The air outside was perfect. A light cool mist that laid thousands of light cool touches to the face I turned up to it. October night.

"Ahh," I said.

"You OK?" Carberry said into my ear.

"Never been better."

"That's what I'm afraid of."

"Bet, better, best," I said.

"You want a lift?"

"Naw. I got to go back to Cronin's. I forgot my hat. I'll catch up with you."

I think I had a hat. When I got back to Cronin's a young couple were sitting in our booth.

"Pardon me," I said. The hat was on neither of the seats. It must have fallen. I got on all fours and felt around under the seats. The girl gave a 'yelp' when by mistake a grabbed her foot.

"Hey!" said her date and gave a kick which unfortunately hit the girl.

"Ow!" She yelled.

Mysteriously, I began to rise by the back. Someone was lifting me by the belt. It was Cronin. "Back to Nova Scotia with you." I got the bum's rush all the way to the door, dancing with him lifting me by the belt and pushing me forward by the fist on my collar. The only time in my life. He expertly got me out the door. Cronin was a real pro.

In the next doorway, a young couple were kissing. It was a night for it. The rain must have been heavy while we were in Cronin's. The streets shone. All that was left was the light mist barely discernable as it lightly settled on my hair, touched my face. The tires of the cars hissed. I could see the mist in their headlights and the curl of it as

they went by in the light from the streetlights. There were few people about. Those that were, though, looked happy. It wasn't really a warm night. Just quiet and cool. Maybe everybody in Cambridge this night had fallen in love with Annie, I thought. I couldn't blame them. I couldn't even blame the Greek. She was a soft, October night. I couldn't deny anyone else the pleasure.

Although there are only four places to cross the railroad tracks that separate North Cambridge, I had developed many routes home from Harvard Square. I would choose them by my mood of the day. Some were quite direct: just set out north on Mass Ave and keep on walking. Some were quite elaborate involving many zigs and zags through the back streets of Cambridge just north of Harvard Square. Those were the routes I preferred on summer nights or winter nights when it was snowing large quiet flakes and on misty nights like tonight.

What I liked was the life perceived in the houses as you passed by. In the summer, of course, you heard snatches of the life within as well. Laughter. The occasional loud voices. Music. One night a lone child singing. Sometimes Bach, maybe, or Mozart filtered through trimmed leafy bushes from the windows of rooms lined with books with objects on the shelves and glimpses of art work on the walls, touches of colour in the golden glow of lamplight seen from the blackness of night.

The interiors would change the closer you got to North Cambridge. Ficus trees gave way to plastic flowers, ever blooming through all the changes of the seasons. Family pictures on the mantels of unused fireplaces. High school graduation pictures of sons and daughters crowded by pictures of grandchildren at First Communion and Confirmation. Sometimes, the fading picture of a son in a uniform from World War II, a forgotten flower limp behind the frame.

Those interiors were reassuring. Nearing home. I was apt to know something about everyone in those houses. Some were friends of myself or of my parents. Some, I just knew about. Where they worked. What bus they got in the morning. Some of those high school pictures must be faded as well. There was something aesthetically pure about plastic flowers: they never faded on you.

A circuitous route is the one that I chose that misty, rainy night when everything was as clear as a sunset in January. I not only knew that I loved Annie, I knew as well that I would do nothing wrong. I could do nothing wrong. All gaffs would turn to laughter. All slips, righted. She would love me back. It would be wonderful.

And it was. Full of wonderful moments. Her face turning to kiss me for the first time. I missed, of course, but the second was perfect, a delight. All the places we went! Plays, concerts, ball games, picnics, all the movies. Cronin even forgave me and we would stop there on our way home, holding hands in a booth, even giggling some times.

The wedding was wonderful.

We spent the first night near my aunt's in Hull, going over on the Nantasket ferry with all the day trippers. My aunt called her Esther and thought she was married to someone else. She'd poke me with her cane and wink. "No-one need know," she'd whisper.

We rented a car and made a circuit of New England for the honeymoon. Down to the Cape, across Narragansett Bay on the Jamestown Ferry, along the Connecticut shore to compare New Haven and Yale with Cambridge and Harvard. Then, up through the Berkshires on Route 7, across the Green Mountains of Vermont to the White Mountains of New Hampshire and returned home along the coast of Maine.

I loved hearing her singing in the mornings.

I remember that Sunday morning after one of the parties we gave when one of the guests stayed on beyond the last bus and the last ride home. He spent the night on the sofa in the living room. We heard him tip-toeing off at dawn. I was unwell that morning and skipped Mass. Annie went, dressed as she was the night before in a black dress and pearls. She came back loaded with the Sunday papers, croissants and rolls. We spent the whole wintery day in bed, eating the pastries and all the fruit and cheeses left over, finishing the wine and making love in a bed strewn with Sunday papers and lost pearls.

Was it payment for such excess of happiness that it all ended so badly? I would love to think so. A jealous God. I would love to think that some angry God with that infinite, all-knowing sensor that scans the globe and picks up, however slight, the faintest glow of human happiness and sends bolts of confusion, misunderstandings, anger, irretrievable words... creates babble among the humming birds, makes them conscious of this wing and then the other and the poor humming birds falter and fail and fall.

I would love to think so. Far better an angry god who thinks enough of you to hate you for your happiness than the cold frozen truth.

It was all my fault. Feeling happiness fleeing by, I panicked, grew formal, started thinking what a husband, a father, was supposed to do and not what we, being who and what we were...

I began to insist on regular meals served on time. Roast beef every Sunday for lunch. I bought a smoking jacket. I wore a tie and jacket to weekday suppers served in the dining room. Insisted she iron my socks. I bought a large calendar which I hung on the bedroom wall to chart her periods. It was the only rhythm I had left in me.

And then she became pregnant which made me even worse, a hostage to fortune. I drove poor Annie crazy and out the door with the word 'mote' on her lips and the echo of the slam of the door in the suddenly silent house.

And then I started telling all those stupid lies to the neighbours and everyone ending up knowing the truth anyway and being oh, so fucking polite every time they'd meet me.

My God, what a mess I made of things. What a mess.

Destiny

Gu Xie

Know where I am
Just in the travel you start your life
Know where I am
Just in the expression you start your travel
Know where I am
Just in the direction you start your expression
Know where I am
Just in the endlessness
You start your direction

After The Monsoons

Adrienne Leavy

Sometimes when I walk through desert botanical gardens damp
after Sonoran rain flavours the air with the thin smell of creosote
I think of you and how you would manage the clumps of sticky
rosemary, the soft strength of the oleanders, the dry clay
where nervous geckos hide.

I know that you would understand the brittle shells of broken quail eggs

A Gift Of Fire And Ice

Ilmar Lehtpere

A gift of fire and ice
and mirrors -
fragments of mirrors -
their jagged edges
melting
in the motion of the waves.

