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READING IRELAND

THE LITTLE MAGAZINE

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Every quarter, Reading Ireland will publish an E-Journal, Reading Ireland: The Little Magazine, which will be available to subscribers for an annual fee of \$40. The magazine will be published in Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. The aim of this publication is to provide in-depth analysis of Irish literature, past and present, through a series of essays and articles written by myself and other Irish and American writers and academics, along with opening a window onto the best of contemporary Irish poetry, prose and drama. To honor the tradition of Irish Literary Magazines, each issue will also focus on a specific "Little Magazine" from the first half of the twentieth-century.

Volume 1, issue 1 which appeared in Spring 2015 is available to download at no cost under the 'subscribe' tab on our website, www.readingireland.net, so that you as the reader can decide if this is a publication you would like to receive on a quarterly basis.

Contributors

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Introduction



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Welcome to the poetry issue of *Reading Ireland: The Little Magazine*. It seems appropriate to bookend this issue with a focus on William Butler Yeats whose birth, a century and a half ago, was on June 13th, 1865. There have been numerous celebrations in Ireland this year to mark the 150th anniversary of the poet's birth, and I am delighted to be able to mark this anniversary in these pages.¹ We open with a close reading of one of Yeats's most celebrated poems, "The Tower," from his 1928 volume of the same name, which also contained such crucial poems as "Sailing to Byzantium," "Meditations in Time of Civil War," "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," "Leda and the Swan," and "Among School Children." The reading, by another renowned Irish poet, Thomas Kinsella, brings a new synthesis and understanding to Yeats's poem. This analysis is followed by an introduction to Kinsella, a poet whose remarkable body of work had flown under the radar for far too long.

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It seems only natural to follow Yeats and Kinsella with Seamus Heaney, whose untimely demise on August 30, 2013, still has an unbelievable air about it. Yvonne Watterson, from County Antrim in Northern Ireland, brings an impassioned focus to her discussion on the importance of Heaney's work to her. Personal and national histories coalesce around Heaney's sestina poem, "Two Lorries," regarding the bombing of the bus station in Magherafelt which was only four miles from the Heaney home in Mossbawn, County Derry. Also accompanying Watterson's essay is a never before seen photograph of the bombed out area of the Ulster Bus Depot on Broad Street in Magherafelt. Heaney is arguable the most widely read poet writing in English; however, less widely read are his critical essays on poetry's justification, its "redress," and on the poets who have been important to him. My essay on Heaney's prose

1. One special publication that might be of interest to our readers is *The Irish Times* Special Yeats Supplement, *W.B. Yeats at 150*, published on June 10 2015, which marks the depth of Yeats's engagement with Ireland and his art. Contributors include Roy Foster, Eavan Boland, Denis Donoghue, Theo Dorgan, Terence Brown and Fintan O'Toole. An e-book version of this supplement is available at no cost to subscribers of the digital version of *The Irish Times*: <http://www.irishtimes.com/digital-subscriptions>.

work argues that in addition to being a gifted poet, Heaney was a perceptive and illuminating critic, and that his critical work sheds as much light on the development of his own writing as it does on the poets who meant the most to him.

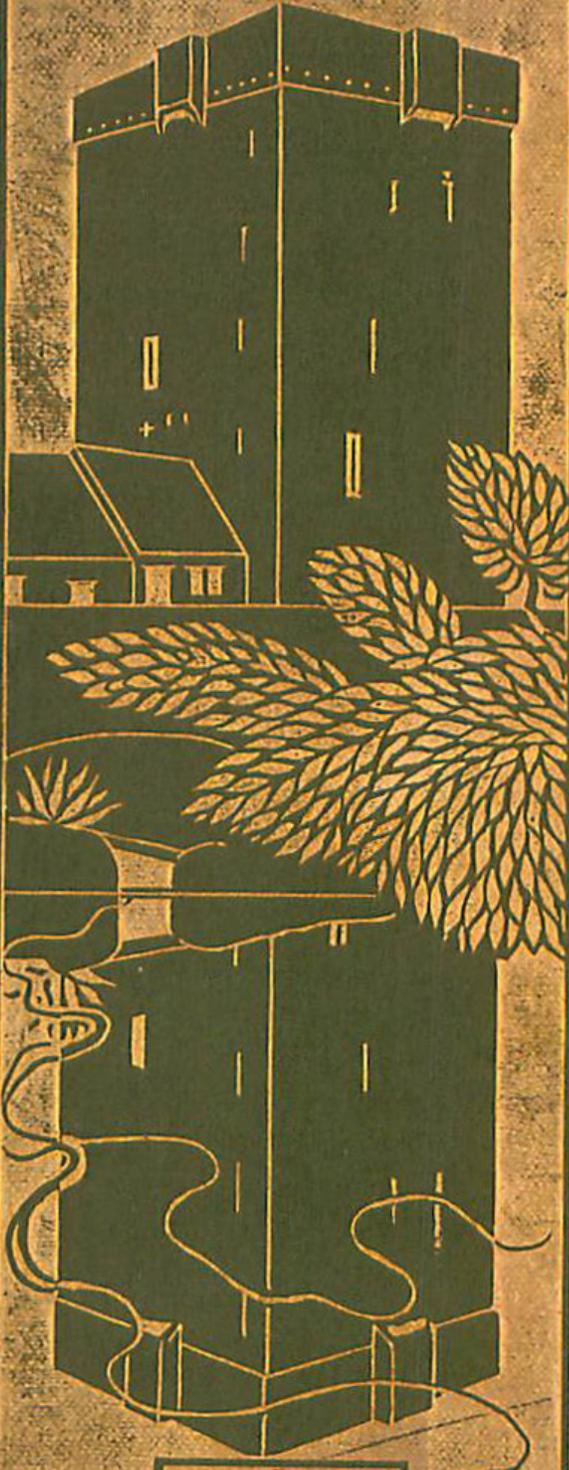
Following this is a spotlight on three new poetry related titles from Irish Academic Press, along with two new poetry titles from Wake Forest University Press. Our regular contributor Des Kenny has a review of Gerald Dawe's memoir, *The Stoic Man*, and I am delighted to also include a poem that Gerald has contributed to this issue. The American writer and poet Ellen Birkett Morris reviews Theo Dorgan's most recent collection, *Nine Bright Shiners* (2014), which was an *Irish Times* notable book of the year. At the heart of Dorgan's new collection is a sequence of elegies that reflect on early and recent deaths from the loss of his infant sister to that of a contemporary by suicide.

Finally, as I mentioned above, this issue of *Reading Ireland* begins and ends on a Yeatsian note. It is my special privilege to include an essay on *Poetry Ireland Review: A WB Yeats Special Issue*, whose list of contributors includes some of the finest contemporary Irish poets. This issue was published in Ireland on September 12, and I am grateful to Poetry Ireland and its editor, poet Vona Groarke, for making a copy available to *Reading Ireland*.

"Out of the quarrel with others we make rhetoric; out of the quarrel with ourselves we make poetry." W.B. Yeats.

THE TOWER

BY W. B. YEATS



MACMILLAN AND CO

TSM

DEL

The Tower

I

What shall I do with this absurdity –
O heart, O troubled heart – this caricature,
Decrepit age that has been tied to me
As to a dog's tail?

5 Never had I more
Excited, passionate, fantastical
Imagination, nor an ear and eye
That more expected the impossible –
No, not in boyhood when with rod and fly,
10 Or the humbler worm, I climbed Ben Bulben's back
And had the livelong summer day to spend.
It seems that I must bid the Muse go pack,
Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend
Until imagination, ear and eye,
15 Can be content with argument and deal
In abstract things; or be derided by
A sort of battered kettle at the heel.

II

I pace upon the battlements and stare
On the foundations of a house, or where
20 Tree, like a sooty finger, starts from the earth;
And send imagination forth (1)
Under the day's declining beam, and call
Images and memories
From ruin or from ancient trees,
25 For I would ask a question of them all.

Beyond that ridge lived Mrs French, and once
When every silver candlestick or sconce
Lit up the dark mahogany and the wine,
A serving-man, that could divine (2)
30 That most respected lady's every wish,
Ran and with the garden shears

Clipped an insolent farmer's ears
And brought them in a little covered dish.

Some few remembered still when I was young
35 A peasant girl commended by a song,
Who'd lived somewhere upon that rocky place,
And praised the colour of her face, (3)
And had the greater joy in praising her,
Remembering that, if walked she there,
40 Farmers jostled at the fair
So great a glory did the song confer.

And certain men, being maddened by those rhymes,
Or else by toasting her a score of times,
Rose from the table and declared it right
45 To test their fancy by their sight; (4)
But they mistook the brightness of the moon
For the prosaic light of day –
Music had driven their wits astray –
And one was drowned in the great bog of Cloone.

50 Strange, but the man who made the song was blind;
Yet, now I have considered it, I find
That nothing strange; the tragedy began (5)
With Homer that was a blind man,
And Helen has all living hearts betrayed.
55 O may the moon and sunlight seem
One inextricable beam,
For if I triumph I must make men mad.

And I myself created Hanrahan
And drove him drunk or sober through the dawn
60 From somewhere in the neighbouring cottages.
Caught by an old man's juggleries (6)
He stumbled, tumbled, fumbled to and fro
And had but broken knees for hire
And horrible splendour of desire;
65 I thought it all out twenty years ago:

Good fellows shuffled cards in an old bawn;
And when that ancient ruffian's turn was on
He so bewitched the cards under his thumb
That all but the one card became (7)
70 A pack of hounds and not a pack of cards,
And that he changed into a hare.
Hanrahan rose in frenzy there
And followed up those baying creatures towards –

O towards I have forgotten what – enough!
75 I must recall a man that neither love
Nor music nor an enemy's clipped ear
Could, he was so harried, cheer; (8)
A figure that has grown so fabulous
There's not a neighbour left to say
80 When he finished his dog's day:
An ancient bankrupt master of this house.

Before that ruin came, for centuries,
Rough men-at-arms, cross-gartered to the knees
Or shod in iron, climbed the narrow stairs,
85 And certain men-at-arms there were (9)
Whose images, in the Great Memory stored,
Come with loud cry and panting breast
To break upon a sleeper's rest
While their great wooden dice beat on the board.

90 As I would question all, come all who can;
Come old, necessitous, half-mounted man;
And bring beauty's blind rambling celebrant;
The red man the juggler sent
Through God-forsaken meadows; Mrs French (10)
95 Gifted with so fine an ear;
The man drowned in a bog's mire,
When mocking Muses chose the country wench.

Did all old men and women, rich and poor,
Who trod upon these rocks or passed this door,
100 Whether in public or in secret rage
As I do now against old age? (11)
But I have found an answer in those eyes
That are impatient to be gone;
Go therefore; but leave Hanrahan,
105 For I need all his mighty memories.

