

AN ÁITIÚIL



SEPTEMBER 2022

AN ANTHOLOGY

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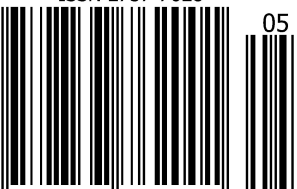
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AN AITIUIL

an anthology

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dearest friends,

To all those who cast their eyes over this offering and take the time to practice a fine art; that great practice of thumbing gently through a book, we the editors would ask you to take good care of what you hold. In compiling this anthology of work, we have been delighted to offer home to the work of a great many authors, friends old and new, but more importantly to attempt to learn what home means to them in a more vivid sense. This anthology is an epitome to us of life in practice and life in passion the likes of which we choose to express in our daily community as ‘Local.’

In this study of locality, being *Áitiúil*, we wished to span the length and breadth of refuge, to peer into hearts as if they were front rooms and find families wrapped in the warmth of tender embrace. We are so happy to share with you these works of place, prose and poem, in hopes they may bring you peace or pleasure. Carry on in your strides the memory of the warmth you leave in the world in search of the beacons of family anew as we can only do in time to come.

Home takes a great many shapes, from the shadow cast in a hallway at a long journey’s end or the smothering embrace of the one we love. It has been a life’s pleasure to peruse these works submitted and selected for this project and feel at its core the work of a community is in fruition deeply, truly. Thank you for supporting art, for caring about your home and caring about one another above all else.

As ever: Be well and Be safe
Helen, Tomas, Una and Jack
The Editors xxx

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COASTING

alan pepin

When I drove back from Ballycastle,
I didn't come the Roman road that cuts straight home,
I zigzagged out along the coast;

Where a leaden sky was weaving the night,
Beading the last bright threads of horizon,
Fusing the last strands of sun

Swerving in a tussling wind
Coasting on the verge - I held my breath -
From Ballintoy to White Park Bay:

Stunned by the light conjuring black,
At the bleak-lit beauty,
At the hemming of the day.

ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY YEARS

s.c. flynn, carrowbehy bog

A lot has happened in five generations,
but nothing can have changed between these hills
that have been holding their breath all that time
and now empty their lungs in this slow, cool breeze
bringing underneath its earthy smell
a fresh hint of the lake that once stood here
and of the glacier that gouged it out
while sliding away in a grinding mime
that left this message: an instant has passed,
no more, and the sun hasn't even blinked.

DEVIL MAY CARE

chaelio thomas, for the phoenix park gate cat

Let's kneel in permafrost
Nuzzle the wrought iron
Roll and recline unabashed
In autumn's detritus

Yes I know my nose is scratched
And the traffic is close
But we have our health
And even the soil needs kneading

Blood comes back
My coat is plush
Everyone else is looking at the deer
And why not
We might as well,
While we're here

DUBLIN, BABY!

megan o'driscoll

When I fell behind Dublin's couch she couldn't reach me. She pulled me out after a month when the dust I gathered made her sneeze. Dublin's got me zonked out. She spilled poppers on my coat and kissed me with too much tongue and left without saying goodbye. I'll still say yes when she asks to borrow a fiver.

When I marched with the endless train of the weary towards the top of the queue for Dublin's golden taxi rank and found nothing, she told me I needed a haircut. Dublin did not call me a dirty hippie. I did not call Dublin a yuppie in the hopes we were bringing that one back. Really, where do you get these ideas?

When I paid five euro for a cup of coffee Dublin told me to sort myself out, Jesus. Dublin has a headache but she swears it's not about that. She thinks it must be something she ate. Dublin hasn't eaten all day, if she's being honest. She does not feel like being honest. I think Dublin's passed out in the back of the taxi again. Great.

When I tried to get away for a while, Dublin told me I'd never get a hotel there. Or there. We're right on the edge of Europe, I told her. We're on the edge of civilization, she told me. She was on the edge, I'll tell you that. I took Dublin out to the pier — Sea swimming is in, cigarettes are out, keep up. She stood at the end and looked out over everything, I stood at the end and turned to look back.

Dublin knows I'll keep coming back even though I hate it. She knows I'll only be sure I hate it if I keep coming back.

BOG

ted naughton

Eamon

I should have just told him straight out on the way up the country. But he might have freaked and jumped out in one of those little villages along the way where the traffic lights still stop the intercity cars. He would have disappeared down a ginnel and I would have to stop and park up and chase him around the town like tailing a hottie who glances back just long enough at you. And we would miss our flight. So I didn't.

He is on his phone checking his flight to Charles de Gaul, he won't be on it. Whatever happens those old men in black frocks will not greet him, will not lift up the seats in their people carrier and whisk him back to remote sanctity and away from me. He is so beautiful as he leans and fusses over papers in the glove compartment. I can smell his scent, an aftershave he slapped on in his underwear in the hotel room. Yes he is still handsome, I like him without the aftershave. I smell of soap.

I love his hair- Mark has the wavy salt and peppery hair that priests are supposed to have. You know distinguished. He runs his hand through it and then carries on scrolling as if he has heard my thoughts and wants to emphasise my point. He does not notice that I am sitting unbelted hands folded on top of the document pouch I need, looking at him. Sometimes it seems he does not even realise how beautiful he is but he is used to being looked at.

The first time I saw him his hair was black and curly and course. It was shaved in a brutal short back and sides and had bits of peat turf in it. Mine was shaved too and gritty with bits of bog and branches. We groomed them off each others' heads like chimps as I lay with him in the brush for the first time.

The bog. That was how we met- our families worked adjoining banks of turf in the Bog of Allen. It was that lost skill of cutting out neat sloppy bricks of acrid peat and drying it out for the fire that brought us together. My dad had called it 'half-arsed' coal but for my Granddad and Marks' bringing home the turf for the winter was a sacred manly ritual and they helped each other perform it. When my dad said 'arse' Mark had giggled and I had pinched his bum. It felt good.

As the men cut the squelchy turf and threw it over their shoulders to be caught and stacked by us, it smashed and shattered on the heather. We were gone. He was chasing me over bog pools and dank ditches. I leaped and jump with what I know now to be joy. I was black with bitter bog juice. Lizards scuttered away from our frenzied games.

When we returned my grandfather told my dad to beat ‘the little English man’ and he did. Mark’s Granddad called him a ‘feckin little scut’ but did not strike him. They turned away from us back to the banks of turf leaving us to spread out the soppy sods in rows like tiny coffins. I hurt as I worked but we could not stop laughing at each other. He had shown me his dick that day and for me the aching would never stop.

Mark hops out of the car and goes to the boot. He taps sharply on the back window for me to unlock it. I reach over for the button then hesitate. I need to get him back in the car. I know him well enough that trying to speak with him in a carpark will not work. He will be off away from me, maybe for good. He is glaring at me I can sense.

One time in the bog Mark’s grandfather had made us stand next to a flooded ditch – right next to the cut out spongy edge and told us to stare down into the black water that did not ripple or reflect your face. There was a blurred image standing surlily next to me. A teenage Mark whose frizzy hair, his shoulders and flared jeans were stained and spoilt with bog gloop. We are ordered again to stare down in to it. No one knew how deep these waters were or whether there was a bottom to them at all.

My grandfather joined in. Men had been falling into these holes since time began and once you fell in, you may never get climb out. All those bodies lying drowned on the bottom where they would never rot. Like the saints themselves said Mark’s grandfather. Or the Kings of Ireland added mine not to be outdone. ‘But I thought there was no bottom to it?’ ‘I could not resist. Mark choked down a laugh so the slap was worth it even though I staggered and almost fell in.

‘Mark’ I shout ‘Come back in I have something I want to tell you before we get the bags out.’ I do not need to look to know he is grimacing and lifting his arms in exasperation. He thinks he will be late for his flight but he will not be.

That evening of the bottomless stinking bog pools, I disappeared from the house into the dusk and went back. I ran back along the banks of turf and kicked over the pyramids of peat that I had stooped to build for weeks. He was there looking down into the dark waters -deep into it. Tall and sad and beautiful. An enormous urge

swelled up in me : I came up behind him and I kicked his fat arse into the rancid water and jumped in after him. All went black.

My head broke the surface and I looked around for him. He touched my shoulder. He was behind me standing in dirty water up to his waist. I stood up too and laughed. Then silence. 'The bloody lying Feckers' he said quietly. I paddled over to him and grabbed his face and shoved my stinking tongue into his sour mouth. He kissed me back.

Mark hates when I call the Pope, Frankie the Nazi Boy, he corrects me reminding me that is the other pope. So I call him Francis when I say to Mark that he has finally openly sanctioned civil partnerships for homosexuals, that gay people, gay couples have a place in the Catholic Church, that God loves us the way we are. I don't tell him I think the Pope is throwing us scraps from the table of the institution of Marriage. Instead I sit beside him in the rental car and stroke his hair. He is thinning ever so slightly. He knows without asking I have cancelled his flights. I can't tell whether he is angry or not? I don't ask him why he wants to carry on living a lie. I sit beside him but I cannot see what he is staring at. I take out the new tickets and place them on his lap. I can't run at him and kick his arse today so I pray to a God I don't believe in. And reach for his hand.

A BEACH IN JANUARY

ds maolalai

buildings rise
like flowerpots
cracking in long-
emptied gardens
at the neat backs
of houses, long-
empty / for sale:
cranes, thistles swaying
between them, rising
past cobbles and wagging
their spiky blue stems,
their long spiky
shoulders. making some colour
and breaking down old
concrete slabs. I walk
down d'olier street, I walk
to the quayside, and the city
just falls into water. a beach
in a january, a cold-
blown sand;
short cliffs. grassy
roots. slipping roads.



I AM A RUIN

cian nolan

I am a Ruin
I wonder how many birds are living in me
I hear a crow flapping its wings
I see a cow grazing in the grass
I want to be rebuilt
I feel like the good old days
I touch the rough hay
I worry about being knocked down
I cry thinking about the good old days
I am a ruin
I understand that the good old days can't come back
I say that things will be good
I dream about being rebuilt
I try to be in use for others
I hope to be rebuilt
I am a ruin

WINDSWEPT GRIEF

claire loader (left)

MOTHERLAND

peter burrows, after The Quiet Man and Brooklyn

In technicolour, the locals squabble on the platform
to direct the stranger, whilst Old Michaelleen Flynn
sensing some return, quietly takes up the luggage.

Drawing up at the derelict cottage, her voice recalled:

Don't you remember, Seany, how it was? Whitewashed.

Thatched. Roses. Once again. A birth-right reclaimed:

I've come home, and home is where I'm going to stay.

You'll realise this is where your life is. Leaving again.

Dulled green pastures reflect off the bus window.

Behind, the doubled-life which almost claimed anew
an emboldened spirit - a promise, long past.

That night, the last, taking hold of the once possessed;
the fleeing face - a mother's self-preservation:

I'd like to say Goodbye now, and only once.

INVOCATION

scott elder

Come to me in a whisper. I'll give
you the wheel. You can drive

through the night fleeting,
with me at your side listening

to warnings of gales in Rockall,
to the thundering rain and showers.

Your position's uncertain. From village
to village I veer. The roadside's a shiver,

a swish and sigh, a cat jumping free...
Oh come to me in the midnight.

I'll be your rising, your swell into Shannon,
your spring tide and Irish Sea.

RUIN WITH A VIEW

lisa perkins

On Montpelier Hill we swallow lumps
of the road that chased us here. Beyond
the pale urban curve, we trace the body home
Haunted backs to a banquet room of burning

'Circle three times and he'll appear...'

Lick of sea, stacks of smoke, clash of headless spades
We mop up the ghostly hands we're given

An inner city lung that coughed out grandparents
now long gone, to the concrete ankle where my children
kick an overflowing can
I see me punching trails, the da silence-heavy, two high-
wired dogs, the pine-drunk flies of Summer. Everything nipping
on another's edge at once

*'They say a boy turned mute overnight at the sight
of a shadowless beast
And then of course, that priest...'*

Later we'd bike it's veiny bait, sing a warning fuelled
by devil's piss and neck hair. So many of us huddled
we cast no shadow

I heard a woods is not a woods until reborn at least once
And what's a trail without a girl, a dog and a cast
of biting beasts traipsing the length of its body,
looking for something to chase

DON'T LET IT BURN/DON'T LET IT FADE

clem flowers, for dolores o'riordan

Where are ye now, O beautiful girls of the mountain, Oreads all?
Nothing at all stirs here save the drip of the fountain; Answers our call
- "Nymphs"
Katharine Tynan

It was so fucking hot outside the first time I heard you.

I was laying on my belly on the bench on our front porch, praying the humidity would drop just enough so it wouldn't feel like walking thru a melting candle in an unwashed jelly jar outside, when the DJ asked if we remembered just a few summers ago, when this was a hit.