And I thought I could fly.
The sky takes on a different shape
in the eyes of an animal.

I touched the clouds reflecting
in the billowing lake
and I thought I could fly.

Danny Liddy And The Brontes

Irene O'Dea

four tick tock
awake o'clock
remember Danny Liddy
only man I knew
to buy 'The Messenger'
collecting from the convent
never heard of 'Playboy'
in his ass and cart

drive my daughter
who's that character
speaks no English
in 'The Beano'
like a hard boiled egg
rolling eyes
like Danny Liddy
she can't help me

Danny called us three
the Bronte sisters
walk slowly swishing
skirts upstairs
practice harpsichord
needlepoint
stroll on the Moors
bodies plenty
him she her he
them they
thou thee
me you
us we
two left

Bully Pulpit

Kenneth Pobo

I colour Paul on the road
to Damascus, bow my head when
Mrs. Polk, my Sunday School teacher,
says we must be grateful to the Father

for sending his son. I wish Jesus
would've stayed with angels and let me
build a new balsa plane to fly
with my friend Greg who's

also in church, only his is Catholic,
and our minister doubts they go
to heaven which is *up yonder*--
I prefer a Snow Cone's brief bliss,

the divine smell of wash on
a windy rope. This church is hell—
I can't say that. Smile. They leave
you alone if you look sweet. I'm butterscotch

with an arsonist's heart. One day
I'll set fire to each lie,
toss my clip-on tie
on the bonfire, walk away.

A Politician's Lament

Alan McMonagle

I love fruit scones.
I love to cut them in two and smear butter all over each half;
Then colour them with strategic goutts of jam.
I especially love fruit scones on a clear blue summer day.
On such a day I am liable to forget my onerous duties;

Showing up at Glenlo Abbey last Saturday, for example, to offer holy words
Towards the unbridled success
Of an unveiled institution
Devoted to the accumulation of money.
Ah! The seduction of getting-on.

Instead, I packed up the wife and children
And we headed off to Silver Strand,
Where we cut a swathe through a hamper of fruit scones
And chased the crumbs through peepholes of immeasurable light.

Firewood

Kevin Higgins

A bone field fifty metres by fifty.
It's problematic to describe this as genocide.
I gather firewood at eight o'clock in the morning.
My son clings to my dress. Men in uniforms
with military insignia stop their car
and throw him into a fire. Then five of them
one after the other. I am paralysed.
It's problematic to describe this as genocide.
*The solution is not military intervention. We demand
the US keep its hands off Sudan.*
Children start jumping out windows
when the Janjaweed come into the school.
The police begin firing. Everyone,
mainly babies and the elderly,
falls down. I am standing on bodies.
A military barracks.
No bathroom. People stay still,
suffering their wounds.
People stay still. No bathroom.
A military barracks. I am standing on bodies,
fall down. Mainly babies and the elderly.
Everyone. The police begin firing.
When the Janjaweed come into the school,
children start jumping out windows.
The solution not military intervention.
The US keep its hands off Sudan, we demand
It's problematic to describe this as genocide.
I am paralysed. One after the other,
five of them. They stop their car
and throw him into a fire. Men
in uniforms with military insignia.
My son clings to my dress.
At eight o'clock in the morning I gather firewood.
It's problematic to describe this as genocide.
A bone field fifty metres by fifty.

(the non-italicised lines are quotations from eye-witness accounts from Darfur)

Spirit Photography

Libby Hart

We have come as a bend in time,
too exposed,
too fragile for naming.

Perhaps angels formed us through dust?
Or at least ghostly things,
of apparitions and shadow's men.

And we are now blind,
for the words do not reach us.
And we are deaf to your touch,

To those sentimental eyes.
We are not ourselves
inside this crowd of shadow

Full with ghost hands, and
the scripture of flighty birds.
All is broken and personal.

The Writer's Room

Nuala Ní Chonchúir

after *The Guardian's* photographs

My desk was a present from Margaret Atwood, after *Zen and the Art of Uterus Maintenance* sold its first million, she said I needed a place to write, other than the local bus-shelter.

My view is of the bare wall, of course, the window and the street are too distracting for a mind as relentlessly creative as mine – the very leaves on the trees inspire me.

I picked up the rug on a trek in Uzbekistan, and that basque-shaped card is from Madonna – she just adored my last little offering:
The Sex of a Good Enough Woman.

My chair, as you can see, is a bale of hay, I will always be a simple farmer's daughter, with that need to stay close to natural things; my oak shelves were salvaged from the Titanic.

My computer is Sony's latest – *trés* posh – but I, of course, prefer paper and ink, then I bash out a final draft on my Remington, and let my super editor deal with it all.

Have you bought the new collection yet, *Back-pedalling from Hell on My Menstrual Cycle?* It's sort of Paul Muldoon meets Wendy Cope, with a dash of Famous Séamus, for gravitas.

My agent says it will be my biggest book to date, so I've left space on the shelf for a few gongs: The T.S. Eliot, the Irish Times, the Nobel – I'll be content with whatever comes my way.

Yes, it's in this humble room – where I am unassailable – that all the magic begins.

The Last Humpback Whale In Dublin Zoo

Michael Farry

Eyelids escalate, but same
grim scaffolding speeds
iceberg memory meltdown.
Shallower dive, weaker
fluke-waved farewell,
shorter bloom each decade.
Farmed krill and shrimp
are sluiced and bolted, static
food, no jigs or reels.
Cloudbreak; downpour stirs
wild hurricane memories,
threshing water against glass.

Market Street, Albania

Morelle Smith

This street is crowded in the mornings,
coloured dresses hanging outside shops,
metal pans flash sunlight,
voices rise and fall, a shout of greeting,
women's laughter -
then the warble of a songbird.

In the afternoon, the shops and kiosks
are all closed. A thin cat hesitates
in front of delicate wrought iron gates
leading to a garden with a palm tree.
The house is shuttered, silent, in the heat.

The cat slips through the gap between the railings.
There is no shade of tree or awning in the empty street.
Even the caged bird's song is paralyzed with heat.

This Cloudy Jug

Norman Darlington and Moira Richards

A Sonetto Haikai Renku

full moon rising - let's share this cloudy jug of fresh-pressed juice
tunes from Puccini to warm the cool night air
the smoothness of a column in Carrara marble
she signs with a flourish with her silver pen

a tanka concealed beneath the maid's silken kimono
oh yes the heat your hands cup my desire
!! gunshots from the grassy knoll... where were you in '63?
like bible days the sun still standing still

an early thaw but snowbones lie stubborn on the mine
I'd wish the pegasus to fly me away
things fall apart the centre cannot hold mere anarchy

favouring the child with a birthmarked cheek
unknown sadnesses and joys in the spring of mother's life
the stream tugs its ribbon of fallen blossom

Renku is a collaborative poetic form originating in medieval Japan. In accordance with tradition, each of the four 'sides' contains reference to one of the four seasons. The sharp-eyed among readers will have noticed the term 'sonetto' in the subtitle. This is a type of renku popular among some modern Japanese groups, which notionally incorporates certain attributes of the Petrarchan sonnet, while maintaining the unthemed mandala-like character of renku.