Old lecher with a love on every wind,
Bring up out of that deep considering mind
All that you have discovered in the grave,
For it is certain that you have (12)
110 Reckoned up every unforeknown, unseeing
Plunge, lured by a softening eye,
Or by a touch or a sigh,
Into the labyrinth of another's being;

Does the imagination dwell the most
115 Upon a woman won or woman lost?
If on the lost, admit you turned aside (13)
From a great labyrinth out of pride,
Cowardice, some silly over-subtle thought
Or anything called conscience once;
120 And that if memory recur, the sun's
Under eclipse and the day blotted out.

III

It is time that I wrote my will;
I choose upstanding men
That climb the streams until
125 The fountain leap, and at dawn
Drop their cast at the side
Of dripping stone; I declare
They shall inherit my pride,
The pride of people that were
130 Bound neither to Cause nor to State,
Neither to slaves that were spat on,

Nor to the tyrants that spat,
The people of Burke and of Grattan
That gave, though free to refuse –
135 Pride, like that of the morn,
When the headlong light is loose,
Or that of the fabulous horn,
Or that of the sudden shower
When all streams are dry,
140 Or that of the hour
When the swan must fix his eye
Upon a fading gleam,
Float out upon a long
Last reach of glittering stream
145 And there sing his last song.
And I declare my faith:
I mock Plotinus' thought
And cry in Plato's teeth,
Death and life were not
150 Till man made up the whole,
Made lock, stock and barrel
Out of his bitter soul,
Aye, sun and moon and star, all,
And further add to that
155 That, being dead, we rise,
Dream and so create
Translunar Paradise.
I have prepared my peace
With learned Italian things
160 And the proud stones of Greece,
Poet's imaginings
And memories of love,
Memories of the words of women,
All those things whereof
165 Man makes a superhuman
Mirror-resembling dream.

As at the loophole there
The daws chatter and scream,
And drop twigs layer upon layer.

170 When they have mounted up,
The mother bird will rest
On their hollow top,
And so warm her wild nest.

I leave both faith and pride
175 To young upstanding men
Climbing the mountain-side,
That under bursting dawn
They may drop a fly;
Being of that metal made
180 Till it was broken by
This sedentary trade.

Now shall I make my soul,
Compelling it to study
In a learned school
185 Till the wreck of body,
Slow decay of blood,
Testy delirium
Or dull decrepitude,
Or what worse evil come –
190 The death of friends, or death
Of every brilliant eye
That made a catch in the breath –
Seem but the clouds of the sky
When the horizon fades;
195 Or a bird's sleepy cry
Among the deepening shades.

Thomas Kinsella: W.B.Yeats, “The Tower”

W.B.Yeats : “The Tower”

“The Tower” is a poem in three parts, provoked by growing pressures of old age: part I a protest at the discrepancy between the poet’s continuing imaginative liveliness and growing bodily limitations; part II a survey of the surrounding landscape from the battlements of the tower, and the summoning of a tribunal of local figures from legend and the past, to put two questions arising at the end of life; in part III the poet considers his will, and prepares for death.

Part I

- Lines 1-4 A protest – rhetorical, half serious – at old age, as it is attached mischievously to the body, like something tied to a dog’s tail,
- Lines 5-8 while passion and excitement, imagination and the senses, are still at their most intense;
- Lines 9-11 no less than in high youth – in lines establishing the height of passion and imaginative excitement, in the poet’s case, in years of boyhood, climbing the hills and fishing in solitude.
- Lines 12-17 The scheme of the opening lines made clear. The imagination and the senses, passion and excitement – as they deal in concrete things – are appropriate to youth, with the Muse as proper companion. Reason – dealing in abstract things – is appropriate to age, with philosophers for companions. The intensities of youth, lasting into age, are incongruous. Old age, unfit for the muse, and attached to the tail, is identified as a battered kettle.

Part II

First Stanza

Lines 18-20

The tower. A setting on the battlements, looking out past the ruins of a house and the black stump of a tree.

(For a speaker troubled by bodily decrepitude there seems a strong verbal excess in the opening line.)

Lines 21-25

It is the close of day, matching the end of life. In a personal ceremony, the poet summons in imagination certain spirits from the ruins of the house, and from among the trees of the neighbourhood, to put a question.

Second Stanza

Lines 26-33

The first spirit, summoned from over a nearby hill, is a member of the Ascendancy, remembered in an incident of excess, arising out of the tyrannous relationship between landlord and peasantry.

Third and Fourth Stanzas

The second spirit, remembered on another occasion of excess, is a man of the people – maddened by drink, the moon and a song.

Lines 34-36

The subject of the song: a peasant girl of the neighbourhood, remembered through the generations because of the song. . .

Lines 37-41

. . .and famous because of the song in her own time;

Lines 42-45

so famous that it was decided on a drunken occasion to check the song, by the light of the moon, against the reality,

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Lines 42-45

so famous that it was decided on a drunken occasion to check the song, by the light of the moon, against the reality,

Lines 46-49 and the spirit now being summoned lost his life in the extreme attempt – so earning his place on the tribunal.

Fifth Stanza

Lines 50-52 An apparent deviation from the ceremony, to consider the fact that the celebrant of such beauty – the poet Raftery – was blind;

Lines 52-54 to find a precursor in blind Homer, who immortalised Helen*;

Lines 55-57 to introduce the poet himself into the poem with these two poets, making men mad with poetry – the moon and sun fused in an excess; (and requiring, if the structure is to be complete, a woman to immortalise, and blindness of the poet's part). And to include – as will appear – Blind Raftery on the tribunal.

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Sixth and Seventh Stanzas

Lines 58-65 The poet summons a fourth spirit from “somewhere in the neighbouring cottages”: Red Hanrahan, a character of extreme desire – a creation of his own.

Lines 66-73 Hanrahan, rising from the card-table, pursuing the magical hunt across the country-side, and vanishing into the past. . .

Eighth Stanza

Lines 74-81 . . .the setting returns to the battlement. A summary of the tribunal begins, and a final member is called up from inside the tower: a former occupant,

*It being a matter for the reader's consideration how far “Helen has all living hearts betrayed”

Ninth Stanza

Lines 82-89

in whose hands it fell into ruin, ending the generations of occupation, leaving it empty, in a last extreme – except as it is occupied by night, when the ghosts of the first Normans appear, to disturb the present generations.

Tenth Stanza

Lines 90-97

The tribunal summarised: the former owner of the tower; Blind Raftery; Red Hanrahan; Mrs. French, burdened with one of Yeats's rare jokes; the drunken man, who died to check the accuracy of a song. And "all who can" – who may include the Norman ghosts.

Eleventh Stanza

Lines 98-101

The question is put;

Lines 102/103

the question so shallow that the various spirits are impatient to be released.

Lines 104/105

Leaving only Hanrahan, the figure created by Yeats himself, for the real question,

Twelfth Stanza

Lines 106-113

for which he is especially qualified, by his wide and casual – and profound and particular – experience of love.

Thirteenth Stanza

Lines 114/115

The question is put with directness;

Lines 116-119

and the answer given, with brutality, in the question itself. So that even Hanrahan was unnecessary.

Lines 120-121 The poem speaks direct. The poet on the battlement admits, or claims, that he chose wrongly; that he has spent his life with the wrong woman; and that (as the fifth stanza requires) the sun darkens when he remembers the woman lost, and he is blinded with emotion.

Part III

Lines 122-127 He considers his will. It is an enclosed gesture: for his heirs he chooses essentially himself when young, fishing in the mountain streams; climbing in the dawn 'until/ The fountain leap' – emphasising imagery of source and new beginning.

Lines 127-134 For his legacy, his pride – the pride of a morally and intellectually liberal and uncommitted middle class, belonging neither to tyrannous Ascendancy nor to ignominious peasantry;

Lines 135-139 a pride associated, again, with the imaginative excitement of boyhood, with imagery of dawnlight and fountain, horn of plenty and refreshment at the source;

Lines 140-145 a pride also of evening and peace, a swan song of fulfilment at the end of life.

Lines 146-149 He declares and considers his faith, dismissing the philosophers ordinarily appropriate to old age, and the abstract considerations of death and life. There is no trace of religious faith

Lines 150-153 – Mankind, bitter in nature and experience, is all there is, on earth or elsewhere.

- Lines 154-157 If there is an afterlife, it is based on nothing but mankind.
- Lines 158-163 He summarises the valuable findings of a life, the material out of which he has contrived an understanding: things from the Mediterranean past, ancient and Renaissance; poetry; the love and the words of women;
- Lines 164-166 matter with which a man can make a dream-construct – its parts reflecting among themselves, so that it seems more than it is.
- Lines 167-169 An image of that construct close at hand: a bird's nest on the battlement, put together from bits and pieces, layer upon layer,
- Lines 170-173 by daws chattering and screaming – an image of the human species; the present generation warm on the hollow top.
- Lines 174-176 With the cosmic limits established, and meaning restricted to mankind, he leaves his legacy of faith and pride to those only in the next generation who will repeat his own beginnings. It is a closed gesture – but an image of possible rebirth.
- Lines 177/178 And his wish is that his chosen heirs – with his legacy of pride and faith – will 'drop a fly'.

It is a gesture of great risk, risking bathos. With the reader required to decide whether it is successful; saved by the confident diction, and the power of the episode and the imagery that has placed greatest imaginative intensity in boyhood, fishing in solitude in

the dawn. And – if the decision is positive – with the reader free to speculate profoundly on the image of dropping a lure into a stream, and a source on a mountain-top.

Lines 179-181 Aware of his active and imaginative youth, and his sedentary and imaginative present . .

Lines 182-end . . . he turns away from the pointless ceremony.

He will tackle his bitter soul, continuing his old man's studies, until even old age is at an end, with the death of friends, the death of the 'woman lost' (lines 191/2), his own death – matching the end of the day, declining now into the dark – and the ending of his generation : the daws fallen silent.

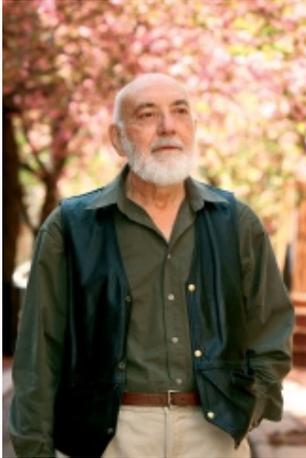
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Note

As to the rhyming of 'Grattan' / 'spat on', 'barrel' / 'star, all' : the reader needs to decide on the success of this; whether the ongoing strength of the poem is sufficient at each point not to be interrupted by the technical extremity of the gesture.