I didn't, but within the first few notes I was gone.

A haunting, gentle breeze of strings, and your voice of honeyed sorrow, and you'd shown me what a fool I'd been to only know Ireland from Irish Spring commercials and that time I heard Bono ramble about Dublin in a U2 live set my older cousin was playing while we played Gunstar Heroes.

Your mournful beauty took me to the rainy countryside, the water running along in a melancholy splendor, the air rich with scents of anise & bog rosemary, the high longing & desperation that permeated so many rich parcels of art that your homeland sent out for the world to admire -

& then the song ended & then I nervously went to my mom to ask if she'd buy me a CD of a song I just heard on the radio. I didn't know the name, so I sheepishly sang the chorus while staring at the ground.

"Oh! The Cranberries. Yeah, I like that song too; it's really pretty. Sure, I'll get it for you. That's your allowance for the week, though."

Fair trade.

I fucking loved that album. Still do.

Everybody Else Is Doing It, So Why Can't We?

It's an absolute pleasure & I remember playing that song so many times, it wore that part of the disc down to where it would start skipping whenever my little boombox got

to that track.

That magic -

That allure-

That honey it put in my heart -

I wanted it to linger.

TODAY IN THE OBITUARIES

conor henry

It is the Irish conglomerate
of omniscience
that makes a stranger's death
so familiar - as their life
was interwoven with those
of friends, relatives, parents,
cousins; so too their death
is interwoven with our grief.

It is not knowing everyone myself,
but knowing people who together do,
that makes the spilling sands
and drifting wood of time
so tiring.

It is not knowing names and faces,
or even the history of their bloom
and blossom and decay -
it is hearing their names and seeing
faces crumble like chalk. It is
how their stories are told, how tears
fall in plush, cavernous silence
as stalagmites grow and
roses bloom, blossom, decay.

It is not about me.
These are not stories I will tell
as if I have any right to tell them.

It is not about the heartbreak
I do not feel, to my guilty dismay;
it is just knowing that someone new
paints the obituary pages,
that friends, relatives, parents,

cousins, stare at the glossy photos
and empty chairs, and weep.

Life carries on, flowing
with the little rivers
tracking down our cheeks.
Life carries on,
and so must we.

Tired, aching with the friction
between shards of glass hearts
and the steady roll of the present:
So must we.

WE THOUGHT THE SEA WAS OURS

anthony o'donovan

We thought the sea was ours. The sandy shore our playground. The tide often left us gifts we'd search for each morning among neat rows of freshly laid seaweed. We'd find someone else's rubbish half-hidden in the grey sand and brown-green kelp. The sky-blue frayed ropes a fishing boat discarded. Glinting glass jars and bottles, their labels long washed off. Mum told us a man in Norway put a note in a bottle and threw it into the sea and it ended up on a beach near here. But we never ever found a note. Once, there were lots of strange blue spheres, like dyed tennis balls which we collected. We played a game to see who could find the most and Maya won.

We could hear the sea from our house and we came to know its moods. On stormy nights the waves would crash and roar and whoosh and wake us in fury. In the morning, when the sea was calm again, the beach looked different. Angry waves pushed stones and moved banks of sand out of its way, like daddy would do with the furniture when he came home late.

The morning we found the whale was such a morning. Even though it was so big we didn't notice it straight away, so focused were we on rooting through the slimy seaweed to see what wonders the water left us. Maya spotted it first. And when we looked at it properly it was so big, it didn't seem real. That we were dreaming.

We seemed to shrink, the closer we got to it. It's blue-tinted skin, sleek like the polished mahogany on mum's piano. Maya asked what it was in a hush whisper, as if not to wake it. I told her and we stared at it in silence. Then she put her hand on its head and I was too shocked to stop her. The creature didn't move, didn't stir, and I pulled her back. She threw me off and put her hand back where it was. After a moment, there was a noise, a sort of humph, like the sound an elephant might make if it were swallowing something. We both ran to tell mother and I got there first.

Men came to drag it out to sea, and even they seemed small beside it. Like Lilliputians with Gulliver. The tide didn't seem to want to take it back. It stayed for weeks slowly changing, being stripped inch by inch and we were forbidden to go near it. When the wind was a particular way, we could smell it from our house. Eventually, more men came and blew it to bits and it became lost among all the other things on the beach the water had cast out.

I wish I had touched it that day. Maya said it felt cold and firm, like a soft stone. I thought about when I kissed granny on the forehead for the last time in her coffin before they closed the lid. Every morning after a storm we look to the spot we first saw it, expecting to see it return. We didn't know the sea wasn't ours, and that we just tended to it.

GROWING
jim xi johnson (right)



SUNDAY REQUIEM

robin mcnamara

I'm rooted to life in a town with bleak
windows and blending in crowds.
Chimney puffs and hacking coughs. The air is
heavy with religion and the Sunday match.
Dare I try...dare I wonder, at your devotion.
I hear a murmur of disapproval/
a growl of dissatisfaction, for wanting better.

My pen is parched. Rebellious even.
Old men with whiskey from rye. The lost and
damned and the red eye beckons in the corner
of your future. The inferno of the poets' words
matters not to them.
They spit on the sawdust floor.
On a hard Sunday afternoon the draughts of
opinions cannot penetrate those thick glasses
and trench coats that prop up the bars.

Thick nicotine-stained fingers with glasses of
Jameson. Men loathing themselves.
Dare I wonder at the small boy who came back
one day and roared his adult disapproval.

Where time has declined and the men have
reclined their opinions in their old, twilight age.
Over time—nothing's changed.

PASSING MOLERICK BOG

s.c. flynn

This is a gate to the underworld, they used to say,
and it's easy to think so when the mist floats up at dusk,
a guardian spirit hiding secrets in a cloak,
and the earthy smell grows richer in the dampening air.
Places like this are Ireland's unconscious, storage rooms
lasting millennia, so somewhere down there –
maybe right near the bottom – must be a bit of me
locked in acidic stasis, patiently waiting
while my ancestors left and I at last returned.
I will not go digging, afraid of what I'd find,
as I learnt to think of underworlds as Hell
and I know already how that might feel:
the clawing anguish and need to escape
that leave you gasping for breath, groping for the surface,
desperate to cross back to the other side,
a shattered hermit emerging from seclusion
after battle with the Devil; I hurry on.

RUNKERRY SONG

olivia heggarty

This evening there is evening conversation
about lemon drop chilli jam, champagne
bottles spotted through the orange oil strip
of his window,
rabbits hung on the back of his granny's door

but I never thought about birds being neighbours,
and the trees above are baubled with nests and the
crows are talking too —

and there is evening conversation about her
journey through mucky Runkerry hills in search
of tinfoiled Easter eggs that were never there
to begin with

but look! at the black lambs, and black slugs
on pilgrimages with knapsacks! They are pushing
their bellies over
the tough ground for Easter Sunday and their own
bodies are crosses!

I see now.

You can't write poems in company —
it takes you out of the world.

But have you ever noticed that the sea does not fade
to black along with everything else this evening?
and especially not here,
and especially not now that I've written it so.

OUR KNIGHT IN LENTENTIDE

ed lyons

I have been born into a world I now nothing of.

I have looked into the skies
to know were and whether my lady lies
true and fair.

I await her not. Circe lies on the page I would write,
lonely for her master. I have seen three faces there,
and Dragon ascended, curled in clouds.

Now the skies have darkened,
night has fallen, the rain falls gently.

The tears of a woman, Father Sky,
and Mother Earth.

The lake rises not; the rivers run in their beds.
And the banjoes of Georgia, black voices and their balm.

Now the lights are bright in Baggot Street,
as I wait for the 10 in Stephen's Green,
and the pubs are alive in Haddington Road
toward the light I wander.

Oceans, cultures, borders, tear my lady away.
Zeus gathers himself, unleashing his final assault
on the heart still in love.

Line by line she would surely die in that other farce.
Azaleas in their second blooming, dogwood by wisteria.

In a few hours the sun will shine again on Howth,
Ireland will awaken to Wednesday of Holy Week,
the bells of St. Mary's ringing with the sounds
of Guinness' men
behind the 51.

WHO READS OBITUARIES FOR TRUTH ANYWAY?

p.w. bridgman

There's a kind of risk/benefit analysis goes into it, this business of writing one's own obit. Can you see? It clearly won't sit well with some. But who can you really trust with the last word about you, *but you?* If making some thin-skinned types cross must be the price, then *pay it!* Bang the drum. Wax lyrical about what you want people to remember, with bits added in that some may prefer to forget. Everyone rewrites history now. A little sin in the mix lends verisimilitude, helps the false positives seem less like spin. So, I told them: "Leave the obit with me. It can do double duty as the eulogy". One smirked, one stared at the wall. The third insincerely praised my ingenuity.

Who reads obituaries for truth, anyway? Like new wallpaper, these florid encomia mostly obscure the true plaster-saint lives of their clay-footed subjects. Occasionally, between the lines, one gleans that a departed one's been horrid. But truth-telling isn't the obituarist's remit: rather, it's hagiography unchecked. Before, I tended to read the obits at about 3:00 a.m. in the bog. I'd slink down, fetch the paper from the step and shuffle in for my constitutional—like a clown, a drowsy, stumbling, unfailingly regular noctambulant in his paisley nightgown. Does my jaundiced view of obits come from reading them next to the bog-roll? The atmosphere's not solemn there; better suited perhaps to reading doggerel.

These awkward little gatherings at the foot of my bed are all that's left us now. The cancer's invaded my spine. There's no more folding me into a wheelchair for dull little circuits round the hospital garden. No more pausing to note how much or how little that feeble little clutch of withering daffodils near the stair has grown. Easter's in the air, aye, but God's in a decidedly ugly humour. The latest broadside from Pathology came on Easter Sunday! A new tumour is now budding like a Christmas cactus at the base of my skull. A late bloomer. The medics don't use words like "toast", at least not within a patient's earshot. But we all know I'm too burnt to scrape. Dear God, this disease is a juggernaut.

Time now to think. I know I haven't always given them what they deserved. That word "always": I've removed and restored it ten times. I guess it stays, but the hesitation is telling, no? The line tracking my car sales each year curved

ever upward. So many meetings that couldn't be missed. So many birthdays that could. Who else needs a mnemonic to recall when their kids were born? Who but me? I owed them every kind of bounty but left them popping corn. I can't remember giving them baths, helping them with maths. Duty forsworn, it was pretty comfy up on the pig's back—swanning about, Platinum Club top performer for 26 years running. Twenty-six! Only osteosarcoma made me stop.

Right. Well. I'm down from the pig's back now. Flat on *my* back in a muck of my own making (and raking). Time to atone is running out. They seem so dutiful standing there—Polly, Ruth and little Jim—eking out only small talk, monosyllables. All three smartly sporting my ginger hair, their mum's dark sloe eyes. And me, my thoughts lately wandering to laundering my reputation. Imagine! It's now so clear, pinned to this bed by disease and mortification. I can see it. I can see that it is beginning again, even here—the subjugation of every hard truth and every selfless instinct, all to serve the greater goal of executing a posthumous deception, one final wobbling and pitiable capriole.

So I've stopped myself and given the job to Ruth,
 who promises to tell the truth.
The obit will do double duty as my eulogy.
 She may or may not be kind to me,
 but I've given her one reason
 to try to be.

CHOCOLATE AND SEMANTICS

jay rafferty

- Would you look.
- What?
- The sweetie shop is still selling Easter bunnies
- Are they taking the piss? Sure, Easter was last month.
- So?
- So, with Easter gone, they aren't Easter bunnies anymore.
- Give over, they're still Easter bunnies
- Everyone knows Easter bunnies are only Easter bunnies when Christ himself rises from the tomb and turns them to chocolate. It's like the Wedding at Cana for Belgians.
- Alright then if they aren't Easter bunnies they can be May bunnies.
- May bunnies?
- What's wrong with May bunnies?
- May bunnies are just rabbits.

JOURNEY

rick magee

The cliff points across the North Channel
to Scotland, hard stone promontories
rising cathedrally from glowing green
grass and moss.

“I want to go there,” he says,
his small face set between
determination and wonder.

And so we climb,
and I set my body between
the small explorer and the drop to the sea.

We play this game at every
place loaded with myth and meaning
for me.

I hear in those Irish names
my books
and passed along stories
about great grandparents.

For him, they are a feast
to feed the visions of a small hero.

His small hand seeks mine
on a rocky, muddy climb
and I can feel every
little bone and grasping muscle
and my heart hurts
as if he were squeezing
that rather than my hand.

From another cliff top
we can see from Skellig to Blasket.
He carries a twig found
lower on the path that in the climb
has turned into a key.

We search for a hidden door
in the piles of Irish stone.
One lichen-clad slab speaks
to us and we find the keyhole.
Who will be released?
Friend or foe?
Magician or mortal?
We are prepared:
a small flower plucked
as friendly favor.
A mystic token.
A plastic sword.