Still Life

Patricia Burke Brogan

In bruised shadows
beneath his easel
the cast-offs lie.

Ten days ago,
yellow petticoats uplifted,
they gazed and gazed
and stood on tip-toe
in bare-bosomed ecstasy
with the sun.

One move away on canvas
their earthly lover
shaped them,
stroke by stroke,
in yellow heartbeats.

Neutral limbed and colourless,
dried-up breasts
returning to worm-food,
they'll live in Amsterdam
with next year's sunflowers.

Playing Pirates

Penny Feeny

The twins, one blue-eyed, one brown, sat cross-legged on the top bunk, each wrapped in a duvet.

They knew nothing about squatters, estate agents or divorce proceedings, but they knew that if the furniture wasn't shifted, the move couldn't take place. And with the conviction of their shared seven years, they knew they wanted to make a stand.

Their father, Adam, had the same idea. He sat, cradling his guitar, in his favourite armchair – black leather with a retractable footstool – staring at the space where the television used to be. Their mother, Cordelia, was directing the men in brown overalls who carried boxes and took apart wardrobes. She had a list in one hand and a phone in the other. Her long hair was tied back and her raw pale face looked tired. Their father used to accuse her of being a drama queen. Now he'd stopping talking to her. She wasn't talking to him either.

The twins were still wearing pyjamas. They could hardly be expected to leave the house if they weren't dressed. Adam was dressed. Adam was wearing an old pair of trousers, a stained tee-shirt and the jacket of his suit with some buttons missing. Cordelia didn't care that Adam's clothes weren't fit to be worn on the street, because she wasn't going anywhere with him ever again. She wasn't letting the twins go with him either, not after the business of the kidnapping.

Sometimes, on the top bunk, they'd be fighter pilots or knights in armour, but the twins' favourite game was pirates. They'd tie scarves around their heads and rattle cutlasses through the wooden safety bars. They liked their father to join in. He could hop on one leg, roll his eyes like marbles and deepen his voice to a throaty roar that made his children squeal.

He told them it was part of the game when he strapped them into the back of his car, pulling the seat belts so tight they protested. No softies on my ship, he said with a dark scowl on his face. You're my captives now and you're lashed to the mast. Got to show a bit of bravery when you walk the plank. Any screaming and I'll have to gag you.

At first it was hugely exciting. The car ploughed through the streets as if cresting waves, sailing past slower vehicles, taking corners at such speed they had to lean into the wind. But then, as the journey lengthened, as it

began to get dark, as the twins started to feel hungry and tired, the adventure lost some of its glamour. Ben, the brown-eyed one, bit his fingernails. Sophie, the blue-eyed one, asked: Are we nearly there yet? Their father merely whistled.

When night surrounded them, when comforting houses, shops and street lamps were left behind, they arrived at the cliff top. Faint shading in the distance indicated where the land ended and the sky began. They made out the tang and the crash of the sea. Adam took a silver flask from the glove box and tipped it into his mouth. Better see which way the wind's blowing, he said, getting out of the car. He staggered a little, as if the wind were fierce, and then he was swallowed into blackness.

Are we going to walk the plank here? Sophie wondered, feeling somehow that the story had taken a wrong turning. They couldn't open the back doors because of the child locks, so she wriggled out of her seat belt and crawled across to the front of the car. Inside the glove box a phone began to ring. Sophie picked it up and heard her mother's frantic gasp. We're playing Pirates, she told her. Daddy's Captain Hook. Do you want to be Peter Pan or Tinkerbell?

Where are you? Cordelia's voice sounded as though it was being stretched on a wire.

We don't know. We can't see anything. The sense of darkness hit Sophie suddenly, like someone throwing a blanket over her head. She started to cry. Ben leaned forward to wrestle the phone from his sister. The instrument slipped into a hole between the seats and disappeared. They could still hear their mother calling but they didn't know how to get her back again. Sophie stopped crying. She can be Tinkerbell, she said.

When, later, they were surrounded by the bright beams of police cars and Adam had his driving licence taken away, they pretended it was all part of the game.

They'd played lots of games with their mother when they were younger, before she went back to work. They had a big dressing up box with cloaks and hats and face paints in it. Their father would come home and pretend he didn't recognise them – that the real Sophie, Ben and Cordelia had been stolen by aliens or fed to the wolves and replaced by these strange, frightening apparitions. He'd hold up his hands and scream until one of them whipped off the disguise. Then he'd run his hands through his hair, which was very short and dark in those days, and shake his head and say, What would I have done if I'd lost my wonderful family?

And Cordelia would say – in a voice that was mostly teasing, but sometimes had a little chink of worry in it – Have you been drinking, darling?

And Adam would pick up Sophie and whirl her around by the legs until she was nearly sick with screaming and the sensation of flying through the air. I've been working all the hours God sends, he'd say, putting her down. *You don't begrudge me do you, kiddo?*

And the excitement would drain away and they'd have to wash the coloured paint off their faces and put on their pyjamas, because their parents wanted to talk about the stupid letters in red ink that kept arriving from the bank.

The twins loved to hear the story of how their bedroom had been especially created for them, how for years it had been ready: a perfect capsule for a perfect baby. And then, said Cordelia, after all that waiting, there were TWO of you! They hadn't been told – and maybe they never would be – about the ghost babies who had failed to develop or were still frozen in a little cupboard somewhere. They knew only that they had grown up in this home, in this room, with these parents. They didn't see why any other family had the right to move in.

While the twins mutinied in their bedroom, Adam played music, not on his guitar, but on the CD player which was plugged into the wall next to his chair. The table it used to stand on had already been removed. The song was called *You Can't Always Get What You Want* and he turned the volume up loud. At the same time he drank some more vodka. He used to hide the bottles all over the place: behind curtains and cushions, under cupboards and chairs, but nowadays he'd stopped being so furtive. My sperm count doesn't matter anymore, he told Cordelia. So what do you care?

The removal men were rolling up a rug and heaving it onto their shoulders. It was the only new rug in the house. The rest of the flooring had been laid before the twins spurted into life in their little glass dish, when there'd still been money for such things. They came into the bedroom and lifted up the chest with the delicate pattern of leaves stencilled on its drawer fronts. Ben shouted at them to stop it but they ignored him. Some minutes later they came back for the matching desks and chairs. We're not going, yelled Ben at the top of his voice. Sophie could see right inside his mouth, which was red and angry.