A Reader's Guide to Thomas Kinsella

By Adrienne Leavy



Biographical details

Born into the working class neighborhood of Inchicore, Dublin, in 1928, just six years after the founding of the Irish Free State, Thomas Kinsella is one of the most distinguished living Irish poets, with a body of work unlike that of any other Irish writer. Kinsella's remarkable art is a reflection of his lifelong search for understanding and meaning amid the chaos of lived experience, and he has characterized his work as a process of "eliciting order from significant experience." A prolific poet, he has published over thirty collections, starting with *Poems* in 1956 and most recently, *Late Poems*, in 2013. Kinsella continues to be a critical voice in Irish poetry, as evidenced in the latest edition of *Poetry Ireland Review*, published on September 12th 2015. Edited by Vona Groarke, this special issue dedicated to W.B. Yeats includes detailed analysis by Kinsella of two important early Yeats poems, "To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time," and "To Ireland in the Coming Times."

Kinsella did not start out as a writer, but instead spent many years working in the Irish Civil Service. He attended the Inchicore Model School and the O'Connell Christian Brothers' Secondary School, where he won a scholarship to study science at University College Dublin. Realizing that science was not the path he wished to pursue, he took the entrance exam for the Civil Service, and in 1946 he began working as a junior executive officer in the Land Commission, eventually rising up the ranks to the position of private secretary to T.K. Whitaker in the Department of Finance. While working as a civil servant by day, Kinsella was writing at night in his city center flat in Baggot Street, a location celebrated in one of his best known early poems, "Baggot Street Deserta." During this time he met the two people who were to have a formative influence over his life and career, Liam Miller, the publisher of the Dolmen Press, and Eleanor Walsh, his future wife. In 1955 Tom and Eleanor were married, and from their union emerge many poems on the theme of romantic love and its ability to survive the ordeals of life. Love poems commemorating their relationship are a large part of Kinsella's first major collection, *Another September* (1958), which brought him to the attention of English as well as Irish readers. Subsequent early work garnered great critical acclaim in Ireland and England, and he received numerous awards including the Guinness Poetry Award in 1958 and the Denis Devlin Memorial Award in 1967.

In 1965 the poet abandoned a promising career in the Department of Finance and moved to the United States, where he was writer-in-residence at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, for three years. After returning to Ireland on a Guggenheim Fellowship relating to his translation of the prose epic, *The Táin Bó Cuailgne*, the Kinsellas made the decision to settle in the United States, and in 1970 he accepted an invitation from Temple University in Philadelphia to join the faculty as Professor of English, a position he held for the next twenty years. This move to America coincided with a radical change in Kinsella's poetic style, which was facilitated to some degree by his immersion in the great Anglo-American modernists, Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams. Kinsella drew inspiration from Williams' "creative relaxation in the face of complex reality," and the American poet's colloquial idiom resonated with the Dublin poet. Exposure to Pound and Williams provided Kinsella with what he describes as "a sort of leverage out of a rather clamped tradition," and encouraged his transition to free verse and experimentation with poetic form.

In addition to his work as a poet, Kinsella has devoted a considerable portion of his career to translating Gaelic literature, most notably with his 1969 translation of the Táin, the oldest narrative prose epic in European literature written in a native language. He is also known as the translator behind the bestselling anthology *An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed* (1981), which he co-authored with Seán Ó Tuama. In his essay on this work, Seamus Heaney characterized *An Duanaire* as "a re-education of our poetry," and praised Kinsella's translations because they were "not asking to be taken as alternatives to the originals," but instead, were "offered as paths to lead our eyes left across the page, back to the Irish," so we could "encounter works of art that belong to world literature." Among his most influential critical interventions is his examination of the contemporary Irish writer's relationship with the dual heritage of Gaelic and English literature, which he published as *The Dual Tradition: An Essay on Poetry and Politics in Ireland* (1995), and also his role as the editor of *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (1986). During his tenure at Temple, Kinsella established Temple University's program of Irish Studies in Dublin. Beginning in 1975, he spent one semester each year in Ireland with Temple students, lecturing and touring around important historical and archeological sites with Liam de Paor and other Irish scholars.

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In recognition of his contribution to Irish literature Kinsella was awarded the Freedom of the City of Dublin in 2007. However, despite the numerous awards and accolades bestowed on him, and the high regard his work attracts from other poets, Kinsella remains an ambivalent figure in the world of poetry. As David Lynch points out in a new introduction to the poet's work, Kinsella "is a writer regarded as central and at the same time marginal, his poetry is both canonical and existing on the fringe." There are several reasons why this major poet's work is not more readily known, including a general reluctance by Kinsella to engage in public readings and actively promote his work. As discussed below, Kinsella's work is of critical importance because it reflects the conflicts of the Irish experience and of humanity in general, with the unrelenting precision of a writer who has thought deeply about these issues for many generations.

Rejection of formal verse

Kinsella's early work, which includes *Another September* (1958), and *Downstream* (1962), was characterized by elegant formalism, and a lyrical style deeply influenced by the English poet W.H. Auden. The poem "A Lady of Quality," which memorializes the time when Eleanor was hospitalized for two years while being treated for tuberculosis, exemplifies this early writing style:

In hospital where windows meet
With sunlight in a pleasing feat
 Of airy architecture
My love has sweets and grapes to eat,
The air is like a laundered sheet,
 The world's a varnished picture.

Books and flowers at her head
Make living-quarters of her bed
 And give a certain style
To our pillow-chat, the nonsense said
To bless the room from present dread
 Just for a brittle while.

Despite strong critical and commercial reception to these early collections, which were both chosen by The Poetry Book Society in Britain, Kinsella gradually became dissatisfied with the ability of conventional poetic forms to aesthetically reflect his encounter with "the data of life" and the subsequent poetic impulse to record and communicate that encounter.

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Alex Davis sees Pound's presence in Kinsella's poetry as "predating his exodus from W.H. Auden and the English lyric tradition," and he cites the title poem in *Downstream* in support of this argument. Certainly, Kinsella was moving in this direction, and by 1968, when he published his groundbreaking work, *Nightwalker and Other Poems*, Kinsella had all but abandoned formal verse, a move consolidated in the subsequent collection, *Notes from the Land of the Dead* (1972). This abandonment of received forms and strict meter in favor of a more open and technically challenging free verse has resulted in a complex poetry of personal interrogation which is simultaneously traditional in theme and formally experimental. Paradoxically, this switch to looser forms is accompanied by a corresponding intellectual and syntactical rigor, with the poems pared down to their essence, devoid of all superfluous language and ornamentation. Heaney described Kinsella's change in style in the following terms: "In his own work he has long since – and deliberately – given up consideration of 'the reader's comfort.' He has strenuously punished the lyricist in himself who carried off such stylish performances in the early books." Heaney astutely attributes Kinsella's changed aesthetic to the influence of two disparate sources which Kinsella succeeds in interweaving: the Anglo-American modernism of Pound and the Irish bardic poetry of Aogán Ó Rathaille.

Revisiting earlier poems

A deliberately open-ended quality characterizes much of Kinsella's later work. Often the poems appear to begin in the middle of the event described, with no authorial presence or clear narrative. He intentionally repeats and echoes himself creatively, finding new aesthetic

meaning in experiences and poems from decades earlier. Recurring imagery and motifs are a hallmark of his poetry, with entire sequences and individual poems frequently and deliberately incorporating situations and language from earlier work. One example of this approach can be seen in a late career sequence, *The Familiar* (1999), wherein Kinsella casts a retrospective glance back over his relationship with Eleanor, and celebrates the hard-won balance that has been achieved between the competing demands of love and creativity. The title poem focuses on specific private moments within the lengthy span of their relationship. The early days of their courtship are recalled along with an acknowledgment of their disparate temperaments which were “mismatched, under a sign of sickness.” The moment when Eleanor moved into the flat in Baggot Street is remembered by the poet as the end of his isolation: “My last thoughts alone.” Another clear example is “The Furnace,” a poem from *Out of Ireland* (1987), which invites a re-reading of “Phoenix Park,” from a decade earlier, through the use of quotations from the earlier work and allusions to imagery employed in “Phoenix Park.” Fidelity to the raw data of experience from which the poet constructs an aesthetic response is a constant theme throughout Kinsella’s work and in “Anatomy,” from *Love Joy Peace* (2011), the poet again reminds himself (and his reader), that he still “presumes from inadequate data / to understand the whole.” Elsewhere in this collection Jungian motifs and archetypes recall the poet’s middle period, and the Kinsellas’ first neighborhood is recalled yet again in the title poem “Love Joy Peace.”

This practice of referring to past work distinguishes Kinsella from his peers and as Derval Tubridy astutely observed, Kinsella has developed “a set of references that serve as the circulatory system for his body of work.” The poet has admitted that he views his work as “a totality that is happening, with the individual poem a contribution to something accumulating,” which is in marked contrast to the isolated lyric poem of his early practice. For the first time reader of Kinsella, or for those who are only familiar with his early poetry, these connections are not always obvious or clear; however, with careful reading one comes to appreciate the continuity running through Kinsella’s work. The poet himself views his art in holistic terms, characterizing each poem as a first-time contribution to his accumulating body of work and his lifelong search for meaning.

Poems of psychic exploration

With the exception of W.B. Yeats’s interest in occultism and spiritualism, Kinsella’s creative interest in dreams and psychoanalysis has no other counterpart in Irish poetry. Some of his most critically acclaimed work is his mid-career poetry from the 1970s and 1980s, which is characterized by psychic exploration influenced by the Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist Carl Gustave Jung (1875-1961). These sequences include *Notes from the Land of the Dead* (1972) (included in *New Poems* (1973)), *One* (1974), *Song of the Night and Other Poems* (1978) and *Songs of the Psyche* (1985). The imaginative and technical daring of the poems in these collections is one of Kinsella’s greatest achievements. Jung’s theory of mythic archetypes, along with his concepts of “the collective unconscious” and “individuation” are imaginatively interpreted by Kinsella in the form of a journey inward and a descent into unconsciousness

wherein the poet encounters female ancestral and archetypal figures. For Kinsella, self-awareness is achieved only by confronting these women and the memories they trigger. The beginning of this period of reflection is signalled in the closing lines of “Phoenix Park,” the last poem in *Nightwalker*: “A snake out of the void moves in my mouth, sucks / At triple darkness/ A few ancient faces / Detach and begin to circle. / Deeper still, / Delicate distinct tissue begins to form,” Henceforth, we see in the poetry recurring imagery of snakes, circles and coils, darkness and a descent into the void which represents the beginning of knowledge, all accompanied by “a few ancient faces.”

Another key aspect of Kinsella’s Jungian-influenced poetry is the manner in which he often frames his personal journey into the Jungian Land of the Dead within the context of Irish history and mythology. Very often, the poet incorporates mythological figures that feature in the stories from *Lebor Gabala Erenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland (The Book of Invasions)*, as a metaphor for the collective unconscious of his ancestors. These stories feature prominently in *From the Land of the Dead* and *One*. Kinsella also draws upon figures from the Irish bardic tradition, including Amergin, Ireland’s first poet, and, as noted by Heaney, Aogán Ó Rathaille, one of the last of the Irish-language poets. This creative incorporation of Irish mythology and the early bardic poets is part of the poet’s ongoing project of repossessing an aesthetic Gaelic culture which Kinsella views as lost after the death of the Irish language with the Famine in the nineteenth century.