We battle an evil wizard
before new grounds call us away.
The cliff presents sharp
black teeth so I again
spread my arms as if
I could protect him always.
He laughs at my cruciform pose,
smiles with his turf-brown eyes.
“I’m okay, Daddy,” he says
punctuating that with a kiss
on my cheek.
I feel his soft vital body
against me,
smell the shampoo with which
I washed his hair this morning.

And wonder why love
feels so much like dying.

(SLIGO:1997) THESE GHOSTS HAUNT
carl walsh

the heft of backpack
worn boots that thread stone paths
I drink in Wine Street
talk with Mr Quirke in his butcher-shop
he carves mythology into timber
shapes an off-cut for me
a leaping fish
the 'salmon of knowledge'
or – perhaps
(as Douglas Adams would've had it)
the 'salmon of doubt'

I've *cast a cold eye* on the poet's grave
on Medb's cairn on Knocknarea
on Carrowmore
where stones channel rain
charnel houses
bones split between air and sky
in exchange for Guinness
I donate blood
offer to donate more

ravens mediate between
this ribcage of standing stones
this beating heart

the wind has bundled up the clouds
I find a pub to warm my skin
tell barman I'm hitchhiking
he finds a piece of card letterheaded 'Fosters'
for the Aussie backpacker
on one side he writes 'Galway'
on the other 'anywhere...'

[includes quotes from W.B. Yeats in italics]



ON MY WAY HOME

megan o'driscoll

Dublin city is like a cathedral tonight
— very beautiful and I am not sure when or where to sit down.
The ceilings must be very high because even when the clouds aren't low
I still can't quite make them out. A lot of things make me a little bit sad.
Some streets are little graveyards — I walk through them like parks and think
About how I didn't know how to be sad at fourteen.
A lot of things get born here and come back again to die.
I was so big when I learned how to walk
From Westland Row to Stephen's Green
And back before dark.
I am so small in the dark tonight.

I am putting my hands to the pavement and checking for a pulse.
I am looking at my hands and hoping I am clean.
I am looking into the streetlight unblinking and hoping some light gets inside of me.
The problem with home is you can't change it.
The problem with home is it won't stop changing.
I know Dublin city is not a cathedral and I will prove it to you:
Next time the clouds part I will point you to the stars.

LIFEBUOY, ARDMORE

alan murphy (left)

DUBLIN WINTER

nathanael o'reilly

i.m. Kay Quigley

On Parnell Road beside the Grand Canal
near the Dolphin's Barn library we stop
to change the rear driver's-side tyre on a blue
hatchback for a young woman with my wife's
name travelling with her toddler and mother.
All three wait in the car while we labour
in the rain with a rusty jack and nuts.

We visit my great-aunt in Portobello,
learn the ice has kept her inside for days.
Kay welcomes us into her kitchen,
makes tea, shares her special biscuits,
says the last time the canal froze over
she was a child. Standing beside her
photo-covered fridge door, she narrates
each picture, names each child, grandchild,
great-grandchild, boyfriends and girlfriends,
explains where each loved one is living,
working and studying, from Boston
to Virginia to Chicago.

After great craic at O'Donoghues,
we head towards Temple Bar but never
make it, lured by warmth and sweet music
into the Dame Tavern, where we sing,
talk and drink until sleep calls our names.

In St. Mary's we regard the columns,
marble statues and stained glass, sit
silently near the altar in a pew
with my surname engraved on a gold plaque.

On New Year's Eve we join the crowds
on the street outside Christchurch, sing

and dance with the guards, call our loved ones,
embrace strangers as the midnight bells toll.

CARRYING HOME

anthony wade

When Home among cousins
and the green fields of summer play,
or walking a gently-grassed *bóithrín**
hedged high, red-blue fuchsia bells
tinkling silently in the constant sea-breeze,
and, as free as the hares in the fields,
running barefoot and unseen
on soft yellowed open strands,
springing across glistening
sea-shaped stones blessed
by a withdrawing tide,
with the stretching sea
murmuring an untiring summer song
to clouds sailing a big wind
across a reaching sky,
London seemed unreal and distant
but for many of us, born here, or there,
hard London with its
choking smog-heavy winter streets
and summer's loud and busy black smelly roads
of heated tarmac greedily grasping underfoot
was where the future lay
with its long promise of harder wealth
but always carrying songs of Home,
and the dream of one day returning.

bóithrín: boreen: literally small road; narrow,
often poorly paved, rural road in Ireland.

IASC NA BEATHADH

michelle granville (right)



THE WEST OF IRELAND.

In terms of Irish body image, folk
we conclude, being revelatory of Irish attitudes
Ford was annotated.

and growing.
A and thinking one to say
is my country, the
bearing attitudes in
a, Ford and are
of 2000 years ago
"wield." This
is a language of
and not the

generally believed to be a slipper
skewered under the arm in the front of
to a feather, the fish of life

with
your
to
CITY

I'M HOLDING A BLOW UP DUCK

róisín sheridan-bryson

It's difficult to get through the door with this. It's taking up too much space again. The Big Thing in the room - the Big Thing with a capital B. It isn't new, I didn't buy it new - it's happened before. It happened when your mother died, and when you got your hair cut, and when your cat ran away, and when your mother died. At night time the problem grows exponentially. Now it's the size of a beach ball (filled - not burst). It's the size of a small country. It's the size of all the shipping forecasts since the beginning of time laid out in a line. When you look at me like that I fall in love in two minutes, you have to stop doing that with your eyes. I fall in love in two minutes.

WATERFORD FIELDS

kevin macalan

And when the boys have left their fields,
and left their youth, and left their tight smooth skins,
the skies are dressed in colder sunsets,
blown further in, pressed deeper
into a slot of thought less often dislodged
as a memory by the probing scratch of reminiscence.

Etched into the dead-dark soil, small allotments
of wind-torn labour, in heathered fields
strewn with dusk, on coastal farms grow
sheep and old, and short of visions, until ruptured
dry-stones are the only sight: sad patchworked silhouettes
stooped beneath the weight of darkening sky.

Drumming winds erode to dust each clump of grey-brown sod,
and drive to foam the bay's wet head to rob
the farm as age robs man. Dried and scarred,
forced to grow or wither at rest, an ancient mark
stood against the cleansing rub, the dripping rub, the endless rub
erasing youth from boys and boys from fields.

ANOTHER ROUND

matthew egan

The noise rose later in the evening as the sun fell lower in the sky. The doors were held back with pegs and the path was crowded by smokers enjoying the cool spring evening. Shouting and singing could be heard all around from the men and women in black who mourned and toasted a life that had been lost.

Stories were shared about the good times and the bad with knowing looks from those who knew the stories that would never be repeated. Nobodies a saint in life though once the coffin is lowered and the mourning begins, things are never the way they were. No more slights or anger, only misunderstandings and forgiveness.

A solitary figure sat at the bar in silence, his back hunched forward and his head low. He looked solemnly at his drink and sipped it slowly. A lonely man surrounded by company, of laughter and fond memories.

He finished his drink and was joined by an old woman, her blonde hair straight to her shoulders. She wore a sad face that had been fixed into a smile. The old man looked to her and forced a grin which faded as quick as it came.

‘How are you getting on?’ she asked.

‘You know. I’m getting there,’ the man garbled back with a long breath. ‘Not an easy day, as I’m sure you know more than anyone.’

‘Yeah.’ She nodded and they fell quiet.

‘How are the kids?’

‘You know, they’re okay, I suppose. Being strong for me.’

The old man nodded and gestured to the barman for another. He was silent as he watched the golden liquid fill his glass.

The old woman stared at him and pursed her lips. She placed a soft hand on his back and stepped down from her stool. ‘He wouldn’t want you to be sad for him,’ she said before disappearing into the crowd.

The man closed his eyes and shook his head. He leaned back, looked around and saw the smiles, the laughter and felt tears forming. He wiped his eyes and turned back to his drink, downing it in one.

He ran a finger along his slim moustache and looked down the bar. ‘Another round,’ he said, his speech slurring.

‘I think you’ve had enough Piper,’ The barman replied coming towards him. ‘I haven’t had enough Jim.’

‘You have. Don’t get yourself into a state.’

The barman turned from him quickly, his attention being drawn to the crowd at the far end. ‘Fuck this,’ Piper mumbled to himself and lumbered over the bar, knocking glasses to the floor without a care as he grabbed the bottle of Jameson he had been courting all night. He ignored the crowds pleas for this or that and moved out of sight just as the barman turned back.

He stumbled across the crowded pub, bottle in one hand and two empty glasses in the other as he entered the parlour. It lay quiet, a comfortable corner hidden by partitions with a long table and dim lighting. He sat down and filled the two glasses, staring at them in silence before taking one with a soft touch and whispering, ‘To the greatest man I have ever known, a friend, a brother, a life that won’t be forgotten.’

He tapped his glass against the other and downed his drink in one before filling it again.

He sat silent, his hand gripping his drink and listened to the joy of everyone outside. The laughter and the singing. The stories being told and the memories that wouldn’t be forgotten. ‘It was a good send-off Pat,’ he whispered. ‘You’d have enjoyed it. Mulligans won’t be the same, and now I’m alone with only the memories of the good times to look back on.’ Piper held his glass high again. ‘To the good times,’ he said for the final time. He downed his drink again and wiped away his tears. ‘You won’t be forgotten,’ he said and stood, bottle in hand, leaving the filled glass on the table in peace.

FLOWERS AT THE GATE

evin rogers

He was in my school, a year
or two above me, around my sister's age.
No doubt she would have told me.
All I ever saw of it were flowers

tied with ribbon to the gate,
wilted, browning, their wrapping
worn but bright enough
to catch my eye.

The farmer must have sold the field.
Today the gate and hedge are gone,
and clean rows of bright new homes
stand happily in sunlight.

In front of the busy playground
a lone ash stands, sole souvenir
of a quieter road where trees grew
dense and shadows lingered closer
than one young man could stand.

SHADES OF ULYSSES

jim ward (right)

SHADES OF 'ULYSTES'



BY
J. WARD

THERE ARE NOT MANY FINER THINGS

josh fortune

There are not many finer things to remark upon in life, than any thing that unexpectedly makes you feel:

the surprise of fingers becoming intertwined with your own ones as you become led through a crowd, and the confusing goodbye squeeze that ends the journey.

A random street where old ladies sit down on plastic white chairs, going ninety in a language that you didn't need to understand, selling you a spirit that makes your throat blaze like a hearth that's made of sour-cherry Haribos.

Taking time into a Summer's day and thumping the head off it, (0)
_____until all that remains in the crusty grass are arse-marks
_____and the sprawling blood of the sun.

Leaving somewhere with a conversation imprinted on you, echoing
{-----}
throughout the caverns of your ears.

When you're in the shops and a child becomes a crying flag, with its hands securely glued to something, and its parent is providing its legs with some wind to flap about in, desperately trying to tear the little fucker away.

Getting home from school when Winter would steal the Jaffa Cake-wrapper sunsets from you, and your mum asking you what you wanted from the chipper (garlic cheese chip fuckinggudtya).

Standing mashed beyond belief in the middle of a party, watching your last drop of charm spill into dispersed groups

of locked people cutting shapes,

as your friend fades away into an excuse for an exit.

Strutting down the whistling waterfront of the promenade with your

newly-purchased *

second-hand, *

button-missing,

carpet-smelling, *

old-tissues-in-the-pocket *

jacket on, feeling like a real Billy Big-Bollix, as you're about to go and mill some pints.

Touching your alabaster upper lip after a clean shave,

astonished at how much hair sticks to the sink.

When a dog comes up to you and selects you as the recipient of a thousand licks;

as the belly rubber; as the arse scratcher.

MY RELATIONSHIPS WITH IRISH MEN AS A HALF-TIME SCORE

fokkina mcdonnell

Liverpool	1	Dublin	2
Dead	2	Married	1 (*)

() Late second marriage to a colleen, after we split over Brexit, after his Mammy died.*

These shirts are collectors' items:

Jack	37
Peter	60
Tim	73

IN EPPING

bern butler

she marvelled how like England England was
not imagined fiction in Enid Blyton books:
bobby at the station with his cockscomb hat,
woman buying tickets saying *hawf* for *half*.

Not made up the rows of red-tiled roofs,
streets of neat-bricked houses, where
children never disobeyed, chimed *please*
and *fank-you* to the mister in the shop.

Where lawns were watched like enemies,
hedges cropped and trees imprisoned
along pavements, ripe with fallen plums,
that summer she went to see her sister.

Such order in comparison to home
where semi-wild, she raided apples
from the gardens of The Blessed
Church of Sanctimonious (but spat
because of wretched bitterness)

thieved blackberries from blackbirds
down laneways clogged with gorse, burnt-
out Escorts, brambles strung with plastic bags
(bunting of the dispossessed) near Ragoon flats.