Their mother came over to them and leaned her arms on the wooden safety rail.

You have to get down now, she said. You have to get dressed.

We don't want to!

No, she agreed. But it isn't your choice.

Cordelia walked over to the window and looked out onto muddy grass and a garden that had been battered by an assault of ball games, treasure hunts and tricycle rides. She could remember the perfume of the roses before they'd been scrubbed up for their thorns. She could remember this room – they'd called it the nursery as soon as they'd moved in – when it was pristine and silent. She could picture Adam painting the walls, putting his arms around her shoulders, telling her they just needed patience; everything would be all right.

She would not turn around until she had stopped crying. Not for one second did she want the twins to think she regretted what they had cost her.

Salty Bitch

Pete Mullineaux

Balancing at the water's edge,
gripping a torn umbrella

she kicks her paws,
and spurts along the shoreline...

The ringmaster
has been left at home

she rolls on her back in the sand,
bounds into the waves

to great white splashes
of applause –

tomorrow she'll bring a unicycle,
juggling balls!

Out of the water she shakes her fur,
showers the world with salt:

she is worth her salt!

Painting In The Dog

Sandra Bunting

after Miles Lowry at Annaghmakerrig

The artist sets up his easel deep among trees,
poised to capture velvet in green.
Shadows create themselves on Japanese paper,
the play of light and dark through trunks.

Eyes half closed, he examines veined leaves,
looks closer at marks and knots on bark.
Straight and still as if he were himself a tree,
he listens to a blackbird's forest melody.

Across the lake a solitary fisherman rows
beneath a hill where deer feed in morning.
On this side a figure walks along the road,
small, in Victorian black bonnet and cape.

She's often seen in the kitchen garden
by the fish pool with newts and tadpoles,
or strolling down by the grey water,
taking in the leaf-green air, briskly.

The artist places her among the paper trees,
imagines her solemn face and cane,
and finishing the rest from memory,
invites locals to see over glasses of wine.

*So, you saw Miss W on her morning trek?
But where's the terrier, her constant friend?
Ghosts together in the garden and woods,
pattering on the stairs, routing in the pantry.*

Could it be down to expense or lethargy?
Miss W will walk until her remains lay deep
under the faraway soil of England, although
for many years these Irish fields were home.

There she is on lush shadowy canvas
a vision fixed once more in time.
The artist picks up a brush and dips it;
at the woman's feet appears a little dog.

The blank page stares back at me.
The slow minutes tick by.
A pale, buff coloured onion enters my consciousness.
I recall its singular smell;
Imagine the feel of its smooth surface;
Take a sharp knife to its skin,
Cut deep into its resistant flesh,
And now almost taste its pungent juices
In the back of my throat.
Tearfully, I start to peel away at its outer skin,
Strip back layer after layer
Until I reach its pulpy core.

I put pen to paper.
The words come
Slowly, haphazardly at first,
Then spill freely out across the page.
Later my pen, a blade, cuts away at the words' flesh
Each word, sentence, at last, trim, clean, precise

Three Levels Of Dark

Shannon Quinn

When Barbara isn't having her dark times, she is like everybody else's mother, only better. She throws parties for no reason at all and all the children on the block are invited.

When she's not feeling dark, she laughs long and hard. And her laugh is infectious. At Barbara's parties there are matching place mats and napkins, the cloth kind, not the paper kind that other mothers use. She doesn't get angry if anyone spills on them. She wants everybody to call her "Barbara" instead of "Mrs. Cottingham."

There are three levels to Barbara's dark times. Level one is crying. She's having a level one day today. Which is fine. Because it means she could snap back to feeling good.

Level one isn't very serious.

Barbara asked her daughter Gillian for a cup of tea yesterday. She was sitting on the couch. Gillian brings the tea to her in her favourite cup-the one with little grey rabbits on it. Some tea slops up over the rim as she takes it from her and Barbara freezes for a minute then lets out a big sob. Gillian doesn't know what to do so instead of just standing there she takes the teacup back from her. Barbara put her hands to her face and tries to suck back her sobs. It doesn't work. Her shoulders shake and she sounds like she is choking. He kneels by Barbara, he puts his hand on Gillian's shoulder and says she shouldn't worry, that it has nothing to do with her and that she should get some fresh air. Gillian sits on the steps to the back door even though she doesn't want to be there, she doesn't want fresh air, she wants to be in her room, reading her Enid Blyton book. But Gillian is good at following orders.

Barbara's crying makes Gillian want to cry. But somehow she knows she's not allowed to. From the steps she can see Ratface, he's leaning over a pile of dirt. Ratface lives in the house beside her. His real name is Kevin, he used to be her friend. Gillian didn't start calling him Ratface until the rest of the school did. He is two grades behind her. He earned his name by ratting out classmates who were cheating. It was the worse thing he could have done. Now he has no friends and people call him that to his face. Gillian just pretends to not know him.

Barbara was in the hospital or 6 weeks, though she won't allow anyone to discuss it, she says she was there for stress related issues. Since her return, Barbara has been talking a lot about what the Christian thing to do is. Gillian has no idea what she means. Apparently, Gillian sitting with Ratface every few days is the Christian thing to do. Gillian hates it, she is always afraid someone from school will see her.

She's also upset that Barbara is trying to act like a real mom. Barbara clearly has no idea how wrong it is for a grade six to have to be around a grade four.

Level two of Barbara's dark times involves stair sitting. When Gillian goes to school Barbara is sitting in the middle of the stairs that run from her bedroom down to the living room. She's there when Gillian wakes up. She's there when Gillian leaves the house and she's there when Gillian comes home from school. Gillian doesn't know if she moves in between those times or not.

Level three of Barbara's dark times means Barbara goes to the hospital.

Her father wishes she could be like her older sister, Bridget. Bridget doesn't run to her room crying the way she does. She doesn't even have to bite down on her lip or turn her head so nobody can see her red face burning up from trying not to cry. Bridget is very grown up. That's what their father says. No one seems to be taking much notice of the fact that Bridget has been on a food strike for three months now. She only eats organic green vegetables and occasionally caves in and has crackers.

At first their father let Bridget not eat at the dinner table. He said it was a phase, something Bridget was doing to get attention. He said that some of Bridget's food strikes were quite ethical choices. As a family we all learned about grain fed cattle and free-range chickens. But Bridget still wouldn't eat anything but her organic veggies. Now everyone just ignores her at dinner. Dad has always said how lucky Bridget is to have a good metabolism. He doesn't say that about Gillian. She thinks her father sees it as her being fat means he's done something wrong. He's never said that. But if he had to walk down the street holding either Gillian's or Bridget's hand, she knows who he'd choose.