A Dublin poet

When Kinsella began writing in the early 1950s he deliberately shied away from locating his work in a specifically Irish context, either in theme or in setting. With *Nightwalker and Other Poems*, we can see a change in the topography of his poetry, as the disillusioned nightwalker wanders through the streets of Dublin. The city continues to be an important setting for future Dublin-centred sequences that include *St. Catherine’s Clock* (1987), where Kinsella explores national and family history at the site of Robert Emmet’s execution in Dublin, and much of his poetry in the 1990s takes Dublin as its setting. In *Personal Places* (1990), Kinsella makes clear the relationship between place and personal identity: “*There are established personal places/ that receive our lives’ heat / and adapt in their mass, like stone.*” *Poems From Center City* (1990), focuses on Dublin in the 1970s and 1980s, and Kinsella’s prayer for a local watchfulness sums up the driving force behind his work: “*Lord, grant us a local watchfulness. / Accept us into that minority / driven toward a totality of response.*” *Open Court* (1991), also set in central Dublin, takes the reader into the famous literary pub, McDaid’s, near closing time. Portraits of several poets active in Dublin in the 1950s and 1960s are imaginatively rendered, as Kinsella employs this conceit to consider the place of poetry in modern Irish society.

The streets of Dublin’s city center provide the scaffolding for *The Pen Shop* (1997), a journey poem in which Kinsella’s speaker explores the relationship between place and politics, the past and the present, in the context of the geographic confines of the city. Kinsella, like Joyce, is in Dennis O’ Driscoll’s estimation, “a narrator of Dublin’s streets,” and in *The Pen Shop* Kinsella’s walker revisits Joyce’s Dublin by reversing Leopold Bloom’s walk through the city centre. He recalls Bloom clasping and unclasping his hands in the vicinity of John

Grey's statue on O'Connell Street, and much of what Kinsella's speaker observes on his walk through the city center corresponds with what Joyce describes Bloom observing, such as O'Connell Bridge and the barge passing underneath. The river Liffey is the dividing line in the poem:

The river poured in dirty and disturbed.
...
From Islandbridge. Under Kingsbridge
with the black currents turning among each other
in among the black piles at the lower Brewery gates:

Although the journey is short, from O'Connell Street to Bewley's Café in Westmorland Street, around College Green towards Nassau Street and the pen shop, the poem opens up beyond the geographic space described. The speaker's thoughts drift toward Wexford, where Eleanor is from, and beyond, to the Atlantic and the home of the original people of Ireland that Kinsella writes about in "At the Western Ocean's Edge."

In the poem "Phoenix Park" referenced earlier, the poet and his wife drive around the Phoenix Park on the eve of their imminent departure from Ireland for the United States. Kinsella's Dublin centered poems and sequences are often characterized by a Joycean attention to local detail, as evidenced in "Model School, Inchicore," "Phoenix Street," and "Bow Lane," which are set in Kinsella's childhood environment. Numerous poems take as their starting point Tom and Eleanor's family home in Percy Place. Further evidence that Kinsella's career long poetic identity is located in Dublin can be found in his 2006 prose memoir, *A Dublin Documentary*, in which the poet revisited the Dublin neighborhoods of his youth through prose, poems and photographs, and tells the story of how the two sides of his family, the Casserlys and the Kinsellas, arrived in Dublin.

24

Representations of women

Women are of central importance to Kinsella's poetry, and one of the unique components of his poetic corpus is the variety of ways in which he represents female figures. Whether it be poems featuring the Beloved, the Jungian archetypal Great Mother, Kinsella's grandmothers (who are often conflated with the Irish Hag or *Cailleach*), or the figure of the Muse, women are an integral part of Kinsella's career long investigation of the creative process and ideas of self. Whatever insights the poet derives from his continual search is typically achieved with the enabling assistance of these female figures, be they real or archetypal.

Notwithstanding his skepticism in conventional belief systems, Kinsella's belief in love's ability to survive and triumph over the bitterness of life is a hallmark of his poetry, and the relationship between the poet and his wife Eleanor is central to his aesthetic exploration of this belief. As Maurice Harmon notes, "Eleanor's role varies from the beloved in *Poems* to the dramatic partner in *Wormwood* (1966), to the Muse figure in 'Phoenix Park,' to the goddess of *Madonna and Other Poems* (1991). In effect, she becomes a multiple woman whose importance as an enduring and reliable partner – wife, companion, Muse – is successfully affirmed." The trajectory of Kinsella's imaginative representations of his relationship with

Eleanor can be traced from the early marriage sequence *Wormwood* (1966), where marital strife and discord are laid bare, to the late career sequence, *The Familiar* (1999), in which Kinsella reaffirms Eleanor's importance to his life and work. Similarly, Kinsella's evolving conception of the Muse figure as impulse, inspiration and expression, is most fully explored in *Late Poems*, specifically, the Peppercanister publications *Fat Master* and *Love Joy Peace*.

Public Poems

Kinsella is a private poet and a private individual; however, there have been a few occasions where he has felt compelled to write about public figures or issues. "Night Conference, Wood Quay: 6 June 1979," reflects the Kinsellas' involvement in the efforts to save the Dublin Viking Settlement in Wood Quay from destruction by Dublin Corporation in the 1970s. Lynch points out that in many of his Dublin themed poems, Kinsella "rigorously interrogates the development of contemporary Ireland," revealing how shortsighted political decisions compromise the ideals and cultural values of the nation. Sadly, the efforts of the Wood Quay committee which the Kinsellas' were part of came to naught, and "The white-cuffed marauders" won the day after the settlement was cemented over for a car park.

Despite Ireland's neutrality during the Second World War, Kinsella was deeply affected by events in Europe, and the war confirmed his sense of man's capacity for destruction. The discovery of evil is the central preoccupation of an early collection, *Downstream* (1962), with the terrifying reality of violence a central motif in the title poem. This volume also includes "Old Harry," about President Truman's decision to drop the atom bomb on Japan. In "Night-walker," public and private experience is merged in an impassioned denunciation of the political corruption and the eclipsed idealism of the independent Free State. The nocturnal rambler, who knows that "things seem and are not good," wanders his home neighborhood, toward the sea front, reflecting on the controversial political figure of Charles Haughey, "Our new young minister," the "Sonhusband," who married the daughter of Fianna Fáil Minister and future Taoiseach Sean Lemass, and is sarcastically imagined as mounting to glory "On his big white horse!" The nightwalker appeals to a very different kind of Irishman, the spectral figure of Joyce associated with the Martello Tower in Sandycove: "Watcher in the tower, / Be with me now." Eventually the nightwalker's meditations under the moon lead him to a desolate psychological place, "the Sea of Disappointment."

25

The first poem published by Kinsella under his own imprint, The Peppercanister Press, was *Butcher's Dozen*, which arose out of the a desire by Kinsella to respond immediately to a monumental injustice. On January 30th 1972, thirteen unarmed civil rights demonstrators were killed in Derry by British paratroopers. A commission was formed, headed by Lord Widgery, to investigate the matter; however, much crucial evidence and medical testimony was ignored and the army officers were exonerated. Within a week of the publication of the committee's findings, Kinsella had written and published *Butcher's Dozen*, an angry, impassioned indictment of the Widgery Report written in ballad form. Although Kinsella's position was subsequently vindicated when the British Prime Minister David Cameron publicly apologized in the House of Commons to the victims and their families in June 2010, the damage was done, and his reputation in Britain never recovered. Kinsella's only other overtly public poem, is *The Good Fight*, a long poem published to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The poem works backwards from the

time of Kennedy's assassination to his swearing in, and includes excerpts from Kennedy's speeches and interviews, along with a dramatized first person portrait of Lee Harvey Oswald drawn from interviews and books. Harmon notes that in complex ways the poem "creates a dramatic and subtle contrast between the two men." Harmon also draws attention to how Kinsella takes Kennedy's optimistic final speech, with "its definitions of national and human possibilities, positive and optimistic, based on the idea that 'All reasonable things are possible,'" and contrasts it with Plato's observations on the dangers and pitfalls of leadership.

The Peppercanister Press

With the establishment of the Peppercanister Press in 1972 Kinsella further distinguished himself from his peers in that he now had the unprecedented ability to control how he published his work. The disadvantage to the Peppercanister method of publication is that it has restricted Kinsella's audience as it removes his work from mainstream publication channels. To the extent that Kinsella's audience has diminished as his career has progressed, I would argue that this is due to low visibility, as opposed to the content of the work causing readers to shy away from engagement with it. Typically, Peppercanister issues two chapbooks at a time in limited deluxe editions and trade editions, and republishes them subsequently in groups of five issued by Oxford University Press or Carcanet Press in Britain. Notwithstanding the drawbacks mentioned above, this method of draft publication has allowed Kinsella considerable freedom with regard to revising and editing his work. When sequences are issued in discrete groups as part of a larger edition, the text has often been revised and a prologue or epilogue has been added. It was not until the publication of the *Collected Poems* by Oxford University Press in 1996 that the full trajectory of Kinsella's career became accessible for the first time. Since then, Kinsella has published five additional sequences through Peppercanister, which were collected and published by Carcanet in 2013 under the title *Late Poems*. As the Peppercanisters have increased in number (there are now 29), critics like Tubridy are recognizing that they are in fact "a series of distinctive and interconnected poetic sequences that build together to form a loosely structured whole."

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Another distinctive facet of the Peppercanister books and pamphlets is the extraordinary attention given to the cover art for each publication, so that the visual images complement and reinforce the thematic concerns of the poems. This attention to the visual aspect of the work was evident from the onset of Kinsella's career in his Dolmen Press publications. *The Death Of A Queen* (1956) includes line drawings of the unnamed queen by Bridget Swinton within the pamphlet. *Finistere* (1972), also published by Dolmen in a limited edition, includes a number of designs by Hugh Kearns and Liam Miller that derive from carvings at the stone passage tombs in Newgrange and Knowth, County Meath, and also from Carndonagh in County Donegal. Perhaps the most striking example of Kinsella's cover art aesthetics is *The Messenger* (1978), an elegy for his father John Kinsella, a political activist and union organizer at Guinness Brewery. On a blood-red cover Jarlath Hayes has redrawn the emblems and motifs of the devotional magazine, *The Irish Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, to reflect various aspects of John Kinsella's life. In addition to cover art, several Peppercanisters include additional art work inside the text, the most notable examples being *One* (1972), with line drawings by Anne Yeats reflecting the Celtic myths that inform the poems, and

A Technical Supplement (1976), which includes illustrations selected from volumes of plates issued with Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. Most readers of Kinsella's translation of *The Táin* will recall the striking brush drawings by Louis le Brocqy, which added to the vigor and the immediacy of Kinsella's powerful translation.