Whereas in Epping, plenty, ease; that sense
of *lived-in* Englishness going back, and back
intact, unlike her patch of interrupted wasteland
its damaged roots, rampant hungry grass.

ACHAIDH CHÉIDE

carmel mc mahon

A poem can root itself in the mind. In Nayyirah Waheed's *Lands*, she says her mother was her first country, the first place she ever lived. Maybe this poem engendered the line of thinking that brought me to be sitting here at this desk, looking out over the bog-brown fields of North Mayo, and wondering why, after having lived in so many different landscapes, this is the one that has welcomed me home.

I moved here in November 2021 after a long emigration in the US. My partner and I found a house on the opposite coast from where I grew up in Ashbourne, Co. Meath. It was built as a cottage in 1860 as part of an older homestead, but the many generations who lived here after kept adding extensions, so now it is rambling and impractical and lovely.

The Céide Fields are a short bike-ride up the road. They are a field system that has been preserved under a blanket of bog for 6,000 years. A local man, while cutting turf in the 1930s, uncovered stones he knew to be very old. An archeological site was formed and a visitor centre opened in 1993, the year I left Ireland, a broke and anxious twenty-year-old, for New York City.

My parents moved to Ashbourne from Dublin in the early 1970s, when it was a village with a population of 400. No one had any money. My mother hung bedsheets on the windows, until curtains, not as necessary as food or fuel, could be saved up for and bought.

In my memory it rained every day. We children were always outdoors and always seeking shelter; in the half-built houses of a new estate, in the sheds behind the old school, in a ditch in a field. We could not wait to be sixteen, the unofficial drinking age, when we could sit inside the warmth of the pub. We could not wait, really, a whole generation of us, to leave this damp and dead-end land.

Once a year, while living abroad, I visited my family. Taking vacation from my waitressing, and later, admin jobs to spend a week with them. Over a quarter of a century, I lost touch with my hometown. My mother continued to tell me about all the latest changes: the new houses, schools, chain-stores, pubs, restaurants, cafes, clubs, hotels, bus stops, banks, playgrounds, hanging baskets, benches, clinics, gyms, bike

paths, a cinema, a bowling alley and a theme park. All good things, she would say, though you wouldn't recognize a soul in the street anymore.

We walk the back roads of North Mayo. Our eyes follow the lines of dry stone walls, blue/grey lichens, green/brown moss, yellow gorse. We talk to the neighbors about their sheep and cows. What, they ask, is our purpose in moving here? Do we have family connections to the place? They are surprised to hear we do not. They already think us touched for buying that old house, so we do not push things by telling them we have never felt at home in the world, but we dreamed of this light, these sounds, this sky.

At the Céide Fields Visitor Centre, I learn that it rains two days out of three in North Mayo. The rain keeps the bogs healthy and forming. They are essential for the environment, not only to nurture their immediate ecosystem, but the greater ecosystem of the planet. While bog lands cover only three percent of the earth's surface, they store twice as much carbon as all the rain forests combined.

We stop to read wall text about the people who arrived here during the early Neolithic period. They built stable dwellings, raised animals, grew crops and buried their dead within the lines of their dry-stone walled enclosures. I pick up an earpiece and listen. It is a recording of Seamus Heaney reciting the poem he wrote after visiting the site in 1974. Through his voice, I descend on soft, round vowels deep into the bog and far back into the past. He identifies what has been preserved in the peat, the stones and their metaphors, a troubled history, a tough land, and a line of tenacity connecting the people who lived then and the people who live now.

Outside on the hill, we find what we have come to see, the bog peeled back revealing ancient walls, a continuation of the walls we see drawn all over the landscape of North Mayo. The sketches that assemble a portrait of the people.

Back at the old house, we prepare supper. Fusilli from the Lidl in Ballina. Afterward, we look for a documentary on Netflix. We find *Reflections* about the Swedish artist, Karin Broos. The film was made by her daughter, and it traces the complexities of their relationship; the impact of traumas, and the distance between them. While painting a cast of her likeness, Karin says it is strange that you can create an accurate reproduction of a person's features but, the resemblance might not be there, yet, a simple sketch can capture it all. I am thinking about the parts that assemble a mother, a country, a home. And what lines might connect them to draw an authentic resemblance to the fore?

The climate changed in Ireland around the year 3200 BCE. It became colder and wetter. Rigid agricultural systems could not adapt, and the people left the hill. I have returned to this country and find myself looking for their stories in the soft bog. I stand on a fragile ecosystem that both preserves their homes, and protects our collective home for the future. This is a home in the world where we are not connected by blood, but by the line drawn through us, when we accept the hand of those who have gone before us, and we extend our other hand forth, to the fragile dream trying to root itself in the minds of those yet to be born.

KELP

ciarán parkes

In his last email he describes kelp
growing taller than the tallest tree
and how Shackleton and his small crew,
seeking help from Elephant Island, knew

they could cling to it as a last resort
if they didn't make landfall before darkness
fell again and how the danger
wasn't so much sinking as colliding

with the jagged coast, the cliffs, like them
all floating up above the highest branches
of kelp they could have twisted into rope
to anchor them, something like the rafts

Aran Islanders made from strands of seaweed
to drift back inland with the tide. He tells
how they made it safe ashore at last, the hull
of the *James Caird* battered, worn thin

as an upturned mussel shell, or maybe
leaves them there, still hanging on somehow
above the kelp, suspended in mid-air.

VOICES LOST IN THE WIND

kevin mcmanus

I call your name, but it gets lost in the rising wind,
your tears are drowned in the driving rain,
your face is fading in the fog of time.

Looking out to sea with the cold seeping into your skin,
thoughts like waves drifting from what might have been,
with the briny taste of the sea in your mouth,
and the far-off storm in your faraway eyes.



ATLANTIC PLASTIC
sacha hutchinson

I LOOK TO GEESE FOR HOPE

christina carty

for frances

Féachaim i dtreo na ngéanna
chun draíocht a chreidiúint
Mar níl ciall ar bith acu
Fíor ollmhór fíor aisteach
Sciatháin caite ar fud na háite
Squawk na meánaoise astu
Níl eitilt ag an gcréatur seo
Conas is féidir leis an aer a corp ramhar a thógáil?
Bhuel, imíonn sí leí
ar chraiceann an uisce
muineál a shíneadh, sciatháin ag fútráil go cru
Agus éiríonn sí suas
Thuas sa spéir
gan smaoineamh orm
nó mo dhá spadchosa

I look to geese for hope—because nothing about them is plausible. Awkward oversized body, wings jutting out at odd misshapen angles, the squawk of impending middle age—this creature cannot fly. How could air alone hold up her weighty torso? But she’s all outstretched neck, wings flapping, toes skimming—until, up she goes, into the air, without one thought for me or my two flat feet.

SLOW TANGO IN SOUTH BELFAST

olivia heggarty

I love it when we walk home from
the nightclub earlier than everybody else.

And Dublin Road is
a drunk man's holler. And the grand church is

an untrained orchestra. But we are quiet.
Just between us, I love it when we walk home

and it is this way. My legs were
seizing up like old car brakes in there. My ears are

filled-up glasses of salt water. Our
vast pavement, lying still outside

the university has been ripped open by feet;
you can hear the cement stones running for

their lives when you listen close —
but I was carried away from noise.

You can see how my hands don't quite
understand how to listen to it. Speak
softly to me — I will dance.

SANCTUARY

nathanael o'reilly

for jessica traynor

I.

Treeless grassed hills
divided by drystone walls,
sculpted by salted winds.
Slate-roofed cottages
scattered across landscape.
Sheep huddling beside
hedgerows in the drizzle.

II.

The logs in the fireplace
spit and crackle. Flames
ebb, rise on wind
gusting down the chimney.
Heat emanates from the hearth,
defrosts farmer's fingers
fresh from feeding cattle.

III.

An elderly man stands,
broad back to the window,
gnarled hands spread
above the orange flames,
bent forward at the hips,
drawn towards warmth
in late-January darkness.

LEGLISS

mike huett

Pick me up

Put me down

A graveyard, Kilrush. The church, dosed-up with heritage; infested by roofers & renovators. Me? I was looking for something, or someone.

Reared on stories of a giant of a man, a fighting man, a hard-drinking man; almost a mythical character. He'd fought in the town's square (often); he'd fought away at sea. (Fighting he did a lot, apparently). Later, he became a bootlegger in America. Then finally, after so many years, he returned home by ship ... an Odyssey of sorts.

Buried down by the water, I'd been told. The lay of the land now affected by an underground river (though with no mention of a boatman, to ferry the dead). The graves themselves, what was left of 'em, rising or sinking over time; sinners hell bent, perhaps?

A young labourer, all muscled enthusiasm, kindly offered help. *My break, no problem*, he said. I told him the name. We set about checking, where legible.

I didn't stop to think, it had caught my eye, I picked it up. Damp dirt pushed away revealed a grey stick? As I stared, the lad came up, *what have you there?* I held it out. *A leg bone that*, said he, *sure they're popping up all over*.

I stood there like an actor in a very low budget production of Hamlet; the stage manager, long unpaid, now taking the piss. Not even a skull. Alas, poor grandad. I knew him not, bar tales alone.

Maybe I'd found the man, or part of him at least? Then again, had I found another strand of the myth? A tragedy; huge, fighting, hard-drinking man, in the end left legless by water?

After a time, I placed it back down on the earth. Not much point taking a leg bone. I didn't really know whose femur it was. Besides, could've got a bit awkward at customs.

Anything to declare?

Er, I was looking for my roots ...

Pick me up

Put me down

IMAGINE

gráinne daly

Imagine a football field. Not one hugging the rugged West of Ireland coastline, but one surrounded by several tall tiers that stretch high into the heavens. A latticework of iron lengths crowns its perimeter in great cylinders cross-stitched from the Hogan Stand to the Cusack. Imagine a train passing by the railway end. There is a girl on the train. She is looking out at the pitch, recalling her brother playing there in his last match.

Suppose an empty Coke can rolls across the floor of the train and lodges under the seat opposite the girl. She is glad it is trapped by the thick metal buckle attaching the seat to the floor. Glad of the respite from the tinny sound of an empty can rolling backwards and forwards throughout the carriage. She checks to make sure there is nothing leaking from it, although she knows from the sound of it it has truly given up its contents. Her white runners intact, she looks out towards the blue slant of the Cusack Stand.

Let's say a bird drops a feather. It falls into the box at the Hill 16 end; just on the goal-line. It lies on the grass, lilywhite against the green. It looks out of place. The girl sees the two tall sticks that rise from the ground in perfect symmetry. Two identical white poles, black tipped, prefabricated, the crossbar with its short moustache of black; a perfect trigonometry of angles and lines. She remembers when the club used old P&T polls. Every summer the chairman would nominate a few players to paint them. One year her brother had been one of the chosen. It was the year that they went on to win their first county final. And from there, they won five in a row. Then, with the jingle of medals in his pocket, he got the call up to the county panel. The relatives called and they stayed for a week; the drinks cabinet in the house was opened and cleared several times over. They were back again six months later for his wake. Once again, the cabinet was drank dry.

Imagine a breeze swirling around centre-field where giants of men have stretched and contorted to catch leather balls. The breeze would set the fabric of a jersey in ripples across a body. It might upset the kick of a ball, seducing the need for more boot than usual. This breeze would carry the shouts of a player up above the tackle and over to the vigilant ears of a teammate. It would ferry cheers of fans into the din of action. This breeze would lift off the sod of a football field and ribbon towards the iron crown above. To where seagulls rest. And past players.

Imagine a set of eyes watching down on a girl on the train. She's looking at that very spot where the winning goal was taken. She remembers. Who could forget? That was the day, the last day. The day she reimagines.

GÁE BOLGA

rick magee

The stick is easily three times his height
but it fits well in his hands.

As the waves recede he chases them with his lance held high
striking at the water with a fierce battle cry.

When the waves return he flees shrieking
to stand on dry sand.

The waves today resemble small, docile ponies more than horses of the sea.
He chases and retreats endlessly, shouts and laughs harmonizing.

Water sprays from the stick as he swings it and
the droplets hang in the air prismaticly.

Finally the small hero tires, his pants saltwater soaked.

He wants to take the stick with us.

It is a great stick, he insists, that makes a great thwack on the waves.

I agree that it is the grand stick of the world
but it will not fit in our car, and sure the airline
will balk if we try to carry it aboard.

I think too of the drifts of sand already collected on the floormats
that someone at the car rental office in Dublin will have to clean.

We decide the stick must go back to the sea
so we toss it high and leap when it splashes down.

The last we see of it it is drifting toward Skellig.