Gillian is not happy that Barbara is home. Sometimes she can't stand being around her. She takes up so much space, whether she's feeling bad or good, that she feels like there's no room for anyone else. She sucks all the oxygen out of the room.

Gillian wakes up the next morning to the sound of an ambulance outside of her window.

Police officers are asking the neighbours questions.

Bridget comes into her room and says she heard that Ratface had some sort of seizure and hit his head and broke something in his neck. She says they took him to intensive care but Gillian doesn't want to believe her. Sometimes she thinks it makes Bridget feel better to make things sound worse than they are.

Barbara is spending the day in bed.

Dad is across the street talking to the Kotinsky's. Bridget is going back over there to see if there's any more news. She is hugging Ratface's older brother Jeremy.

Gillian waits till she's gone and then goes running for Ratface's backyard where she was with him yesterday-when her father made me go out for fresh air because Barbara was having one of her level one cries.

She was so mad at being forced to go outside she wanted to kick something, Ratface was in a corner of his yard and as Gillian got closer she could see he was digging a hole for this dead budgee he had laid out beside him and she could

tell by how careful he was being that he loved that budgie but Gillian just felt so angry inside that she went up to Ratface and asked him if he'd given the budgie a bath. He looked like he didn't understand and she was asking him, "That's what you do before funerals stupid, you bathe them." Then Gillian worked up a good goober and spat it down right on that budgie's head and he just stared at her, didn't say a word. She was ready to run once he started yelling but he didn't, he was completely silent. He looked Gillian straight in the eye, so that she felt as if he was looking through her.

Now Gillian pushes open her back door and runs as fast as she can to the spot in Ratface's back yard where the fresh mound of dirt and a Popsicle stick cross stands out. She drops to my knees and starts to dig as fast as she can. Her fingernails scratch the lid of the shoebox that Ratface buried his bird in. She pulls of the lid and takes out the bundled package. She unwraps the bird from the dishtowel that Ratface that Kevin had so carefully wrapped him in and she pulls that bird close to her chest. She gets that bird and cradles him in her arms and wipes off his face and she just sits there rocking back and forth, almost as if she could rock some life back into this bird.

Gillian rocks herself in order to feel still. She knows what's coming next. Level Three. She saw her mother last night. When she's about to hit level three she begins to seem like a perfect ball of glass. Delicate, anything could break it and anything does break it, and Gillian is left with sharp angry shards of glass in her hands that draw blood.

But Gillian's hands are full.

Rock Museum

Val Nolan

The high white doors of that academy were closed;
Their wedded faces required a shouldering to open.
Inside, those lengthy exhibition aisles had lingered
And not one speck of dust had lifted since our visit.

Cabinets and gallery remained like they'd been left:
Oak Victorian, insecure majesties of a museum age,
The room itself as much the jewel of that collection
As any straining shelf of stone magnificence within.

Cloistered school of secret ecstasy, I returned there
Scolded and alone; recalled your rock museum joy,
The pleasures that you took in amethysts and stone;

The weight of your intent upon the roped-off cases,
All signs pleading do not lean, a ridiculous request
For steely glass has tolerance so very near my own.

Perfect Pitch

Ted McCarthy

The mundane brooks no wavering; the drill's whistle
ascends with the sureness of a rocket,
traffic all cadence and staccato.

And when I think of juvenile music, how it not quite
came together, I remember it now
as almost industrial; as machines distant yet part;
or twined hedges in spring
budding to a different calendar

and how it dwells on the harmonics of silence
- its strange alertness the unexpected fruit of having settled,
the night-shock of branches wounding each other -

or in the recollected drill of mute practice, fingers on knuckle-valves,
silent scales, the mime of song drummed
on a row of fists.

There is a coming together and stopping short,
rehearsed steps on a ground that is never
wholly familiar, where the mind wanders
to raindrift round ship-horns, boat-bells, the pitch of small masts;
where every act is of a pattern seen from a long way off,
the discernment of exile.

And after this
the eye is keen momentarily, pitch is restored,
narrative resumed in the first person.
For this the rose blooms: for light in diesel-shimmering
air, exhaust warmth on the bite of October.

Beyond The Railings

Ted McCarthy

I was walking in the garden when your message came.
One of the ferns was lopsided like a broken wing
I was trying to prop it back to a semblance of health.
Your words had the ring/music of a foreign tongue,
I felt the world where they were uttered. It passed
and you became that shade where the smell of earth is pungent
as damp at the bottom of steps.

How goes it in the land of steel and glass
where the long stem of day is perpetually
elegant, and fat churches pray for peace?
The bee reels from impenetrable
flowers here, and his hum is the din
of a river of far cars cut off
from their own sound. Like you, me,

All the others isolated by what we have grown.
There was a plan once, a manageable knowledge;
now, too exhausted to cut or nurture, we move
among small reliefs like a cat after a patch of sun
while noises out of vision settle to the hum
of exile/a sentence. If we listened, we could pick out shards
of meaning from that drone

that would make a mesh of girders
permanent as a leaf. I know our clocks beat
to the same tick, but the shades of our understanding
are the greens of chlorophyll and copper
and those luminous hand-tips that call
morning to your waiting eyelids are reminders
no averted mind can bury with clear light.

The Himalayan nusc that has no heart
- just layer upon packed cactus layer wrapping a thin,
thread of xylem, like a stream trickling
where no frost can reach – has raked my palm
more than once, its dead leaves a razor-paper
mocking with a sting my ungloved carelessness
and this foreign impulse to tidiness.

Looking at those skin-slivers reddened like a gill
I have been tempted to shake the drops onto the roots
as we feed the lie of who we are with the residue
of a far-off prick of discontent or a missed chance.
I've seen a day-old smear of blood on a stem as powdered
rust, or a vivid rash or alarm; a wild
and uncomprehending signature

or a scrawl of pain along the wall of a new building
where night creatures congregate to be repelled
and leave no lasting mark. Their lives will
in the end fold as sharply-perfect as a gable corner
or the stories we crease symmetrically along
the line of an astonishing reminder
from the fissure of the dreary and exotic.

Geranium

Tommy Murray

You keep cropping up
Gatecrashing conversations, small talk
Popping in and out of photographs

The pinks and whites of youth
The muted ochres of maturity
Fresh calico mornings, our

Cloning hands all over you, evenings
Posing on the windowsill
Between cartwheels of freshly

Baked soda bread, you're jardinière
The one with the strong
Staffordshire colours, glowing modestly

The scene of the crime, we called it
Where our best efforts wilted
Under avalanches of affection.

Beach In A Box

James Martyn

That final week you craved the beach:
wishing infinities of sand between your toes,
shells sharp on your calloused soles,
pebbles lodging in your soft knees,
kneeling to imbibe the salt taste,
easing the seaweed between your lips,
gripping the nipple-full bubbles in your teeth,
chewing the carrageen richness of the sea.