The question of "difficulty."

It is an unfortunate commonplace in Kinsella criticism to talk about the poet's mature work in terms of the demands it places on the reader. Throughout his work, the accessible poetry continues; for example, in the poems about Kinsella's grandparents and neighbors, "Hen Woman," "The High Road," "A Hand of Solo," and "Ancestor," from *New Poems* (1973). Many of Kinsella's apparently 'difficult' poems are not as difficult as they seem on the first encounter. As with the poetic corpus of other significant modern poets, what is required is that readers pay close attention to the text. Kinsella has often stated that he regards the act of writing poetry as an act of communication, wherein the poet initiates the act of communication by virtue of writing the poem and which the reader then completes through careful and attentive reading. Numerous examples abound also in the Peppercanister sequences. In *One* (1974), a collection focused on the poet's search for origins and meaning, "38 Phoenix Street," "Minstrel," and "His Father's Hands," consider the theme of origin from the perspective of Kinsella's own family. In another Peppercanister sequence that focuses on psychic exploration, *Song of the Night and Other Poems* (1978), a gentle tone persists in the poem "Artists' Letters," where once again love and the artistic act are linked. Here, the speaker discovers packets of old love letters, "old immediacies in elastic bands," and reflects on his courtship of Eleanor and also his development as a poet, with "the spirit shaken into strength / by shock after shock of understanding." Also in this volume, "Tao and Unfitness at Inistiogue on the River Nore," arguably one of Kinsella's most memorable historical poems, is set around a family visit to the town of Inistiogue. In "Shop Shut," a poem from *Littlebody* (2000), Kinsella describes in plain and unambiguous language the simple act of locking up the poet's "den of images" on a summer night in Percy Place: "I pulled the heavy door over / and leaned my head against it, / the long key coarse in my face." The overall clarity of Kinsella's poetry is also evident throughout *Late Poems*, where the poet interrogates "the waste and the excess" of the living process, along with the corrosive effects of warfare on the human spirit. Countering these moral and ethical vacuums are the creatively redeeming impulses that inform the search for understanding and meaning, and the affirmation of the pervasive effects of "Love Joy Peace."

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Conclusion

Despite Kinsella's radical change in form, his thematic concerns have been fairly consistent throughout his work, namely, the search for meaning and self-knowledge in the modern world, the power of love and its ability to survive the ordeals of life, the psychic explorations of the self, the questions of artistic creativity and the moral role of the artist in society. Throughout his work, Kinsella endeavors to formulate an aesthetic structure that will provide order, while simultaneously recognizing that an understanding or order will be at best, provisional. Yet evidence of a more detailed understanding can be read in Kinsella's most recent collection, *Late Poems*, wherein the poet continues his effort to craft a positive aesthetic response to the waste and bitterness that he considers an inevitable facet of human history.

Like Robert Lowell, Kinsella has mined the details of his own life to produce poems of acute personal reminiscence, and like Joyce, his writing demonstrates how art can be created out of the corruption and disappointments of modern life. Although some admirers of the early work may have been disappointed about the direction of Kinsella's mature work, there has never been any doubt about the integrity and passion with which he pursued his artistic ambition. His decisive shift to open forms in the 1960s expanded the frontiers of Irish poetry. To the extent that Kinsella's corpus can be viewed as one continuous creative endeavor, it is arguably similar in scope and ambition to Pound's *Cantos*. Given the organic unity of Kinsella's work, he is best approached not in terms of individual collections or poems, but rather as if his entire output constitutes a single work of art.

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Bringing it All Back Home with Seamus Heaney

by Yvonne Watterson

*“Perhaps if I’d stayed behind
And lived it bomb by bomb
I might have grown up at last
And learnt what is meant by home.”¹*

I first heard the poetry of Seamus Heaney on a September morning in 1983. I was a student at Queen’s University of Belfast’s Stranmillis College, and I was late for my first Modern Irish Fiction Since Joyce seminar. When I opened the door, it was to the sound of a familiar voice coming from the front of a classroom. Sitting behind a desk that was too small for him, was Ulster Television newscaster, Brian Baird, reciting Heaney’s “Digging,” delivering the words with the same gentle gravitas with which he also read the evening news. I did not know until recently that Mr. Baird had started out as an English teacher in a small town in Malaysia, when he accepted the post vacated in 1956 by John Wilson, who would a few years later, under the pen name, Anthony Burgess, publish *A Clockwork Orange*. By 1963, the year I was born, Mr. Baird returned home to Northern Ireland, bringing with him a cargo of words and phrases from exotic places that could not have been further away from rural Derry.

30



Were I to draw a map of the child-world that fed my day-dreams, I would mark on it many of the places of Seamus Heaney’s poems, their pronunciation “difficult to manage” with handfuls of craftily placed consonants and vowels at once keeping strangers apart from and a part of Magherafelt, Anahorish, Aughrim, Ballyscullion, Bellaghy, and Broagh, where my mother grew up. One of seven children, she was raised on a farm not far from the Heaneys and recalls Paddy, the man Seamus immortalized in “Digging,” trading cattle at the local fair in his yellow boots and a heavy coat. She remembers our poet, not as a Nobel Laureate but as a ‘young cub,’ only a few months younger than she, riding a bicycle into Castledawson, face to the wind, his sandy hair flying behind him.

Although neighbors, Seamus Heaney would have signified to my mother a world beyond reach, having passed the eleven-plus “qualifying” exam which gained him a place in St. Columbs College that would lead to university; a road unfamiliar to her. Heaney explained this environment in his book length series of interviews with Dennis O’Driscoll, *Stepping Stones*: “Even Belfast was far away to me. In those days, I was outside the loop, my family had no familiarity

1. Mahon, Derek. “Derek Mahon, The Art of Poetry No. 82.” *the Paris Review* Spring 2000, No. 154.

with universities, no sense of the choices that there were, no will to go beyond the known procedures, no confidence, for example, about phoning up the local education authority and seeking clarification about what was possible – no phone, for God’s sake.”³

For my mother, America was more accessible than a formal education in Derry or Belfast, her parents having emigrated there in the 1920s. Full of hope, they had settled in Connecticut, but a steady flow of letters from home, heavy with reminders of familial obligation, pulled them back to Broagh, with their American-born children - four little boys and a daughter. Resigned, they fell back into the known and expected ways of the townland, forced to abandon forever the unfulfilled promise of America. By 1938, the family was complete with the arrival of my mother.



There was no money. As a matter of economic necessity and from an early age, my mother and her brothers and sisters learned to be “good with their hands” and frugal too. Like their neighbors who move within and about Heaney’s poems, they were off the grid, resigned to hard work – the compulsory craft – thatching and churning, divining and digging. In the background, there would have been an awareness of the importance of education, but it was not enforced beyond my grandmother’s mantra that “a pen was easier handled than a spade.” Uninspired and without more tangible encouragements, my mother attended the technical school in Magherafelt, an anathema on which she could barely wait to turn her back on.

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I imagine her waiting for the bus at the end of the lane every morning, knowing that when it stops for her, it will be already packed with students from Maghera. I wonder how often she wished for a day different from the one that preceded it, for the bus-driver to surprise his desultory young passengers with a detour, on past Magherafelt to Cookstown or farther still to the sandy edges of County Antrim, to the place where, like Seamus Heaney, my mother first encountered the Atlantic Ocean – the Strand Beach, at Portstewart: “. . . a mighty curve of sand and dunes running for a mile and more. It retains for me the aura of original wonder and, of course, there was the mystery of the courting couples in the dunes.”⁴



Down to earth again, and perhaps too soon, she was in her first job in Castledawson, at Crawford’s shop, where she learned, among other things, how to wrap a tidy parcel in

3. O’Driscoll, Dennis. *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney*. London and New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

4. Anon, 2013. Portstewart Strand was one of Seamus Heaney’s Seven Wonders. *Coleraine Times*.

brown paper and string. As she had learned to bake and sew and “make do” by watching my grandmother, she observed Jim Crawford make parcels of groceries for his customers. Soon she was expertly packaging sweets and biscuits – *Rich Tea or Arrowroot* – that would deliver a taste of home to emigrants, like Mrs. O’Connor’s daughter, across the water in England. Always efficient, Jim Crawford had even devised a method of tying newspapers with string so news could travel easily to relatives in America or Australia. My mother still has the knack for it, and I cannot bring myself to open these Mid Ulster dispatches that remain in a drawer in my Phoenix kitchen - preserved ordinariness, a tribute to my mother’s heart and craft.



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As a young mother in the early 1960s, she frequently took me “up home” to Broagh to see my grandparents. We took the Route 110 bus from Antrim, which made an adventure out of it, me forcing my tiny self to quiet the fear that waited at the Hillhead bus stop from which we began our walk to my grandparents’ house. On the alert, my hand in my mother’s, I was afraid of what hid in the dark spaces in the canopy of beech and alder that hung over us. Scared, but buoyed by bluebells and foxgloves winking at me from the grassy edges of the road and rustic noises of men cutting turf or baling hay, I kept going, knowing that soon I would be in my grandmother’s arms. Heartsome (my mother’s word) with a big indulgent smile for me, in her cardigan the color of buttercups and a flowery apron, she let me help her fill an enamel bucket with water from the pump, and together we would carry milky tea to the men out in the fields. *How she loved me.* What was there to fear?



The Sandy Loaning

“A silky fragrant world there, and for the first few hundred yards, you were safe enough . . .
But scuffles in old leaves made you nervous.”

When did this foreboding settle in me? Perhaps when I first became aware of The Troubles as they were revealed on our television set. From the grainy black and white images that flicker still in my memory, of young women on their knees banging bin-lids, young soldiers on street corners, smoke and ash where bombed out shops used to stand, and panic-stricken faces of families forced out of their homes. From the distressing conflation of a school report delivered on the same day as a radio report of a young Roman Catholic women tarred and feathered, publicly humiliated for having loved a British soldier. Or perhaps from questions of British soldiers “all camouflaged with broken alder branches”⁶ at a security checkpoint on Route 110 outside Toomebridge, an in-between place on the border between County Antrim and County Derry. I recall my mother and I on an autumn evening, when we were no longer bus passengers, but seated with my brother in my father’s car. Da, the head of our house, obedient, dimming his lights and answering like a schoolboy before being released back onto our road.