FLORENCE DROPPED A NEW ALBUM

gale aitken

and I'm doing my laundry the bill's gonna be cheap this cycle
since I can't stand the lights on I want to leave but the weather
app keeps lying to me six hours four and half hours three hours
of rain of sleep of something else I'll keep black mould eating
the bathroom walls I am an ant-crawling picnic bench I am a
car alarm I am a bad gay porn I am a lost cause and I've never
been that tall I lost my last crumbs of tobacco to the spring
winds and I don't have enough to buy more there's too many
bottles for the bottle bank they're lying on the floor now green
crystals underfoot now celery on the bus stop roof now I like
to peel my nails on the 49 and drop them there I like to lay out
lines of thread and hair I like to think I've a DNA trail in case
something happens to me when I get off the bus I am in a sea-
shell I am under a hat I am a horse with blinkers on the noise
reaches out but cannot touch me it's taking all my energy not
to scream when the wind blows through the building site I
scrub my clothes in each night since the washing machine
broke I'm crouching I'm a leaf I didn't brush my teeth and I
didn't wash my face and it's still light somehow but it's blueing
soon I was just in time to see the streetlamps turn on to face
the bug moon the night sky's mild enough that I could sit
outside in my pyjama shorts so I sit outside in just my pyjama
shorts.

And nobody's around to stop me.

IN '52 NOBODY DIED

terry doyle, for PG

You made your suited entrance,
clean cut from the peat bog of Allen.
Travelling over twelve hundred miles
to drink lagumbra, corralled by Dead Man's Corner –
the bulls of Navarre drawing in.
Knowing that if you fall you should never get up.
Unsuppressed like slack draped in Latin sweat
braving your left hand, barrelling down
the wrinkled number of the beast's back.
This is the legend of Hopper's Bar,
the early hour snugs of Shinrone,
the mozo limp, unpredictable of step,
a red handkerchief waving from your double breast
and with that, onto the next.



CROW, GALWAY BAY
sacha hutchinson

CILL DROMA

claire loader

In the end we are a trickle, karst hilltops lifted out from the sea, rock worn as if by the ocean, the rain, the constant flow to its base. They call this place Cill Droma, the Church of the Ridge, though no trace of such remains. The only ringfort now a cluster of stones, bulldozed into a pile, tips yellow with the bloom of gorse.

There were trees here once, whole forests, temperate woods before axe and scythe. There were cattle, roaming fortunes, before stone walls, potato drills crisscrossed the raised earth. And always the water from that first rise, each since, labours to flow ever downward; tears over an unmarked burial - sacred water, sacrifice - seeping into the waiting clay. Spring rains, winter's damp. All filters down, finds its way into the dark caverns of the soil.

There is a *lisín* at the bottom of the hill. Memories set down with tiny bones beneath the earth. We think of history separately, as if the energy of life divides us from the dead - that the water I wash the dishes with, the sweat with which we toil, somehow stays. Yet our memories will go too, where others were placed. Little bodies laid to rest, where our own will eventually find them.

ON LOOKING AT PHOTOGRAPHS OF
CLOSED-DOWN ST. BRIGID'S
HOSPITAL, BALLINASLOE

bern butler, i.m. my grandmother

I see strewn, dank debris in hollow rooms
tattered patterned curtains, dipping
to black floor pools, mildewed lockers
splayed on crumbly carpet tiles;
curled-up edgy truths un-swept out.

In a clearing, bed-frames jangle-joust
a bewildered wheelchair idly rusts,
in the nurses' room pill-white coats hang
slack, dusty ghosts of hectic people
gone and not come back.

There's a sick-pink corridor, punched along
with dark-green doors whose gaping mouths
hang open, showing padded stapled walls;
etched souls' canvasses, yellowing, exposed.

No more needling medics wander,
or worse, no bored, clock-watching screw,
in the corner of a ward, I see an Exit sign,
its light not on, they've all gone home –

I think of you.

A TWEED SPINNER WATCHES THE WATER CHURN

oisín breen

My mother, and my father, too, they used to tell me stories you now know.
They told of the shattered hulls that decorated my childhood in Donegal.
And I remember, as I climbed one boat's unsteady beams, as water-rot swallowed ship-
Wood, I remember how softly my mother called to me. But I remember most the ken
Of watching the sense of water near fill my flesh, and how it blurred my feel for time,
Like their stories did. I remember, too, how I used to clamber down, my hands
Kneading sodden whorls of teak and oak, of cedar and mahogany, how I used to
Clamber down to race to the lapping water frame beneath the clouds, which
Sometimes then still carried the drenching gulping sound
Of fish lips pressing, pleased, round the drifting bodies of shrimp, and plankton, too.
Of fish lips harvesting skin-flakes, crustaceans, red algae, and the spirits of the dead
We left behind.

And when I was young, my parents also told me how they were the last to know
What happened before the boats that decorate the coast lost their will to swim.
My aunt and uncle, my brother and sister, too, were all too young, they told me.
They were too young to remember travel – back and forth – to the other kingdom,
In the praití trade. They were too young to ken how families sent ambassadors of dirt
To yield a crop, and income, and spare the ageing organs of a lineage of shared blood
The harrowing of another mouth to feed, as years waned. And they remembered
More, my family, but most of all how it was a heart-sore thing to send children, often
Young as ten, fathers and lovers, too, on months-long sea-sorry schleps to the fields of
Fife just to dig crops for a man whose sole gift was threat-stolen, grief-stolen, paper-
Stolen, fear-stolen land. And my mother, and my father, they knew how hard not
Knowing was, they knew how hard it was not to know, of either party in a coin-split
Net, what might have come to all those now and past, what might have come to those
We all must call 'dear to me'.

But the end came swiftly, just as theirs did. The boatmen dwindled, and few could
Carry kin those long 300 miles that resolve in hardened hearts in the firth of Forth,
Splitting Edinburgh and land that once belonged to painted men. So by 1940 the sea-
Flung diggers were done, done in Donegal, where my father, and my mother, some

Sixty years thereafter, also died, like the boats they loved, their motion stopped – as
Mine soon will – in a hospice by the sea.

Yet the memories that sustain us, they survive us still, even if their echo now erodes.

They once outpaced time with brilliance, riding on the common tongue, but today

They make do with the thinking flesh of men long known to me: Molloy's, tweed-
Spinners all, and Gallaghers, too, they who loaded mackerel, pollock and wrasse onto

Long sloops for years in hundreds counted, counted, they who gathered conger and

Dogfish, too, to fill their decks with a breathless flood of cavorting bodies drunk on
Airlessness, a flood of the life-sick, loose among the serried ranks of shredded gills, for

The plated flap that guards their swimmer's lungs gave no protection from hook or

Wire. And our memories still pass – and did before – even through the Ó
Dochartaigh, even they, whose line bent its knee to a bigamist king, whose fat mouth

Flapped with hip-hunger, even they hold the cold memory poverty sinks into human

Skin, the memory it leaves on jawlines time-heavy drooping, a memory become an

Age-baked tattoo no lathe can remove: a reminder of lifetimes of mud, of lifetimes

Spent washing in the mud to teach British thieves good manners.

Yet now I stand here, an old man on the beach, knuckle-kneading his cane, a watchful
nurse nearby, and when I stand here, near the boat we called Báid Eddy, its ship-wood

Half weed and water-wine, it is a landmark to everything that will pass with me:

Memories of love and memories of flesh, memories of the people we once were, and

The memory of all we lose when the water churns.

THE SWIMMERS

terry doyle

An aluminium stepladder peeling off-centre –
I'm guessing shot near the magic hour,
at Newtown Cove, along the cliff road early July;
little noise to side-track by.

A trinket linking sky to sea.
Think tides, think Old Moore's Almanac,
pressing out crème flat from shingle mill,
on the full, soft booming and booming.

And secured not for millennia.
Fashioned bare-plate bullion
conquering true from your mortar mix
tugging the lime-slipped pier affix.

An imagined volley of swimmers stripped
their gasping gasps rock countersink;
others more measured a deglazed date-brown
burst blowing in a film of viscosity.

All knapping the footrest's grip.
Having heard the voice of the sea,
tongues transmuted, mouths' ripped bliss,
they stare back in, towel-drying into common calcite.

IT IS NOT SILENT

deirdre maher

here on the winding Burren trail
the murmured prayer of bees
intoned over stones
like bone scorched white.
A cantankerous chorus of crows.
Everywhere your absence,
keen as the scythe's blade.
I am come home without you,
buried in English soil.
Caramel butterflies kiss the meadowsweet
tiny birds dart through
shimmering July grasses
to a rosary of insect hum.
Hazel branches reach
across my calvary path
green cob nuts bunched.
My London shoes slip on spongy moss
iridescent green and bog-brown
past birch and elder guarding faery dell
in ferny shadows.
Hawthorns blown
divide the fields,
bowed like gnarled old men
beaten down by care and toil.
Above, the Burren hillside
blanketed in mauve and ash.
Close by in the hedgerows
buddleia going over
honeys the stillness, broken
by the shard of a seabird's cry.
The strand where once we swam
not far now
just down the sticky tarmac road
past the ruined cottage,

trumpet flowers of woodbine
curling by the cracked wooden door
paint long peeled away.
Was it green?
Or white like the burnet rose
growing wild now on the path
curving round the pitted gable end.
It is not silent
here on the Burren trail.
The air remembers
the sighs of old women
who bade farewell to sons and daughters
across ages and oceans
the trees whisper their ancient lamentation
in the Burren beo.

MY GRANDFATHER READ CLOUDS

attracta fahy

Once walking through fields,
as he held my hand I asked him to teach me.

He didn't reply

or speak for a while as we paced our steps,
slowing to my rhythm, our eyes on the sun
falling on fields, patches of shadow,
walls and trees lining our path.

On we walked, our feet on silver
reflections, opaque sprinklings of dew after rain,

until he stood, pointed to a pookie
hidden between moss

and grass,

'Now,' he said, 'Look, that's where fairies live.'

As I looked, a story my mother loved to read to us
flashed in my mind –

the one about the woman who lived in a shoe,

and there under the canopy of her mushroom roof
I could see her and her children busy inside the stalk,

heads sticking out, two windows upstairs,
one down, as they scurried about, in and out
of its red door.

I could feel the warmth of her fire
telling grandad everything I saw.

That's when he said,

'Now look up'

'look up,' he stressed again,

as I struggled to lift my gaze from the friends

I'd just met.

‘Look up,’ and I did.

‘Now tell me what you see?’

I saw horses galloping, a chariot on fire,
and my grandmother walking towards the sun.



YOUNG CORMORANT ON BARNA ROCK

sacha hutchinson

SPAGHETTIFICATION

jamie anderson

It is twenty five to four in the morning and I am searching black holes on the Internet. I do this not because I want to know about black holes, or that I feel the study of black holes is important to me, but because I think the knowledge will replace something inside me that I think I've misplaced. Did you know that you can't directly see a black hole? The gravitational pull is so strong that not even light can escape it, making it invisible to the naked eye. They are also harmless unless you get too close. I think of myself as a black hole, and then feel pretentious about it. Like out of all the similes and metaphors of the world, I could have picked a better one. Outside, Dublin festers. I hear a car go past. For a second, I feel like I am shapeless.

It is seven minutes past four in the morning and I am thinking of a better way to describe myself than a black hole. I google search the words 'good similes' and realise that there are perhaps no good similes at all, and that no one has ever found a way to accurately depict themselves. I wrestle with anger at Jane Austen and Oscar Wilde because they claimed all the beautiful words as their own, and left none for me. I reach for my writing journal and pour helplessly over its pages, realising that if there was ever a good sentence, that someone else has already written it. I try to find some solace that it probably wasn't Yeats. I turn back to my laptop. I scroll through endless lists of weak metaphors generated by a billion dollar search engine that does everything but settle me until I have convinced myself that, perhaps, the black hole wasn't such a bad metaphor after all, and that I am a better writer than I think. But then I wonder if Virginia Woolf would ever describe herself as a black hole, and decide that it's maybe a bit too on the nose, even for her. I feel shapeless again.