The forcing conflict pinned you to your bed,
victory re-defined with every hour
until all of us could see the battle lost
and a friend travelled from the coast,
a cigar-box of beach his chosen gift:
the sand slipping through your fingers,
blue pebble-tears in your swollen grip,
a shell held to your ear, your terror
hushed in the sibilant push of the sea.

Eamon had been sat waiting in the reception area for over an hour and was getting bored. There were no casually interesting magazines to read like at a dentists' surgery and most of the posters were printed in a swirling bicycle race of a script that he couldn't even begin to comprehend. When Eamon had telephoned the day before he'd been told to come at eleven o'clock but it was already past noon and the Chief Minister hadn't even arrived at his office yet. Eamon looked around at the room full of people who were also waiting and wondered how many of them had appointments before his. Most were sat patiently quiet. Occasionally one of the men would stand to retie a chequered sarong, wander over to the open door or window, and flob the pomegranate-red remains of a semi-masticated betel nut out onto the ground. Although Eamon thought that the act was particularly disgusting, he was nevertheless intrigued by the garish residue left behind on the chewers' lips, teeth and tongue.

Every time Eamon looked around, the red-mouthed man next to him grinned in an expectorant tongue-twirling, lip-twitching sort of way that eventually stopped short of an anticipated splattering projectile of brightly speckled saliva and became instead a question, "England?"

"No, I'm from Ireland," replied Eamon somewhat taken aback but happy to converse.

The man grinned and wagged his head enthusiastically, "London?"

"Dublin actually."

This time the waggle was hesitant, the grin vacant and confused. The man looked disappointed and fell quiet. Eamon regretted not confirming London as his home. "After all" he thought, "what difference would it have made?"

Another hour went by and the Chief Minister had still not turned up. A foreigner clutching an important looking file came in, smiled with a conspiratorial nod towards Eamon, but left shortly afterwards shouting at one of the clerks for having wasted his time. As the clerk grinned and wagged his head deferentially, Eamon watched and began to understand something of the movements' many meanings.

Eamon had been sat for three hours and could feel himself getting irritated as well. He too wanted to shout at someone but instead reached into his cloth bag, as he always did when he felt tense or angry, and pulled out three fist sized leather stitched balls.

redgreenblueredgreenblueredgreenblueredgreenblueredgreenblue

Eamon loved to juggle. It helped him to relax. By completely focusing on keeping three coloured balls constantly rotating between his palms and a point in space somewhere just out in-front of his face and a little above his head, he could clear everything else from his cluttered mind and enter into a blissful absorbingly rhythmic world of perpetually circular motion. As each ball blurred through its orbit Eamon stared straight ahead, fused in flight amidst a kaleidoscope of primary colours, his mind floating away, free from each of its myriad troubles and concerns.

Everyone sat waiting turned to look at him in shock and fascination. The clerks came out from behind their cubicles, lunch-packets and newspapers whilst the security guards hovered in the doorway and waiting trishaw drivers filled the window ledge from outside. A woman whose son slept on her lap woke him to watch. Eamon loved an audience and to everyone's surprise reached swiftly inside the bag for a fourth ball whilst the others were all still in flight, and deftly introduced a yellow to his rapid rainbow of cyclically concentrated precision.

yellowredgreenblueyellowredgreenblueyellowredgreenblue

The entire room looked on entranced as Eamon continued to juggle. Higher and higher looped the balls, faster and faster. With a swift change of hands Eamon altered their trajectory and started plucking balls from one point like apples off a tree, and putting them in again somewhere else in the circle. Everybody cheered, except for the Chief Minister who, with all the balls in mid air, Eamon laughing and the crowd chortling away, suddenly entered, pulled the two loitering guards apart, stormed right through the middle of the room and glowering at each and everyone waiting there, marched straight into his office and banged the door. One by one Eamon's balls tumbled out of his hand, rolled across the floor and bumped into the Chief Minister's door, each thudding in turn like a persistent knock.

Everyone held their breath as the Chief Minister flung the door back open and glared at Eamon.

"Your balls?" he demanded menacingly.

"Yes."

The Chief Minister looked at him coldly, "Bring them in."

Eamon was motioned to sit on one of the low chairs in-front of the Chief Ministers' file filled desk.

"So, what did you want to see me about?"

"I want to offer my help" Eamon explained.

"Very generous of you," smiled the Chief Minister suddenly warming to him, "which aid agency are you with?"

"I'm not here with an agency. I came over on my own."

“Not a problem, not a problem, we’ve had quiet a few individual benefactors coming over since the tsunami to help us. One lady, an American, came and dumped an entire suitcase full of money right on this very desk! ‘A gift Chief Minister’ she told me, ‘from the Sri Lanka Friendship Society of...’, err, something or other, umm, mid-west somewhere I think ... anyway, ‘two-hundred and fifty thousand dollars’ she said, ‘for you to spend on those poor people who have lost their homes.’ ‘You’re so kind’ I told her, ‘gratefully received.’ So, how much are you thinking of donating?” The Chief Minister opened one of his desk drawers, “We can accept any amount, in any currency you like.”

Eamon shook his head, “I’m sorry Chief Minister, perhaps I didn’t explain properly, I haven’t come to give any money, I’ve come to offer my services.”

The Chief Minister’s smile vanished in an instant as he closed the drawer. “Oh, I see, and exactly what ‘services’ do you have to offer?”

Eamon took a plastic red bauble out of his bag and suck it on the end of his nose grinning, “I’m a clown,” he said.

Incredulous, the Chief Minister didn’t immediately respond but just starred fuming for an excruciatingly long minute of silence during which the only sounds that dared be heard were that of the ceiling fan whirring overhead and a second hand ticking its way around the solemn face of a clock on the wall behind. The Chief Minister waited. And then he exploded.

“Bloody fool! What do think this is? A circus? We’ve got enough jokers running around handing out aid without having some clown joining in as well!”

“I thought I might cheer the people up a bit, make them laugh.”

“Are you mad? These people don’t need laughter, they need livelihoods! And the only thing that will cheer them up is a roof over their heads. Fool! This is an emergency, not some kind of pantomime we’re having! Go on, get out! Get out!”

“But...but...but, please let me explain” stammered Eamon.

“I don’t want to listen to your ‘but-but-but’, just get out! And if I ever see you round here again I’ll have you deported!” The Chief Minister threw a pile of files at a clerk who had come through the door to see what all the commotion was about. “Should have never let all those sudhu buggers in here in the first place!” he muttered as Eamon turned and left.

As Eamon walked back towards the gate someone clapped behind him. Turning, he saw the red-mouthed man waving at him to wait. “Mahathaya,” said the man when he had caught up, “come my camp?” He smiled pleadingly. Eamon waggled his head and followed as the man led the way to a trishaw that was waiting outside by the road.