We kept the fear at bay in this place that shaped and divided us. Like a catechism, we learned the lexicon of The Troubles, each of us increasingly adept at the subtle and more overt ways of using language to determine one’s religion, one’s fate. In his interviews with the people who lived there in the early 1980s, Tony Parker makes an unsettling but astute observation⁷ that those born and brought up in Northern Ireland have a mutual need to know, from the start, the particulars of a person’s background, so they can carry on in the conversation, maybe take it further into a friendship, a marriage, a lasting relationship, without ever saying the wrong thing, “the wrong word.” The schools we attended, our last names, the way we

5. Heaney, Seamus. *Preoccupations: Selected Prose, 1968-1978*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980. Print.

6. Heaney, Seamus. “The Toome Road” in *Field Work: Poems*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979.

7. Parker, Tony. *May the Lord in His Mercy be Kind to Belfast*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1994.

pronounce an “H” all provide critical clues that we use to help ascertain “who we are.” “Derry” or “Londonderry?” “The Troubles,” “the struggle,” or “The Irish Question,” “Ulster” or “The Six Counties?” We are well practiced in the dance-steps Heaney explains in “Whatever You Say, Say Nothing”:

Smoke-signals are loud-mouthed compared with us:
Manoeuvrings to find out name and school,
Subtle discrimination by addresses
With hardly an exception to the rule

That Norman, Ken and Sidney signalled Prod
And Seamus (call me Sean) was sure-fire Pape.
O land of password, handgrip, wink and nod,
Of open minds as open as a trap.⁸

Thus we kept our distance in a crucible of doubt and suspicion. The glass was half-empty, and we anticipated the worst because we had seen it happen to people we knew, and to our little towns where there were gaping spaces where shops had been blown to bits. Everybody knew somebody affected by The Troubles. According to CAIN⁹ during the period from 1968 – 1999, “3,289 people died. There were over 35,000 shootings, 150,000 bombings, and over 40,000 people wounded. Surveys say half of the population knows somebody killed or injured.”

Although maddened by the bombs and bullets, the brutality and barbarism on all sides, we were also resigned to it. We were cautious, but not all the time. Sometimes, we were casual the swirling sectarianism around us, hearing it at an “acceptable pitch” – the sirens and smoke, booby traps and barricades, incendiary devices and legitimate targets. Such things were part of us, stitched into our remembrances of ordinary trips to the shops or to school or to the pub on a Friday night. Still, we kept our distance, as County Down poet, Damian Gorman, articulates in “Devices of Detachment”:

“I’ve come to point the finger
I’m rounding on my own
The decent cagey people
I count myself among ...
We are like rows of idle hands
We are like lost or mislaid plans
We’re working under cover
We’re making in our homes
Devices of detachment
As dangerous as bombs.”¹⁰

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8. Heaney, Seamus. “Whatever You Say Say Nothing,” in *North*. London: Faber & Faber, 1975.

9. “CAIN: Northern Ireland Conflict, Politics, and Society. Information on ‘the Troubles.’” *CAIN: Northern Ireland Conflict, Politics, and Society. Information on ‘the Troubles.’* Web. 30 Sept. 2015.

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We “coped too well,” growing numb until inevitable jolt to the psyche when it happened again, and it always happened again. From the other side of America, I had distanced myself from it, until it was “too close to home,” too close to the places that had formed me, to the landscape of childhood from which Edna O’Brien maintains we can never escape – “many and terrible are the roads to home.”¹¹

In May 1993 the Irish Republican Army (IRA) renewed its bombing campaign with four car-bombings in as many days. On May 23, they packed 500 lbs of explosives in a van and abandoned it outside the Ulster Bus Depot on Broad Street in Magherafelt. With chilling choreography, they called in a warning and detonated the bomb only twenty minutes later, the explosion flattening the bus station and damaging three out of every four shops. Far away in the desert southwest of the United States, in the days before Skype and Social Media, I got word on the phone. No one was badly hurt, and businesses as usual signs were posted on boarded up windows. The local community – Catholic and Protestant – unified in their shock and their commitment to keep going, but in my mother’s voice I heard a familiar pain, sorrow for a place that from then on would only be accessed by memory. Magherafelt was without its bus station, the place where once she took shelter, waiting for the bus home from the school that did not serve her, the place where Seamus Heaney’s mother once waited for him to return from boarding school in Derry. More than a set of coordinates, this bus depot and more than “a legitimate target.” Every bombed place in Northern Ireland is a part of someone’s personal pain and drama.



Photograph: Courtesy of Eugene Kielt, Laurel Villa Magherafelt

11. O’Brien, Edna. “Plunder,” in *Saints and Sinners: Stories*. New York: Back Bay Books, 2011.

12. O’Driscoll, Dennis. *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

In his conversation with Dennis O'Driscoll, Heaney recalls with tenderness a Halloween when he took the private bus home from Derry to Magherafelt. At the bus station, he found his mother in the waiting room, there "for the service bus" that they needed to take to complete the journey home. At the time, he believed it to be a coincidence, but years later, he realized that "she must have planned it, in order to be first to see me and to have that little while on our own together."

Heaney's "Two Lorries,"¹³ was published three years after the Magherafelt bombing, when he had moved away from Northern Ireland. Its mundane title belies the complexity of its form, a sestina, in which he juxtaposes a memory of an encounter between his mother and a flirtatious coalman in the 1940s and the bombing of the Magherafelt bus station in 1993. It opens with a recollection of a coal delivery to his home in 1940s, but by the end of the first line our thoughts drift to Ulysses, to an anguished Stephen Dedalus whose dead mother has appeared to him in a dream, "giving off an odour of wetted ashes."¹⁴ In Magherafelt, it is also raining, "on black coal and warm wet ashes" with a young Heaney observing Agnew, the coal man from Belfast, flirt with his mother,

"With his Belfast accent sweet-talking my mother
Would she ever go to a film in Magherafelt?"

Heaney's reading of the poem alerts us to the out-of-place Belfast accent,¹⁵ its incongruous playfulness. There is no harm in this flirtation and flattered by it, his mother returns to her work with dreams of "red plush and a city coalman." Then, a quick scene change as we are propelled forward to modern-day Magherafelt and to a second lorry on its approach to the town, bearing a deadly load that will "blow the bus station to dust and ashes."

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Unable to look away as this old black and white movie unfolds, we are with Heaney in a flashback to a scene in which his mother is waiting for him again at the bus-station. Nightmarish, her bags are filled not with groceries, but with shovelfuls of ashes. Agnew has returned too, death personified, no longer folding empty coal sacks but refolding "empty upon empty" body bags. Heaney asks the frightened, harrowing question, "but which/ lorry was it now?" A boy again, momentarily caught between Magherafelt's past and present, between boarding school and home, between the nightmare of Northern Ireland and the nightmare of losing his mother, between reality and a daydream, between the coal dust and the smoldering ash of a detonated bomb. Transcending it all, beautiful, and immortal – the coalman and his old lorry:

"Then reappear from your lorry as my mother's
Dreamboat coalman filmed in silk-white ashes."

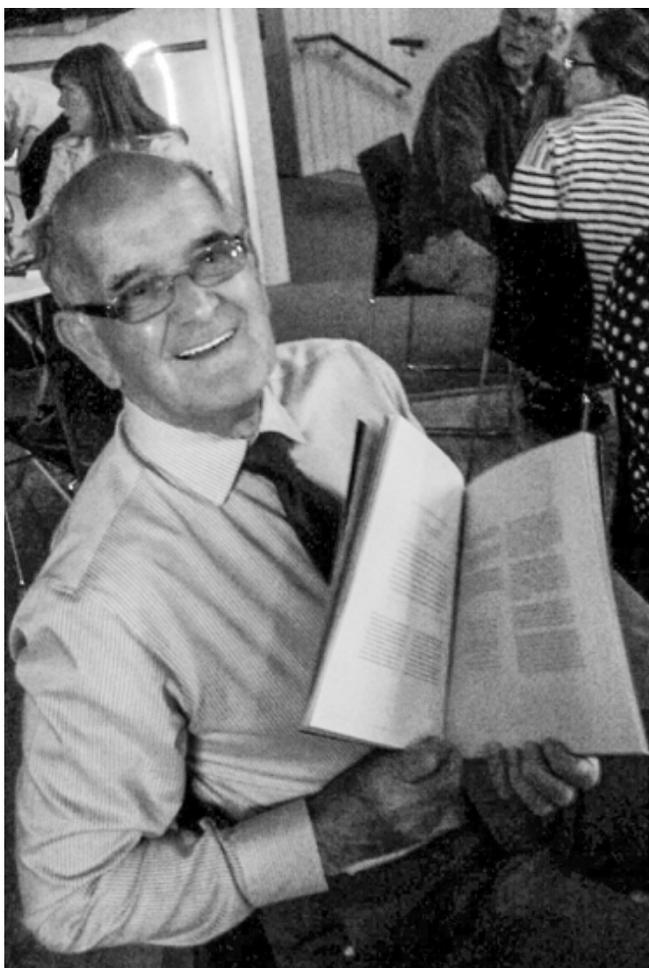
13. Heaney, Seamus. "Two Lorries," in *The Spirit Level*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996.

14. Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. New York: Modern Library, 1992.

15. Anon, Seamus Heaney – "Two Lorries" - Video *Dailymotion*.

The tragedy and the beauty of the Northern Ireland that shaped me lies within “Two Lorries” – the ashes of a devastating bomb sharing the same lyrical space as the ashes of a coal-fire such as that my father regularly built to keep our house warm. “Two Lorries” brings me back home, to Heaney country, to Castledawson, and to men like my father at work, digging potato drills, “purdy drills,” the sound of a spade slicing through the dirt – sure and steady – or the high-pitched scrape of steel on steel sharpening a dull knife, the long metallic strokes on each side ensuring a blade sharp enough to carve a Sunday roast or a Christmas turkey.

“Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father digging. I look down”¹⁶



My father is a maker of things with the “Midas touch” of the Thatcher¹⁷ and the grasp of the diviner. Once, I observed, awestruck, as Da “witched” water, the pull of it so strong where he stood, that the wishbone-shaped stick in his hands, bent and almost tied itself in a knot, “suddenly broadcasting/ Through a green hazel its secret stations.”¹⁸

Like my mother, he had no formal education. I rarely saw him read anything other than the daily newspapers, but somehow within the spare and uncompromising context of rural South Derry, he encountered the poetry of Robert Service and learned it by heart. I recall impromptu recitations of “The Cremation of Sam McGee” or “The Shooting of Dan McGrew” and, in response to the opening daffodil bulbs along the lane, snippets from Wordsworth’s “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.” Listening to Heaney recite poetry, I am immediately drawn back to my father’s random Robert Service workshops and wonder what he would have made of his life if the opportunity for an education had been available to him.

I love my father, and have almost told him as much. Almost, because, as Heaney explains to Dennis O’Driscoll, “That kind of language would have been much suspect. We knew love. It wasn’t a matter of declaring it. It was proven.” It was, and it is, and I am forever indebted to my college professor, Brian Baird, for introducing me to Seamus Heaney, and far more, for introducing me to my father as a

man who would not be out of place in those poems about rural Derry, a man who can make things and find magic in the making of them, a man who understands that poetry belongs to all of us and can speak on our behalf.