It is thirty three minutes past six in the morning and it has been light for almost ten minutes. Outside birds sing. If I looked out the window at that exact moment, I know that I would see the same row of derelict houses across the street from my own, while people are without one. The familiarity both bristles and calms me. The webpage with facts about black holes has been open on my laptop for almost three hours. Did you know that if you fall into a black hole, your body would undergo a process called 'spaghettification'? At first I thought this was some childish joke, that someone had edited the webpage to include this, laughing behind the clicks of their keyboard. But after a few more searches, I find that it's true. When a human body falls into a black hole, the force of gravity would compress the body mass entirely, while stretching it out

at the same time. Like spaghetti. I then search if someone could survive spaghettification. Nothing can survive falling into a black hole, my computer replies. Not even information. I wilt. I think about how language is integral to science, how there would be no way to relate the complexity of scientific fact without similes, like spaghetti. How Einstein would probably be considered mental if he didn't have metaphors to simplify his theories to the masses. That's what language is, really, isn't it? Finding a way to dumb things down for people to understand. I wonder at the simplicity of myself as a black hole, and then come to the conclusion that even if I confided this in someone, they still wouldn't understand how I feel. I don't understand how I feel. I think I want to die. I stare at my computer for a long moment, my mind growing tired, feeling almost satisfied that the flow of information has ceased some leak inside me. I find some peace in the knowledge that if I ever fell into a black hole that I wouldn't survive. That someone could probably make a nice carbonara out of my remains. I close the page for good. I forget almost instantly about spaghettification. I go to sleep, and forget too, for a moment, about feeling shapeless.

It is two in the afternoon when I wake. I have forgotten almost everything I learned about black holes. And the fact that nothing I will ever write will be original because everything great there is to say has already been said by someone else. And that I don't really know who I am, or what I am. And the fact I want to leave because the thought of staying tastes like similes and metaphors that I'll never be able to write. And that no matter what I do, someone else will have done it first. Except, that is, falling into a black hole. That I could do first. I get out of bed and look out of my window. Dublin is the same colour it was yesterday, and the day before that. The nearest black hole to earth is called Sagittarius A*, fifty thousand light years from Ireland. I look into the sky and wonder which Luas line would take me fifty thousand light years away. The red line, I think. When I put my clothes on, I think for a long time about how Jane Austen was too busy writing books about rich white men to experience spaghettification, and how I'll beat her to it, and then I don't feel as shapeless anymore.

The Qur'an says that God is nearer to man
than his jugular vein,
forbids consanguineous marriages—
blood always a proxy for proximity.

Perhaps it is the iron in it that always points
to where things truly are; they say
that Uthman's killer spilled his blood
first upon the page of his Qur'an,

verse 8:64—"Allah is sufficient for you,
and for the believers who will follow you."

Who can doubt his repose? —Uthman,
who argued the caliph need not go

to Jerusalem to receive the city?

So the Bundists said, too, at home in Poland
and the Pale, naming Zion a fool's errand
for those too impatient of the Revolution

(which is but the socialist's name for God).

They might have been right, had the Germans
not switched from shootings to gas
so that their blood on the soil would not testify

of their *doykayt*—their 'here-ness'—in Europe.

And so the half of my blood, with nowhere
else to flow, spilled into Palestine,
opening jugulars to look for God.

The other half had left Ireland too soon
to hear Lady Desart preach the Hebrew revival
as a model for Gaelic. Their blood was thin
from hunger, and the Sasanaigh

didn't care much where it fell—dripped it
across the colonies so that they, too,
like Britain's other mandates, might be
overpromised lands where God does not suffice.

Each year, at the Seder, we eat potatoes
and name the plagues, dripping wine on our plates
in memory of Egyptian blood, remembering
the solemn price of our places

at a free table, remembering that we—
Rowleys, refugees from starving Connacht,
and Gaelic-speaking Connells, driven
from the Highlands by landowners

who never bothered to replace us
—were the tenth plague of the Cherokee
and the Haudenosaunee, fallen angels
who did not pass them by,

but named their doorposts “home”
in a blanched tongue, like the kibbutz boy
and the Arab who point at the same olive tree and,
with equal truth and conviction, cry

“That was my grandfather's orchard!”
before coming to blows, as though
the alliteration of Cain and Cú Chulainn
were not coincidence, but the capstone

of the falling tower that gave both
Hebrew and Irish the same word for “knife.”

BACK TOWARDS HOME

s.j. delaney, after W.B. Yeats, a paltry poet

This is no country for the young. The old
sit atop their hill of granite and iron,
unmoved and unmoving, shouting down this
or that, wrong or right, advice or blame
while the young flounder in boiling seas,
burning trees and dying for peace or liberty.

I do not know this land barren. Badgers
wandering denless and foxes without pups
and bird crying, crying into the night.
It is well to sail, that once was an option;
so sweet the thoughts of abandoning shop
and expiring off the coast of Wexford.

So sail away my paltry friend and leave
us a carcass of home. Byzantium's
gold was always gilded and mosaics
are for bathroom walls. Pass on old man
if so you please, it is here and not there is our home.
Or so it can be, if only we're let;
It's from Byzantine dust we'll build home.

STILL HOME

jim xi johnson (next)



MASS: AN INTERNAL COMMENTARY

jay rafferty

It's cold. It's always been cold
in here. I think those radiators were put
in for nothing but show. Jesus, I can't
hear a word that priest is saying.

Those speakers are shot or his words
can't hold their form, can't hold their shape
in the empty air between us and the saints
on the ceiling. Dymphna needs a touch up.

They've the typical battle axe doing the readings.
The fire and brimstone type. Dreary, grey, taut. She'd be lost
without the Old Testament. Some psalm response today.
Remember this, you who never think of God.

Has it always sounded like this? An incantational hum,
more muscle memory than understanding? Thoughtless
recitation. Do these people even think of the words?
Their roots, their Latin branches, their Hebrew bark?

Gospel. Could catch that at least. Matthew
did he say? Thumb cross brow, lips, heart.
What was that? Oh, ballpoint in my breast
pocket. Been serving six months. Reliable so far

So good to hear kids laughing. Two toddlers in the pew
parallel, across the aisle abyss. The pair of them
playing peekaboo between the slots in the pew backs.
Squealing delight. Who would have the heart to shush them?

It's been a hot second from I was here, were these always
the answers? And with your spirit. Remember that
changing but what's with the rest of these catechetical replies?
Wait, it's the rosary. The speakers really are over the hill

Back in the day Mr Minne would be thumping that gargantuan organ into life. Nice man. All automated now. Youtubed hymns. Have never heard a more dreary Amen or Hallelujah. You couldn't transfigure to that

Christ's flesh tastes stale. Someone forgot to close the sacred bread bin. Gotta try to pray. Hail Mary full of grace the lord is with the blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fru— How is it holding its shape this long? Should be mush by now.

I wonder what we look like from up top. Scattered and few like a scantron with no clear rhyme or reason. Grey heads: bubbles filled by pencil. Bald heads: bubbles once full and erased. Dyed heads: bubbles filled by ballpoint. What's the answer key?

Hosanna in the Highest! Saved by the bells chiming the hour. One bong, two, eight bongs in all from the belfry, rolling the end credits down through the spires, passed the saints. We don't need subtitles for the final furlough. Time to go in peace to love and serve the lord.

THE LOST MAN

rory milhench

Footsteps crack against the mountains and rattle the trees. The seated Rambler looks up for a moment. His lungs feel carved open by the stony air. He is feeling the exhaustion others had warned him about on Mount Errigal. “It’s almost like the fatigue is carried in the air and sets in against your eyes” the people had said. His right eye feels close to crumbling. He was rubbing around in the socket when he heard the thick noise, which sounded like an avalanche howling through the forest.

He’d heard all the tall tales about the place. The fairy lakes at the foot of the mountain, which locals still made generous offerings to. The peak of Errigal, across which uncategorisable mammals traversed with ravenous hungers.

The Rambler walks over to the edge of the ridge he was sitting at and peers into the setting darkness. Soon enough it will be nightfall. If solitude has a colour it is deep black. The Rambler curses himself for miscalculating his route. He has ample supplies, but the ebbing light is a problem. He does not feel brave enough to use his pocket torch to guide himself home, in case he tumbles on an unseen rock. He is stranded for the night.

The noise reverberates again. Is this an echo or the rumble of a new iteration? He cannot be sure. But he can detect motion. The image his mind conjures is of a fallen tree rolling itself out of the wood towards a town to be cut up for kindling.

He is on high ground at least. He feels that offers him some protection. Some sensation suddenly fills him, giving the feeling that he knows how to defend himself against primitive threats. He can make a competent shelter for himself; of that he is certain.

He finds a clear tract of ground and clears away the loose debris. He pulls off thick boughs from a nearby tree and stands them up in a triangular formation. He supports them with rocks at the base of this structure and covers the frame with foliage from the surrounding trees. He suddenly wonders if Ireland is full of men and women hidden in the darkness somewhere, in a makeshift shelter, hoping the sky doesn’t open over them. Maybe there are not as many people in homes as we think. Maybe the land knows the company of disparate faces, muddy from the dirt, who find the company of others something to flee. The woods can tell.

This sequence of thought is broken by a new series of sounds. It sounds like the animal has grown teeth and is pricking its ears to hear the rambler make his next move. He stays stock-still. He feels a level of protection inside his hut which he knows to be absurd and mistaken. He knows that whatever the outcome of this impending event, it will be a historical one in the story of his life. It will not be easily forgotten.

The rambler thinks about the aftermath of the attack. He doesn't want to survive it as some maimed, half-alive thing. He hopes the end will be swift and automatic, like the clicking of a finger. But who will find him, he wonders? Who will even raise the alarm? He didn't tell any of his friends about the trip. He hasn't heard from his estranged wife in eight months, so she won't be looking for him. Perhaps just those locals he had met in Letterkenny, who'd warned him about the marauding power of Errigal. Maybe someone will fasten a printed photo of him to a wintry lamppost in weeks to come and their memories will be stirred. Or maybe, he thinks, as the noise reaches a few feet away, the monster is something like himself, a person lost in life and lost in the wilderness, who'd tried to find shelter from a world that would not let him be.

THE MAGIC ROAD

isabel miles

No magic wand, no mirrors we can see
but -just like that-
the N3 vanishes without a puff of smoke
transmogrifying to the -wait for it- A46.

And in a flash we cease to travel in kilometres per hour
for all the distances have turned to miles,
like knotted handkerchiefs to rabbits,
Guinness to pale ale.

The sky's above it all,
indifferent as the hills,
the swans and crows and cows and little crawling things.
It seems this trick is meaningless to every other kind but ours.

And yet the sat nav tells us that we're in another country,
so it must be true.
We pay in pounds but find the tea and scones taste much the same.
And Lough Erne is as Irish as Lough Gill.

This sleight of hand seems second rate
beside the true enchantment shared by trees
and hills and ancient stones
on either side of this imaginary real line
that disappears as soon as nobody believes in it.

On the road back -Hey presto!-
and the mumbo jumbo is reversed.

26-YEAR AGE GAP

maitiú charleton

You know Harry Styles came here when he was in Dublin? Cian ran his hand through the purplish flowers budding from the top of the long grass. Will raised his eyebrows and stretched the bottom half of his face in mock-surprise. Cian glanced over as he was jumping down the hill. Well, not really a hill, it's kind of hard to explain, but it's one of those paths that only exists because people walk there all the time? The ground looks like fossilised chocolate mousse.

I don't think it does.

Cmon! Cian teased. Oh! He stumbled. Fuck. He caught himself on Will's forearms.

Jesus don't fall, you could actually die. The boys stood still for a second, Cian was breathing hard. I told you not to wear the sliders.

You literally didn't. They both smiled. It would be a really cool way to die though right? The wind whipped around their legs. Cian peered down the cliff face. I would become- Will wasn't reacting to this. Part of the ocean! My guts food for the gulls and my thoughts sea-foam for the swimmers.

Will smiled into the sun as they descended. Passers-by ogled at him. Cian could almost see the look of disappointment on their faces that they were leaving the baths before getting to see Will without his t-shirt on. That means people got to see Harry Styles topless - in real life. Come on, that is crazy?

Doesn't he do that at, like all of his concerts? Will rolled his eyes at Cian, smiling.

Oh look, we're here. Cian jogged for a moment and slowed down when a few faces turned towards him. Where do you want to put your stuff? Will looked around, the swimming spot was peppered with families and small friend groups with beards and tote bags. They settled behind a group of teenage boys in black shoes and neon shorts. Cian faced the hill while he took off his top. The grass bloomed yellow against the sky's blue.

Hey soul sister, I just wanna miss a single thing you do-ooo, tonight.

Terrible song.

Can you help me with my towel, I don't want to flash people here. Cian held a handful of towel in Will's direction, squinting his eyes against the light reflected across the slow water surface. So what were you saying about Clara? I think I interrupted you before. Will took the two corners of the towel and looked down at his feet. Why did you wear underwear underneath your -

Why are my articles of clothing - wait answer my question.

I was just saying that I don't think we are going to work, as in, I don't - that's all really. Cian stood up straight again from the clambering he was doing underneath the towel. She's too, Will tilted his head from one shoulder to the other. Cian took the fabric out of his friend's grip, inhaled and started climbing down to the water.