An hour later and Eamon, wearing a curly orange wig, sporting a bright red nose, a pair of unfeasibly large flapping shoes that squeaked like mice wherever he walked

and exceedingly baggy pants held up with elastic braces over a red and white stripped t-shirt, was performing on a patch of bare ground amidst a huddle of tarpaulin tents and plastic sheeting. As he juggled, tripped, tumbled and fell, all around him a sea of faces cried, their cheeks drowning in the happy tears of laughter.

Growing Up

Aoife Casby

Do you remember that summer we built
a castle on the hillside -
we shored the walls with lichened rock,
our muddy fingers put things into it
like sorrow and other deaf words.

I picked primroses, was sorry
for their delicate stems,
imagined them keening for clay
when it would have been better
to find a seed of some wild thing
and press it into the earthen garden
we built for our tiny castle.

Then we did not understand
that only picked flowers wither;
growing flowers die
and when you saw the ripped petals
I saw your eyes warble
underneath their lids

and I want to remember that,
yes,
once,
we did build
a castle
in the ribs
of a mountain.

Back then, I was able to feel
that thing when your daddy died,
a thing between fear and hunger
sitting there in places you can't touch
like in that flesh around your heart
or the season where sadness is made.

The Sunday Sister

Carol MacKay

When I awoke this morning, I knew you'd be gone.
The rain knocked the alarm aside,
filled water barrels to overflowing,
detector peeped in the hallway
overwhelmed by the humidity, the banking of tears.
You had always been my Sunday calendar:
after church lunches, birthday cakes, and after,
side trips into creaky-spined albums and
dusty matinee talk of Heathcliff and Catherine,
frustrating each other mercilessly in black & white.
I never understood that book, not even the movie.
Why you longed for the moors,
why you thought it was sad.
I never understood
until you rode across the gently sloping pasture
Arabian falling, and in the wet, matted grass
waited, drenched in adversity
right through to your petticoats;
waited for the kindness of neighbours, family and friends
to carry you home again.

New Testament

Veronica Gaylie

During the ordination
I sit beside the confessional
listening to sins in Italian.

At the front
priests in pink satin swing incense balls,
families weep, a young man on the floor
at their feet. In the back it's nothing but
sin, latecomers in running shoes
talking about last night's middle weight match
at the Societa Pugilistica di Padano,
the women's minds still on Eduardo Enigmatico
with the bursting muscles,
the tight shirt.

Finally the confessional's free.
The priest sits inside the swinging doors
blowing his nose;
everyone outside
crossing themselves.

Exactness

J. J. Steinfeld

I have no time for the spacecraft on my lawn
bright and shiny and beckoning as it may be
too many thoughts of my stumblings
for the smaller-than-small performance piece
I'm contemplating:

Existence: A Sort of Opera.

I have no time for discourse with the world's smartest human
intelligent and erudite and cerebral as that thinker may be
too many errands to run
and obligations to fulfil
not to mention an act I'm perfecting:

Consciousness: Now You See It...

Perhaps I should slow down
and smell the roses, coffee, or evasiveness
but speed and agility and fancy stepping
are as essential as existence and consciousness
if I'm to deal with the exactness
of eclipses and sunsets.

Going Home

Jarlath Fahy

will we always be standing
at henleys of cashel cross
in the early seventies
and you crying
not wanting to go home

will we always be waiting
with our suitcases
for the red and white cie bus
with the britvic sign
an orange cut in two

will you always pluck
that branch of box hedge
and begin that rhyme
he loves me-he loves me not
and the green leaves drop

will the bus always come
to a jerky stop
the driver greet
we climb the footworn steps up
and take our seats
and face the inevitable return

Biographical details

Biographical details

Sandra Bunting grew up in Canada and now lives in Galway. Her poetry collection *Identified in Trees* was published in 2006 by Marram Press. Besides poetry, she writes fiction, works in journalism and is involved in printmaking, batik and silkpainting.

Patricia Burke Brogan is the author of the internationally acclaimed plays *Eclipsed* and *Stained Glass at Samhain*. Her collection of poems and etchings *Above the Waves Calligraphy* was published by Salmon. She received a 2005 Arts Council Bursary in Drama. Her monologue *Requiem of Love* had its World Premiere at the Town Hall Theatre, Galway in November 2005 prior to moving to the Pavilion Theatre, Dun Laoghaire. It was staged as part of Galway's Project '06 in July 2006. The script of the play is published by Wordsonthestreet and a poetry collection is forthcoming. www.wordsonthestreet.com.

Aoife Casby lives in Carraroe, Co. Galway. Her work was featured in the *Sunday Tribune New Irish Writing* in March 2007. She read at the *Cúirt International Festival of Literature 2007* in a showcase for emerging writers and was selected by *Poetry Ireland* to participate in *Poetry Ireland's Introductions Series* in April 2007. In 2006, she was highly commended in the *START Chapbook Poetry Award*. Her work has also been published in a range of literary journals. She is currently working as Writer-In-Residence on a project in Connemara with three other artists on the theme of Language, Community and Change.

Norman Darlington lives in Bunclody, Co. Wexford. He is Renku editor of the online journal *Simply Haiku* www.simplyhaiku.com and his work has been published in *Crannóg*, *The SHOp*, *The Scaldy Detail*, and numerous international journals and anthologies, both in English and in translation. Samples of his published work can be found on his website Xaiku.com.

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

Kevin Donnelly lives in Galway and is completing the novel, *Ash Wednesday*.

Jarlath Fahy is a former member of The Focus Theatre Group. His first collection, *The Man Who Was Haunted By Beautiful Smells*, is published by Wordsonthestreet, www.wordsonthestreet.com.

Michael Farry, a primary teacher, is a founder member of the Boyne Writers Group and joint editor of their magazine *Boyne Berries*. Work of his has been commended in the 2007 Francis Ledwidge International Poetry Award, shortlisted for the Sligo Scriobh Poetry competition 2006, the Fish International Poetry Competition 2007 and the Boyle Poetry competition 2007. He has had poems published in *Crannog*, *Revival* and *Carillon*. He has also written and published three books on the history of county Sligo.

Penny Feeny's work has featured in many literary magazines and anthologies in the UK and elsewhere including *Aesthetica*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Carve*, *Mslaxia*, *The Reader*, *Staple*, *Her Majesty* (Tindal Street), *Bracket* (Comma Press), and *Naked City* (Route). She has also been broadcast on local radio, Radio 4 and the BBC World Service, and won several prizes for her writing. She lives in Liverpool with her family.

Veronica Gaylie's poems have appeared in various literary journals. She lives in Vancouver, Canada.

Simon Harris has worked with peace and humanitarian aid organisations in Sri Lanka for the past twelve years where he is currently the Country Representative for the Irish Red Cross post-tsunami assistance programme. He is also pursuing part-time doctoral studies at the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College, Dublin.