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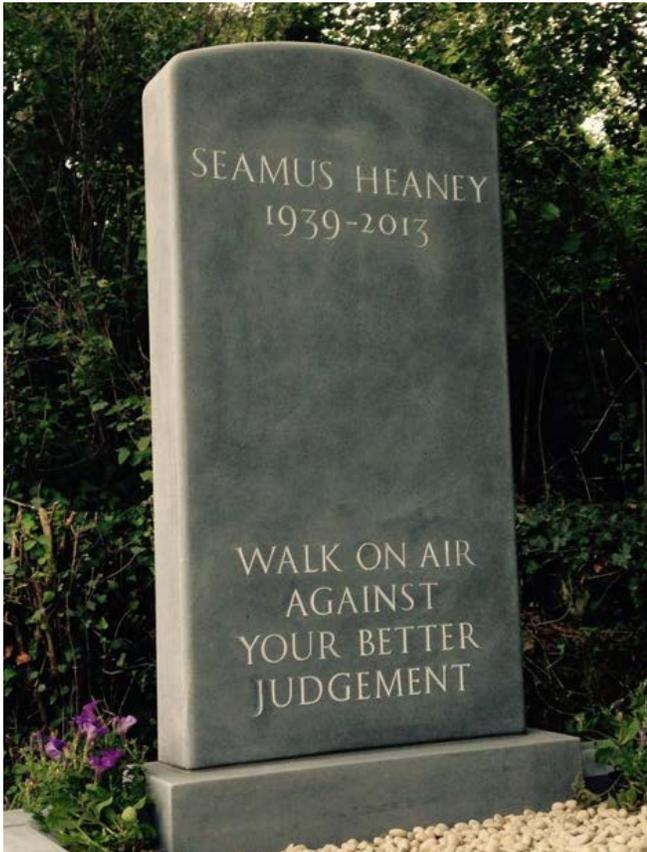
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A Post-Script

Ever since hearing Mr. Baird read from “Death of a Naturalist,” I have turned to Seamus Heaney. I have turned back home. In collective grief for those lost and forever changed by Northern Ireland, in the personal devastating grief following the loss of my husband, or in grieving for the woman I used to be before a cancer diagnosis, I have turned to poetry and the places that inspire it. Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy understands this, responding here to the devastation of the Haiti earthquake as it unfolded on television:

“We turn to poetry at intense moments in our lives . . . When we lose people, or are bereaved, we look for a piece of music or poem to read at the funeral, or when we fall in love we turn to poetry, or when children are born. And I think that can happen at moments of public grief too, as well as personal. It is so close to prayer, it is the most intense use of language that there is. It is the perfect art form for public or private grief.”



It was during a period of private grief that *Death of a Naturalist* surfaced again. The weekend before my first Christmas without my husband, a large envelope arrived, bearing a familiar Northern Ireland post-mark and unfamiliar handwriting. I opened it to find an old copy of *Death of a Naturalist* and inside its pages a typed letter from Brian Baird’s son, Patric. Some time previously, he had read an article I once wrote about his father and had been meaning to send me a book of Heaney’s poetry from Mr. Baird’s personal library. While searching the Internet for my mailing address, he had stumbled upon the news of my husband’s death. So it was that Mr. Baird’s personal copy of “*Death of a Naturalist*,” the volume from which he read to us in 1983, became part of my collection.

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“It is certainly the most dog-eared of the collection and probably the one he read the most. I’m sure he could think of no better person to whom he would like it passed on.”

In my Phoenix kitchen, I was a child again, “shin deep in bluebells” on the Broagh road. I was walking on air.

Photograph: Courtesy Eugene Kielt, Laurel Villa Magherafelt

A PowerPoint link to this essay can be accessed at:

<http://www.slideshare.net/yvonnewatterson/bringing-it-all-back-home-with-seamus-heaney>

Yvonne Watterson



Bio

Originally from County Antrim, Yvonne Watterson emigrated to the United States in 1987 and settled in Arizona where she has enjoyed a highly successful career in public education. A graduate of Stranmillis College, Queen's University Belfast, Yvonne has been recognized nationally for her work not only in school reform but for her advocacy for immigrant children.

Currently, Yvonne teaches English in the Paradise Valley Unified School District. She is also a contributing writer for online publications including IrishCentral.com and Writing.ie Through her personal blog, Considering the Lilies and Lessons from the Field, Yvonne maintains a connection with Northern Ireland, as she shares her unique perspective on life as an immigrant, a teacher, a breast cancer patient, a mother, and a recent widow. Visitors can expect Seamus Heaney and Van Morrison to make regular appearances.

Yvonne lives in Phoenix with her daughter, Sophie, and two dogs, Edgar and Gloria.

The Critical Commentary of Seamus Heaney

by Adrienne Leavy

This essay discusses four major collections of prose writing published by Seamus Heaney, along with several critical responses to this work. Heaney's reputation as a poet was well established even before he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995, and he continues to this day to be one of the most widely read poets in English; however, his critical essays on the art of poetry and the work of other poets are less well known. That Heaney was an astute commentator and critic of poetry should come as no surprise when one considers his educational and professional background. A teacher by profession, Heaney began his pedagogical career in the early 1960s in St. Thomas's Secondary Intermediate School in the Catholic working class area of Ballymurphy in Belfast. He proceeded from there to teach in St. Joseph's teacher training college for three years, before moving to Queens University Belfast as an English lecturer in 1966. After a year as visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley, Heaney made a decisive move from Northern Ireland to the South, specifically, to Glenmore in County Wicklow in 1972, to devote himself full time to writing. However, teaching remained an important part of his professional life. He taught at Carysfort College in Dublin for several years before entering a ten year relationship with Harvard University in 1979 which required him to teach for one semester each academic year. Thereafter, he was Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1989-1994. In addition to these teaching assignments Heaney was regularly invited to deliver prestigious public lectures such as the T.S. Eliot Memorial Lecture at the University of Kent and the Richard Ellmann Lecture at Emory University.

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Heaney's views on the artistic and ethical challenges of poetry are illuminated in the many essays he wrote, and when considered as a whole, they give the reader an overall sense of his ideas on poetry as an art form and its relationship to the world. He does not subscribe to any particular theoretical school or literary movement, but is instead more interested in how writing emerges from lived experience and on the impact individual poets have had on his own work. As Michael Cavanagh points out, "Heaney's criticism may not always be consistent – indeed, it is usually conflicted – but it is clear, strikingly well written, and adventuresome."

1. *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* London: Faber and Faber; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980.

In the introduction to his first collection of prose, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978*, Heaney described how the essays selected were held together "by searches for answers to central preoccupying questions." These questions included "how should a poet properly live and write?" and "what is his relationship to be to his own voice, his own place, his literary heritage and his contemporary world?" An indication of how Heaney intended to answer these questions can be gleaned from a quote from W.B. Yeats that is placed directly after

the table of contents. Specifically, Heaney quotes Yeats on the subject of art and the necessity for the artist to write from within, without bending to the dictates of literary fashion or the opinions of others:

At the enquiry which preceded the granting of a patent to the Abbey Theatre I was asked if *Cathleen ni Houlihan* was not written to affect opinion. Certainly it was not. I had a dream one night which gave me a story, and I had certain emotions about this country, and I gave those emotions expression for my own pleasure. If I had written to convince others I would have asked myself, not 'Is that exactly what I think and feel?' but 'How would that strike so-and-so? How will they think and feel when they read it?' And all would be oratorical and insincere. If we understand our own minds, and the things that that are striving to utter themselves through our minds, we move others, not because we have understood or thought about those others, but because all life has the same root. Coventry Patmore has said, 'The end of art is peace,' and the following of art is little different from the following of religion in the intense pre-occupation it demands.

W. B. Yeats, *Samhain*: 1905 in *Explorations*

Divided into three sections, section 1 gives us a vivid account of the poet's early years on his father's farm in Northern Ireland and his coming of age as a student in Belfast. In the opening memoir essay, "Mossbawn," Heaney describes the sounds of his childhood environment along with the books that first permeated his young consciousness: *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*, school rhymes and poetry by Byron and Keats. The second essay, "Belfast," is notable for the deliberate understatement employed by Heaney in describing the volatile sectarian world he and his friends lived in during the early 1970s. Elsewhere in this piece he talks about his struggle to reconcile the Irish and English traditions that often pulled him in two different directions. As he recalls it, the voices of the different cultural traditions brought him "back through the political and cultural traumas of Ireland, and out towards the urgencies and experience of the world beyond it."

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The subsequent sections include critical assessments on Gerald Manley Hopkins, an early influence on Heaney, along with an essay on the topic of Yeats as an example, and the poetry of Patrick Kavanagh, another important exemplar. In contrast to some of the later, more soul-searching prose work, these trios of essays focus on Heaney's critical appreciation of the poets under consideration. Heaney demonstrates the breath and the depth of his engagement with the work of a wide range of poets including Theodore Roethke, Hugh MacDiarmid, Stevie Smith, Francis Ledwidge, John Hewitt, Paul Muldoon, Osip Mandelstam and Robert Lowell in a number of shorter pieces republished from various newspaper and journal sources. Cavanagh characterizes *Preoccupations* as "largely a record of Heaney's admiration for poets who in one way or another serve their cultures." An interesting addition to this collection is a piece Heaney wrote for *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1975, defending Brian Friel's play, "Volunteers," an oblique and symbolic treatment of Irish history, which was the subject of unsympathetic reviews. Heaney rarely wrote about drama, but felt compelled to come to the defense of his friend in this instance out of a sense that the critics did not understand what Friel was trying to do. As Heaney notes, "Friel has always been obsessed by the conflict between public and private selves, by games and disguises."

2. *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings.* London: Faber and Faber; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.

The title for this book, which continues Heaney's explorations of poetic conscience, is taken from the fourth poem of the sonnet cycle "Clearances," a series of elegiac sonnets dedicated to his mother which appeared in *The Haw Lantern* (1987):

With more challenge than pride, she'd tell me, 'You
Know all them things.' So I governed my tongue
In front of her, a genuinely well-
Adjusted adequate betrayal.

These essays include a tribute to the life and work of Mandelstam, and his wife Nadezhda Mandelstam, who documented her husband's stance against the Soviet authorities in the early 1930s in her books *Hope against Hope*, and *Hope Abandoned*. Heaney also discusses the poetry of Plath and Lowell, and he expands his range to include critical essays on the work of W.H. Auden, Derek Walcott, Elizabeth Bishop and Philip Larkin. An essay on the anthology of Gaelic language poetry, *An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed* edited by Seán Ó Tuama and translated by Thomas Kinsella, looks at the issue of the poet's place in language, specifically with regard to poetry in translation. Heaney notes with approval that "as a translator, Kinsella is most interested in tone, to try to carry the tone of Irish across the linguistic divide."