Once when Cian stayed at Will's mum's house in Cork, a small, fat, black and white bird set up camp with its chicks in the air vent beside the kitchen. The young birds tweeted from midday until dawn, a sound Cian thought added to the home's rural, summery ambiance. Will kept saying he was going to turn on the fan and make chicken tenders. Please don't splash me. Forty seconds earlier Cian had pleaded with Will not to push him from the slick steps they flirted with the sea from. You're already wet, it won't make a difference. Will had pushed himself away from the land like an Olympian. The sunlight rippled over his body through the inches of teal water at the surface. I haven't gotten my head wet, and I don't want to. A tuft of hair fell over Cian's eyes, he picked it up with his hand and fixed it so it wouldn't fall again.

Will glanced behind his shoulder as he floated into the darker water. A drop running down Cian's nose from the hair he touched ran into his mouth. It was salty. Wait, wait, Cian swam like a dog trying to keep its carefully groomed fur dry. I'm just here, Will replied. The pair faced each other in the water, they looked at their respective views. Will saw the rocky platforms and bright blue railings of the baths and Cian saw across the wide bay and the white houses stacked in expensive rows on its hills. Have I told you about constructed, inherited hierarchical value system theory before? Cian's chin slapped the sea's surface as he spoke. I don't think so, Will squinted through the sun at Cian. Well, that's not really what it's called. I don't remember what it's actual name is, but you get what I mean don't you?

I think so. Did you read about it somewhere? Will turned around with his legs under the water, a little like a sea lion doing tricks for fish. Yeah. It's like, the way that our values in terms of hierarchical values, like the way we perceive merit and subjective, or even objective quality, are both constructed by societies but also inherited from groups over time or context within those societies. Cian spoke quite slowly. Will wasn't going to reply to this. So like, that idea is 100% translatable and transferable into literally everything, everyone and every way we perceive. Do you understand? He was excited now. Give me an example.

Genuinely anything. The fact that you think Harry Styles' music is bad and I don't. He said this provocatively. Will's face scrunched a little. That's just taste.

Exactly! Taste! Cian didn't pause before continuing. And that people from some countries have a higher spice tolerance than people raised in other countries. Eugenics isn't real you know? Will was disinterested now. That I found the water cold? That certain behaviours are acceptable in some spaces and rejected in others? I'm talking countries, communities, genders, age groups, hobby spaces, do you see what I mean? Yeah, he lied. After a few seconds Will submerged his head completely underwater.

Cian turned idly towards the Vico. An older man in sunglasses with two friends in pastel string tops and bright coloured towels was getting ready beside the stocky whitewashed changing-hut. Cian heard Will say something casual about the setting sun. The man had an Apple watch on his wrist. He turned towards one of his friends and made some joke Cian couldn't make out. He saw the man's teeth. The snarl of his grin. Cian felt something large and dark move around in his stomach. Breath caught tight in his throat. Can we get out now? I'm freezing. Yeah I'll be another minute.

YOU KNOW IT WHEN YOU FEEL IT

daragh fleming

We elected to play table tennis.

Months had passed since I last saw them. Them; the wonderfully Italian woman and incredulously optimistic man from Cork. We met in Milan months before and now we were here, they drinking Murphy's and me drinking water like the temporary dullard I had to be. A friendship magic'd out of thin air. In the grand calculus of the universe, it was all so incredibly unlikely. They'd fallen in love, God bless them, on the road before we'd met. And now we were what you'd call good friends. Not seeing each other often but making time when we could. You can't predict the road, nor who will walk along it beside you.

Other memories from travelling are not so fond. Other friendships did not persevere. Tenuous social media connections are all that remain. Not every destination can be a highlight real. Not every trip lives up to expectations. The bar is set so high, how could every place on Earth succeed in meeting?

Berlin, for example. Perhaps it's because I lost a love there. Or maybe it's because every other day in Berlin is spent hungover or worse. Whatever the case, the capital city of Germany strikes an unsettled chord within me.

London, a place I hope to one day live for at least a little while, strikes me directly in this way like sunlight through the curtains. Sadness sits in the stomach, yesterday's optimism drowning. I could never put my finger on why exactly this is. Until we played table tennis in Cork while I drank an embarrassing pint of water. It sort of just emerged from the ether.

It's the uncanny valley. Sort of.

London reminds me of home in that everyone speaks in the same way, and more or less has the same sense of humour, and diversity of values and all the rest. Nothing feels alien, the way things do in Spain or France, with foreign words stupidly falling out of my incapable mouth. London feels like home in all the ways aside from the ones that are necessary.

Home, in its essence, is a sense of belonging. It runs deeper than familiarity. Have you ever returned to a childhood home where a new family now lives? Familiar, but you don't belong there. It's no longer home. Just a house you used to live in.

London for me causes this uncanny valley flavoured melancholy. It feels like home but I am alone there, without belonging, and thus it is not home. There is no love, no tribe, no sense of adhesion. It's the veneer of home without the feel of it. Artificial. Like swimming in a pool rather than the ocean, there's something indescribable missing. Walking around London produces a sense of unease, and – until recently - unplaceable nausea. It's as if my very atoms are screaming for home, thinking it exists in London, and finding that there is no semblance of it to be found.

The ghost of belonging is all I find there. Something so very close that I might easily tolerate it for years without really noticing it. Until I return home. And my shoulders relax. And harmony washes over my soul. It's in these small inexplicable subtleties. A range of tiny nothings that compile into everything.

You can't really describe home, but you know it when you feel it.

I delivered this sermon of sorts to Italy and Cork, a pint of water in one hand, a worn table tennis paddle in the other, and I remarked that I should attempt write it down.

So I did, and now I have.

MOTHER WAKES FROM HER DREAM OF BECOMING A TREE

monica de bhailis

Her new wisdom stirred by an older wonder—
these days, her girlhood on the farm much closer.
It's her job to notice natural phenomena.

She reports *such a strange sensation*.
I worry if it felt like a pain or sickness,
What kind of tree was it?

None of the above, she says—
it was simply what it was, a process.
She accepts a cup of tea, sips it,

studies bare oak limbs that fill the window.
I say it's time to get up, she replies
sure there's no hurry on us.

She knows when the time is right and I trust her—
when light sinks and softens it's her signal—
a slight movement of her head, her shoulders.

I raise the orthopaedic bed—it whirs, winches.
Her arms reach out in counterbalance.
Mine slip in beneath them, hug her to me,

hoist her higher. She twists and lifts,
swings her legs to the floor, laughing:
Whoosh, strong gust from the East!

I inch her sore arm into a bunched sleeve.
The arthritic fingers branching
wide in all directions

catch in yarn of her jumper—
Wait now...we must learn patience.
Her arms push through and she stretches.

I kneel to close the velcro straps on her slippers.
Hands on my shoulders, she leans on me to stand,
straightens. Two taps of her stick—she's grounded.

Her range is wide as the house, a root system—
we proceed to her chair in the kitchen.
Here, it's dusk all day, nothing happens.

She knows better: *A grand stretch this evening—
the cock stepped out a scarlet fraction farther—
It's a pity that you missed it!*

Some time later, her heart begins to flutter—
*Not unpleasant, like when a bat unfurls its wings
to test the end of winter.* She refuses supper

but drinks slowly from a glass of water.
We discuss our ash dieback, how the tallest one
stands proud in the canopy, its ghostly crown

turns rose gold as the sun lowers,
how death is part of the woodland's future.
It's the hour we watch the line of sentry beech

lift silver shields and shoot shadows
as rooks come home to scots pine and oaks listen.
She says *trees are comrades always looking out for us.*

As hawthorns stoke red embers on the horizon,
I get up to draw the curtains. *No, wait!* she calls,
Dark will be home soon. I want it to feel welcome.

A BIT OUT OF TOUCH

úna nolan

Dublin and I go way back, actually.

We held toddler hands in Primary,
chubby little dinner plates tugging on each other's plaits.
She knows how jealous I was when my brother and sister
first came home from Hollow Street.

We have sat in the Hairy Lemon
Waiting for the drinks to start serving.
Sat there from open til close, laughing until sides
ached and my chest glowed.

She came straight over after my first real heartbreak,
the lane between Ballsbridge and Herbert Park-
I brought salt and vinegar, I knew chocolate would be pointless.

And always Workman's on a Wednesday
Pack of Amber Leaf in one pocket (I'd have her roll for me) and a naggin under the
table

We would order too many rum-cokes and dare each other to kiss strangers-
On the lips or it doesn't count

Not that we could afford that now-
No more €7 Smirnoff fished for in Green,
Split it with a Club Lemon and stumble home
Rebellious and tipsy at a clean 9:30-
Yeah, the movie was great Mam thanks for asking

I guess Dublin's been quite distant lately.
She's hanging out with another crowd-
Business, economics- you know the type.
The ones we used to laugh at from the Newman steps,
I'd plant a kiss on her shoulder and she'd rummage
in her tote for a light.

Her tastes seem to be changing
Less grimey pool tables (she'd always win)
Less sleeping over on the old mattress downstairs
I've stopped keeping oat milk in the fridge actually,
I've been meaning to tell her

Yeah, Dublin and I go way back but
we don't see much of each other these days

She's always working when I try call-
Heard she wanted to be a Hotel Manager
Or Something like that, anyways.



MAGPIE
sacha hutchinson

GHOST MOTHER

abby connolly

I walk past the house sometimes and though I see it from the street, occupied by unknown people, I only ever imagine it from the inside looking out. She told me a story once about the magic in her family and I like the idea that there is something special about the blood I have inherited from my mother's side.

Her own mother had been plagued with supernatural afflictions, shooting up in bed with premonitions and predicting deaths. There's something different about Irish magic even though it can look miserable- powder-faced wakes and jealous fairies and circling omens. Everything wrings of death and yet there's a comfort in it. Paving roads around hawthorn is ridiculous but important. Saluting a magpie is silly but necessary. Black cats are good luck, unless you're a Protestant, or at least that's what I've been told. I don't have my mother's eyes, but I have her superstitions.

"She'd come down the stairs in the morning with a name on her tongue," my mother would tell me of my grandmother, "And sure enough they'd be in the next day's obituary."

Her name had been Bea and she smoked like a trooper, saw sorrow in tea leaves and reared nine children, almost dying twice on hardwood floors of that house, husband begging for last rights as she mothered and mothered again. She lost two, one as a baby, one as a man, and there were rumours she foretold their deaths, rumours she had heard the dreaded banshee, met eyes with a black dog. She refused to use loose leaf tea after that. It never gets easier.

I complained that it was a shame she never taught anyone how to read the leaves, but I suppose if misery is all you can predict it's just a learnt kind of pessimism. She did a kindness. She did say black dogs were only messengers though, that in the rare old times dogs were protectors of labouring mothers.

They stood watch, and if a man killed a woman's dog it was his duty to be her protector during the birth to keep child-snatching spirits away. It was a law, she said. I thought that was funny, imagining Webster, a small Yorkie with spindly legs and high pitch yap, standing guard looking like a sock gone through a Hoover.

Once, my mother told me, Bea had been sitting in the hall on the telephone when she saw the front door swing open all on its own. A man in a hat and a trench coat walked in and fell right to his knees before keeling all the way over. He gripped his chest and before landing flat on the carpet simply evaporated. This hadn't been Bea's first ghost encounter, but she was no less riled by it. When her own husband passed through the door that evening, he said well, wasn't that funny because when they bought the house he had been told by a neighbour the previous owner had died of a heart attack right there in that doorway.

He hadn't told Bea at the time because he knew how she was with things, and he half worried she'd invite any lingering spirits in to stay. There was already barely a moments peace between the kids and all the local ladies she had over for tea and biscuits. He didn't need even more ectoplasmic arses on the pews, I suppose.

"Did they say what kind of hat he wore?" she asked as if it was of the utmost importance.

I never knew the inside of that house and I can't see ghosts, but I still conjure them up every time I walk down that street. The house is bigger than the one I grew up in though it isn't far away. I don't think anyone died in my house. All I know of it is that it's draughty and was a sixties build, and the police commissioner used to live there once. My father's parents grew up in a grey house full of bad religion and I knew it, I knew them, and they had only stepped through the veil when I was already an adult, but they were always more ghostly in life than even the second-hand memories of my mother's parents. Their house was big but empty.

Nothing hid around their corners except for pictures of Jesus with moving eyes. There are different kinds of everlasting life.

Soon my parents' house will be sold, and I won't have a reason to come back here anymore and to pass by the ghosts. The place swells with them, they're in the bricks and the concrete, undulating soft under the hard bricks of our world. I forget about it when I'm gone, when I drift, and only seem to remember when life loops me back here.

My siblings are all flown, my parents travelling in opposite directions and the nuclear family nucleus all exploded and adult makes me wonder where my ghost would settle.

Maybe I'd wander back here and dwell where I already know ghosts sit around, making tea.

As I pass the house a woman jogs by me on the path with a black dog on a lead and I feel some comfort. I never met them but maybe they met me. My mother says they would have liked me. She says she can feel them too sometimes. I know where they're buried but I don't visit empty boxes under earth. They're more here, as close as sitting on at the phone table on the other side of that door, still nattering and bustling, darning socks and sewing wedding dresses and insisting teabags. Still full of life all these years later.