Libby Hart's first collection of poetry, *Fresh News from the Arctic* was published in 2006 by Interactive Press (Australia) and received the Anne Elder Award as part of the 2006 FAW National Literary Awards.

Kevin Higgins was born in London in 1967, and grew up in Galway City where he still lives. He is co-organiser of *Over The Edge*. His first collection of poems, *The Boy With No Face*, was published by Salmon in 2005. *The Boy With No Face* was short-listed for the 2006 Strong Award and has recently gone to its second printing. He won the 2003 Cúirt Festival Poetry Grand Slam and was awarded a literary bursary by the Arts Council of Ireland in 2005. He is the poetry critic of *The Galway Advertiser* and also regularly reviews for *Books In Canada: The Canadian Review of Books*. His second collection of poems, *Time Gentlemen, Please*, will be published in 2008 by Salmon Poetry.

Adrienne Leavy is originally from Dundalk but now lives in Phoenix, Arizona, where she is working on her Ph. D. in literature at Arizona State University.

Ilmar Lehtpere's translation of *The Drums of Silence* by Kristiina Ehin (Oleander, 2007) was awarded the Poetry Society Popescu Prize for European Poetry in Translation. Other recent publications of his translations of Estonian literature include *Noorkuuhommik - New Moon Morning* by Kristiina Ehin (Huma, 2007) and *My Brother Is Going off to War* by Kristiina Ehin and Hella Wuolijoki (Lapwing, 2007).

Ted McCarthy is a teacher from Clones, Co. Monaghan. His work has been published in Ireland, Britain, Europe and the U.S. His first collection, *November Wedding* was published by The Lilliput Press, Dublin.

Carol L. MacKay is from Bawlf, Alberta, Canada. Her poems and essays have been aired nationally, in Canada, on CBC Radio One and have appeared in literary magazines across North America. Most recently her poetry has appeared in *White Ink: An Anthology about Mothers and Mothering* (Demeter Press, Toronto) and in *Writing the Land: Alberta Through its Poets* (Blue Skies Press, Grande Prairie, AB). She also writes for children.

Alan McMonagle lives in Galway. His work has appeared in *Southword*, Crannóg, *The Cúirt Annual* and *WOW!* He is also a featured writer in 2007 Windows Publications *Authors & Artists Introduction Series*.

James Martyn is from Galway. He has published in *The Cúirt Journal*, *West 47*, *Books Ireland*, *Full Moon* and *Crannóg*. He has won the Listowel Writers' Week Originals short story competition and has had work broadcast on RTE and BBC Radio. He was shortlisted for a Hennessy Award in 2006 and the Francis McManus award in 2007.

Pete Mullineaux's poetry has been published widely in Ireland & the UK. He is resident MC for the Cúirt International Festival of Literature Grand Slam.

Nuala Ní Chonchúir's first stand-alone poetry collection (bilingual), *Tattoo:Tatú*, was published in September 2007, by Arlen House. Her second fiction collection, *To the World of Men, Welcome*, was published in 2005 by the same publisher. She won the inaugural Jonathan Swift Award in 2007, for fiction. See www.nualanichonchuir.com.

Val Nolan has been published in the London anthology *Che Guevara in Verse* and the 25th anniversary issue of New York's *Mobius* magazine, along with *Southward*, *Revival*, *ROPES*, *Spoke*, *Limited Edition*, and *Criterion '05*. His work was recently on show in the Galway City Museum as part of the *Document* writer/artist collaboration. He has been selected for Poetry Ireland's *Introductions* reading series. He is currently a Ph.D student in the Department of English at NUIG, where he teaches courses in Creative Writing and Twentieth Century Poetry. He also reviews books for *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Sunday Business Post*, and *The Stinging Fly* magazine.

Debi O'Hehir was born in England but grew up in Kinvara, Co. Galway. She now lives in Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim. She has exhibited extensively in Ireland and Britain and her works are included in many private and public collections. Her exhibition *-Horses-* opens in Paris 6th March, 2008 and runs for a month at the Centre Cultural Irlandais and she has a major exhibition coming up in England. Through the iconology of horses she explores her inner self which extends to reflect aspects of the human spirit.

Irene O'Dea is a poet and teacher from Belturbet, Co Cavan.

Edward O'Dwyer is 23, from Limerick, and is associated with the Whitehouse Poets. He has had a chapbook published by Revival Press and also has poems published in *The Stony Thursday Book*, *THE SHOp*, *Southword* and *Revival*. He is currently at UCC doing a Postgrad. in Education.

Kenneth Pobo's collection *Glass Garden* is due in 2008 from WordTech Press. His work appears in: *Orbis*, *Southern Ocean Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Windsor Review* and elsewhere.

Shannon Quinn is a Canadian writer who has published fiction and creative non-fiction in literary magazines in Canada and the United States. She also produces documentaries for radio.

Moirá Richards writes accounting textbooks and poems in South Africa. Her tanka and collaborative work appear in journals in a half-dozen different countries about the planet.

Eileen Sheehan is from Co Kerry. Her poetry is widely published including *The Open Door Anthology of Poetry* (ed Niall MacMonagle), *Winter Blessings* by Patricia Scanlan, most recently in *Our Shared Japan* (ed Irene De Angelis & Joseph Woods) and *The Echoing Years* (ed John Ennis, Randall Maggs & Stephanie McKenzie). Her collection *Song Of The Midnight Fox* is from Doghouse Books with a second collection due for publication in 2008.

Morelle Smith is a writer of poetry, fiction, non-fiction and travel articles. Her work has appeared in various magazines and anthologies in UK, Ireland, France, Canada etc. Her recent poetry collection is *The Way Words Travel*, UKA Press (2005). Her recent fiction is *Touching the Shell*, Editions Arabesques (2006).

J. J. Steinfeld lives in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Canada. He has published a novel, *Our Hero in the Cradle of Confederation* (Pottersfield Press), short story collections, *Should the Word Hell Be Capitalized?*, *Anton Chekhov Was Never in Charlottetown*, and *Would You Hide Me?* (Gaspereau Press) and a poetry collection, *An Affection for Precipices* (Serengeti Press). His short stories and poems have appeared in numerous anthologies and periodicals internationally, and over thirty of his one-act and full-length plays have been performed in Canada and the United States.

Gu Xie is a member of the Chinese Writers Association. He was born in Shanghai in 1960's. After graduation, he worked successively as a road builder, warehouse keeper, journalist, literary editor, editorial director and chief editor. He is the author of six collections of poetry: *Selected Poetry of Gu Xie*, *Tai Ji*, *£" the Supreme Ultimate* £©, *State Symphony*, *Steps of Guangzhou*, *Pudong Symphony* and has won many poetry awards.