*

“And the priest said, ‘peace be with you’ and she said ‘a moments peace? Now that would be the miracle, father’.”

*

TURAS (A JOURNEY)

bríd mcginley

Unfurling under the car wheels, the narrow road ribboned through the foothills of the powder-blue mountains. Na Cruagha Gorma. The Bluestacks. Rosie knew she shouldn't have come. Her sigh was inadvertent, but she felt Eamonn turn towards her, endured his worried gaze. The meagre lowland fields had petered out. Now raised bog stretched, muted-mauve spring heather spilling over banks and ditches.

Why had she come? An opportunity to talk? Hardly. Eamonn wanted to see the course of yet another adventure race, cycling, mountaineering, running. There'd be no time for talking today. His unrelenting enthusiasm, once so attractive, now grated. Earlier, as his usual patter narrated the journey, the word futile rose before her. She saw hurt wash across his face when she asked for quiet, feigning a headache.

Intermittent breaks in the hedges allowed glimpses of small houses. Who would choose to live here? Bogland, moor, wet fields wrested from the hills, tended with rigour, dotted with sheep. Then, over another low hill Eamonn pulled in at the most unlikely football field, a green vision, alongside a startling modern clubhouse.

'You'd be surprised how many people live up here,' Eamonn said, reading her expression.

'Enough for a football team?' Her words clipped, her voice incredulous. She saw Eamonn's face tighten, the slightest crimping of his mouth. Why did everything she say sound callous? Outside, Eamonn pulled on his rucksack.

'I won't be long,' he said, 'an hour at most.' He paused, zipping his jacket.

'It's called Carnaween,' he said, hesitant, looking at the mountain. 'There's a pilgrimage to the top every year. In June.' Now he looked at his boot, at the small stone he was attempting to dislodge. 'Traditionally, there was dancing afterwards, like an unofficial matchmaking event. People came from the other side of the mountain.' He looked at her, smiled. Rosie bristled, another of his stories of hope.

‘I’d imagine it’d be hard to find love here,’ she said, her voice brittle. Eamonn lifted his head, eyes dangerously bright.

‘Give it a rest Rosie.’ She saw the anger vie with hurt. ‘You know, it happened to me too.’

His skin stretched taut across his cheeks, thin and pale, like silk at the point of rupture. Rosie felt ice penetrate her abdomen, resisted the urge to bend over, to scream. Eamonn stood, waiting, she had no idea for what.

‘I’ll be back soon,’ he said finally, and she watched the dust rise as he jogged away.

Rosie looked along the road. Eamonn was right, it was a good place for a walk. Isolated, no houses nearby. In the distance, where the road curved uphill, a single green fingerpost beckoned, irresistible. *Dísert*, it read. She knew the word from school. A hermitage, a sanctuary, a place of healing. She swung through a wooden gate into a grassy field, and followed the faint track curving across low hillocks before dropping to a stream. The fields were tended, tidy, a triumph of necessity. A wooden bridge spanned softly running water, and led her to a sitemap with a brief history of the site, its composition, its significance. Why here, this small semi-fertile place, hemmed to the mountain by the small river, watched over by Carnaween, overlooking a desolate landscape falling to the distant sea? Had this been a more hospitable place in past centuries? A blackbird’s plaintive note trilled, a breeze stroked her face. She looked at the mountain, scanning it, but could see no sign of Eamonn, no red jacket winding to the top. Relationships; no maps or signposts for those, just the same searching for faint tracks, wondering which was the correct path. She inhaled, let her shoulders drop, and despite herself, felt an unexpected sense of possibility. She stepped through another gate and climbed into the site.

Then as she scaled the hillside, she saw them; the altar, the well, the graveyard and cillín. Beyond, under gnarled trees, the portal, harp-shaped, topped with a pyramid of stones. She didn’t look at the graveyard. She wouldn’t think about the cillín, this liminal burial site for unbaptised babies. The board by the bridge had listed cures; a stone with a hole for poor eyesight; well-water for toothache; and on the altar, two carved fertility stones. Now, feeling the weight of these in her hands, she wondered did they relate to the matchmaking. She looked at the rocky mountainside again, imagined Eamonn’s

determined hiking. He'd seemed entranced by the idea of matchmaking. But what about match-breaking? Were there traditions around that? She peered through the hole in the semi-circular stone, like looking through an old pinhole camera, and for an instant, it was as if she had entered an alternate space; Eamonn's face appeared, inverted, tears flowing downwards, over his forehead, through his hanging hair. She replaced the suddenly heavy stone. The day had become unaccountably hot. Shade, she needed shade. Tumbled walls and a ring of crooked trees marked what remained of a small enclosure, mercifully chilly. She let her hand run through deep moss on the tree trunks, soft, damp and cool, recalling his tiny curls after a bath, and she had the urge to bury her face in its soothing luxuriance. And as she watched, she saw her hands become immersed in the clear well-water, saw the enclosure become a cathedral, heard the harp-portal's strings play a lament in the pulsing breeze. With her hands against the moss-cloaked trunk, Rosie's tears welled and fell, mingled with the earth, became part of that ancient cycle of love and grief.

She was waiting at the car when Eamonn reappeared. His lilted walk, red jacket flapping, dark curls bouncing, and Rosie thought of invisible paths, of unknown tracks, of ancient wisdom, of healing.

'What,' he said, as came close. 'What is it?'

So many tears, so many lonely tears. She opened her arms, they cleaved together, buried their heads against the other, rediscovered the bumps and hollows, their ancient topography. Their pilgrimage begun.

MÉABH + AILILL

christina carty

after Táin Bó Cuailgne

Nach rachaidh fir chun cogaidh Won't men go to war
in ionad caoin a ligeadh instead of shed a tear
Níos éasca gáipéar a chruthú Easier carve a wound
ná gortú a mhothú than feel one

Ba ise mo dhomhan *She was my world*
An dearg i mo fhuil *The red in my blood*
M' bhean chéile fhocáilte *My well-fucked wife*

Buachaillí tógadh chun an domhan a cheannach Boys built to buy the world ar nós go
mbeadh sé le díol as if it's for sale

Is fuath liom í *I hate her*
Maróidh mé í *I'll kill her*
A sine goirt *Her salty nipple*
Loiscfidh mé an spéir *I'll burn up the sky*
's tarraingeadh mé anuas é ar a cloigeann bréagach an' pull it down upon her lying head

Troidim I fight Troidim nó titim I fight or fall faoin mbúireach na buile under the
freight train of rage Cén fáth a nglacfainnse Why would I accept le coróin an uasail
mhairbh the dead martyr's crown

Tóg gach uile phíosá uaithe *Take every man from her*
's gach uile amárach uathu *and tomorrow from them*

Dá ndéarfadh sé If he'd say 'tá croí briste agam the heart's broke on me' B'fhéidir go
ndéarfainn I might say

Ná bris d'chroí Ailill Don't smash your heart Ailill agus ag guí mise a ghearradh
imagining it'll cut me

Is liomsa gach fód *Every sod, mine*

Cé go bhfuil trua a'm don tragóid atá ag bualadh isteach sa chliabhrach m'fhear céile
While I've some pity for the blunt trauma that's thumping away in my husband's chest
Nílím ar tí mo bhrollach a thabhairt dó I amn't about to offer him my breast Ní
Máthair na mBrón mé I'm not The Mother of Sorrows

SIX MONTHS BOUGHT WITH DIRT: THE BOTHY CROP OF ARRANMORE

oisín breen

They knelt in the dirt, joining a movement gigaannum long,
A continuum shifted in increments by ancestral kin,
And time transformed their role to architect, where once,
Like so many others of their wide-eyed and lust-hungry frame,
They served as co-conspirator among the heavy legged,
Who pound dirt and stone as they run for warmth and nourished bone.

They knelt in the dirt, above the worms, and seedlings dampened off,
Pressing their hands beneath the earth, seeking a grip, with fingertip traces,
A hold on life, to pull the tubers from the soil in April and in June,
In late August and October, too. And their fingernails were a hue of purple brown,
Those islanders, who knew the chopped yawl sail from Burtonport
To Arranmore and back. Some dug, others gathered: a bothy crop.

They knelt in the dirt, whole families, who moved each year,
For like the swallow, whimbrel, and sandwich tern, they lived
To a steady pattern that spread its seed back-and-forth, a kindling
For change rippling out in knots of life clustered among the north-west
Islands and the lowland fiefs of Dál Riata. Their children kept the beat
On water and lowland, too, singing the Baidín Fheilim, the boat broke off Tory.

They knelt in the dirt, and moved from farm to farm, gathering the crop –
Yetholm gypsies, Kepplestone kidneys, and Highland Burgandies –
All the while singing of the little boat that went away to Gola and then to Tory.
They knelt in the dirt, gathering their crop in baskets wicker weaved --
A chain-link from mud to young man's belly. They slept in stone huts, too,
Hoarding silver in purses, their father's before, to take to their kin in Arranmore.

They knelt in the dirt through summer and autumn, tattie hokers most,
Though some worked to furnish the others with spun cloth, sharp knives,
And with the few ministries of love that wind-whetted hearts could spare,
Before the morning's walk, miles of land stalked in service, dually done
For barely known scions of the long-dug soil with marble blemishes
On alabaster skin, and for old mothers who sang to keep the heat in.

They knelt in the dirt, often singing, too, of Fheilimí beag, his little boat,
With the fish on board, and Fheilimí in it, and the sea onboard beside Fheilimí.

They knelt in the dirt, stopping only to chew on soda bread, its crusts wet
With last night's treat of dillisk soup, a welcome weed, and water wine,
Kept dried in bags beside their sleeping mats, having gathered it by moonlight,
Having gathered it as children too on the storm-swept rocks of home.

And they sailed, at last, after months away, to briefly return to that resting place
Of tenderness, known best in winter. And the sight of the yawl, holding steady
Above the waves that washed the stone-guarded coasts, it was enough to still –
For a season, at least – that seed of melancholy for the surely lost and dead,
Brothers, sisters, all. And in its place came laughter, and a ritual of held hips
And clasped hands, of sweat and drink, all bought with fistfuls of dirt,
Six months toil for a kiss, for a baby's grasping hand, six months bought with dirt.



RED LISTED
sacha hutchinson

EMBER

tomás clancy

I recall, as if for the first time the echoed words
of my poor mother
“they hate an arsonist, in a neighbourhood because it’s the
most amount of damage that can be done by the smallest consortium. Some lone freak
settling little bright blazes about the place, cant be well.”

I remember peering from behind the shadow of her spine past the spectres of
inquisition, the guards, clad in hi-visibility toggging bright like the tongued fire;
That which ran like a throbbing vein up the street.
The amount matters not, they only used to be cars now anyways,
they were formless from their husks shone now like stars born anew that peer through
the sky each night at dusks falling.

It didn’t seem like the work of a little sneery figure of the machinations of unwellness,
there was no sense to be made in my mind,
I felt the power of its damage demanded it to be that of gods hand turned in a rage.
But on ran the platitudes and the needling in the doorway late into the dawn
way high over my head, till it was not but a gurgling like the bristling flames that
lapped over yonder from the voids of light emanation.

In this still time, when I do approach the door in the dark,
I search for the blackening of smoke and soot on my skin when I sweep forth from
passage; Behind these closed eyes, lost in my own tender recollection is an image of
the city from way on high. The amber lamps of ways light in every corridor
lining old trodden ways bent like willow bough.
The dreams of children passed to the wind, the lapping tongues of a petroleum fire.
It’s a churning spiral of flitting glimmers. Sign of nothing more than life and life in
anguish.

God watch how it burns, while the crimson clouds of night rumble over in tow.

NOTHING'S MORE LOCAL THAN ARNOLD: AN ELEGY

helen jenks

I tremble in the sea. It seeps
into my mouth, a kiss,
a drowning, the damp
a bitter water which swoops
and swallows with the gulls overhead.
We think anxiously about
autumn, then the winter.
The bins are gone from
the garden, though we left them
there for a while. Will the rat
stay? We don't like him
much, but he makes us
laugh, amid it all. He is warmer
than us, fatter than us,
well-fed on rubbish, cement,
and weeds. It is our first autumn
in this house. We wait for the
fireworks, the trick-or-treaters, the
boys on bikes on the Finglas road.
I wait for my mother.
The waves are cold and bitter. There
have been myths made here, in these
waters. I could be one of them, if I
wanted. I try dissolving into foam.
I am caught and steadied instead,
then thrown back to the sea.
Next week I am older. It is a
bittersweet thing. The house is
draughty, though we close the windows.
Autumn comes anyway —
already it is over, already have
the spiders nestled in.