Primarily, these essays are concerned with an attempt to square art with life, and to answer the question, "what is the responsibility of the poet's words?" In an interview with Mike Murphy for *RTE*, Heaney stated that he was compelled to think on this philosophical question because of the political turmoil in Northern Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s: "I kept wondering, 'Are you fiddling while Rome burns?'"

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Heaney's response to the following question from Murphy reveals as much about the poet's own deeply held convictions on the value of poetry as a form of witnessing as it does about the two Russian poets he uses to explain his answer:

MM: There's an element of severity about the title *The Government of the Tongue* – even political overtones, and in political terms, there are those poets on the other side of the world who have suffered from the preservation of the word.

SH: Yes. The severity comes from the origin of the phrase 'government of the tongue,' which was a monastic phrase. There was 'custody of the eyes' that you practiced and 'government of the tongue,' which meant self-censorship, that you spoke responsibly. The question of whether the tongue governs or should the tongue be governed is meant to be in the title.

I found that exemplified for me in Russian poetry in people like Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova. One of the puns that interests me is to be found in the word 'herd/heard' if it's spelt h-e-r-d or if it's spelt h-e-a-r-d. I think this goes to the very core of not only the Russian experience but of the function of

poetry in the public world. John Keats says, 'Heard melodies are sweet.' What you hear in the sanctum of yourself, that which strikes you as true, convinces you, steadies you – to provide that kind of heard melody is the function of poetry. To get into the true place by the truth in the language and the life of it.

H-e-r-d melodies are what in Russian the government wanted. The government wanted the tongue governed, it wanted you to hear and speak 'herd speak.' It wanted slogans to bond people into solidarity and into a party line.

People like Mandelstam and Akhmatova suffered for their art because aesthetically and artistically speaking they couldn't follow the party line. They had to hear and express things originally. Their work was a growth point, a point of truth, a point of joy and a point of principle. Poets suffer for poetry, not because they espouse political causes, not because they are political figures, or savior figures, but because their calling is to speak to the inner hearing, in the language, in themselves and in the reader. That is their salvific function, that's their holistic function, and that's why they are hurt by conditions where solidarity and 'herd-speak' are called for. If they are out of step with the party line they are in sync with the individual spirit.

Reading the Future.

3. *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures* London: Faber and Faber; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995.

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The ten lectures in *The Redress of Poetry* were first delivered during Heaney's tenure as Professor of Poetry at Oxford University between 1989 and 1994. One of the requirements of this position is that the Professor of Poetry will deliver three public lectures each year. The ten selected by Heaney for inclusion in this book are unified in his view as they all "focus upon a single work or a completed oeuvre by poets in the English, Irish and American canons. In the title lecture, "The Redress of Poetry," Heaney discusses and celebrates poetry's special ability to redress spiritual balance and to function as a counterweight to hostile and oppressive forces in the world. How this "redress" manifests itself in a diverse range of poems and poets is the focus of the remaining lectures. Specific poems analyzed include Christopher Marlowe's "Hero and Leander," Brian Merriman's "The Midnight Court," and Oscar Wilde's "The Ballad of Reading Gaol." Exhibiting again a wide knowledge of international poetry, separate chapters focus more generally but just as perceptively, on the work of Hugh MacDiarmid, Dylan Thomas, the later poetry of Yeats and Philip Larkin, and also on the work of his friend and colleague at Harvard, Elizabeth Bishop.

Critics have drawn attention to the fact that Heaney's prose writing often overlaps with his poetry. For example, in *Stepping Stones*, Dennis O'Driscoll asked Heaney about the link between "An Invocation," Heaney's poem to Hugh MacDiarmid, and his Oxford lecture on MacDiarmid's work. Acknowledging the connection, Heaney praised the Scottish poet, "the least read, least acknowledged of the twentieth-century modernists," as being "as formative of present-day literary culture in his country as Yeats and Joyce were in ours."

4. *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001*. London: Faber and Faber; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

Finders Keepers is a gathering of Heaney's prose work of three decades, part of which is culled from the poet's three previous collections of prose. In addition, this volume contains material from *The Place of Writing*, a series of lectures that Heaney delivered at Emory University in 1988. A variety of other pieces not previously collected in volume form, ranging from short newspaper articles to more extended lectures and contributions to books, including "Place and Displacement" (1984), only available previously as a pamphlet, and "Burn's Art Speech," written for the bicentennial of Robert Burns's death, complete the volume. As Bernard O'Donoghue points out in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, the poet's two concerns, the choice between the ethical and the aesthetic, continue to inform his criticism. O'Donoghue draws attention to the fact the Heaney quotes the forward from his earlier prose collection, *Preoccupations*, in the preface to this collection of essays. In O'Donoghue's view, "by quoting the earlier Forward verbatim, Heaney is making it clear that his abiding concerns have remained unchanged." One of the pleasures of this collection is an essay on the nineteenth-century English poet John Clare, whose work had suffered from neglect until the late 1970s. Here, Heaney lends his voice to the critical reconsideration of Clare's poetry. As Heaney notes, "Clare ended up in Northamptonshire Asylum for the last twenty years of his life, having spent his late thirties and forties in mental confusion, economic distress and poetic neglect." Heaney admires Clare both for his rhetorical sweep and for his "willful strength" in remaining true to his own linguistic identity, and his characterization of Clare as "a poet who possessed a secure local idiom but operated within the range of official literary tradition," could equally apply to Heaney himself.

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Critical Commentary

David Wheatley raises several interesting issues in the context of his examination of Heaney's criticism. Noting that Heaney's prose works are "rooted in his own life and the narrative of his growth as a writer," Wheatley speculates on whether we read Heaney's prose work "for what he has to say about others or what he reveals about himself." Wheatley identifies three hallmarks of Heaney's prose and asks "why should we have a problem with a critic-poet who would rather praise than damn, who would rather write about poets he knows than those who are alien to him, and who uses autobiography in ways that occasionally encroach on the strictly critical integrity of what he is up to?" Despite his misgivings about Heaney's aesthetic use of the Russian poet Mandelstam and his negative assessment of Philip Larkin's late poem "Aubade," Wheatley recognizes that Heaney's essays are "an integral part in the creative process of his work as a whole," seeing them as "a record, with few contemporary equals, of a writer responding with critical magnanimity to his subjects and succeeding at the same time in taking what he needs from them to further his own art."

Thomas Docherty's review of Heaney's second volume of essays, *The Government of the Tongue*, provides a theoretical framework, in this case, "deconstruction," from which to assess Heaney's writing. Docherty identifies two interweaving threads in Heaney's criticism: a major concern with ethics, and the political dialectic of identity and difference, and he reads these essays as evidence of a dilemma facing Heaney the critic; "He is caught between the desire for identity and conscience on the one hand and the awareness of the necessity of difference and the political demand for a song of discord on the other, a poetry that will stir

confusion.” In drawing attention to the political implications of Heaney’s aesthetic stance, Docherty suggests that Heaney regards “the suffering in the east as the primary condition of great poetry,” which, if Heaney were to follow this ideal to its logical conclusion who require a “flight from home, in every sense of the word.”

Cavanagh’s valuable study, *Professing Poetry: Seamus Heaney’s Poetics*, discusses how persuasively Heaney’s critical work has been informed by his poetry, and how much in turn these essays have helped him shape the evolution of his poetry. Individual chapters focus on the intersection of Heaney’s poetry and prose through his writing on Eliot, Lowell, Dante, Larkin and Yeats, and Cavanagh illustrates just how shifting and complex Heaney’s thinking is. There is less attention given to the various Eastern European poets that also feature in Heaney’s critical work; however, Cavanagh provides the rationale for his selection, arguing that “not only because Heaney’s debt to all of them, save Larkin, is great, but also because his relationship to these particular writers is more than usually bound up with issues in his poetics and the motifs in his maturation as a poet.”

Whatever one chooses to place Heaney’s prose writing in the category of “intelligent admirer” or “true critic,” his criticism, like that of T.S.Eliot, is essential reading for both students of Heaney and the poets he writes about. Either way, one comes away from reading Heaney’s essays with a deeper sense of his concerns as an artist, a new way of looking at the guiding principles that govern other writers work, and an ancillary source of material which illuminate Heaney’s own poetry. Cavanagh’s assessment of the importance of this work is probably the most appropriate way to close this essay: “It is the very center of his literary enterprise as a poet with a public conscience and a private heart.”

45

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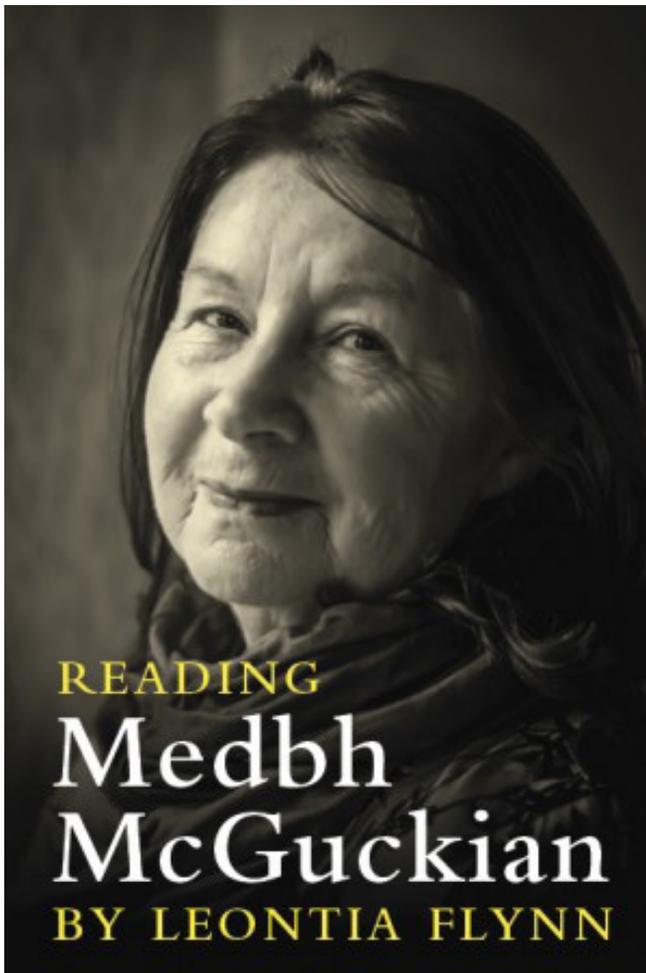
Copies of this publication can be ordered from Poetry Ireland at the following address:
<http://www.poetryireland.ie/publications/poetry-ireland-review/back-issues/issue113-a-seamus-heaney-special-issue>

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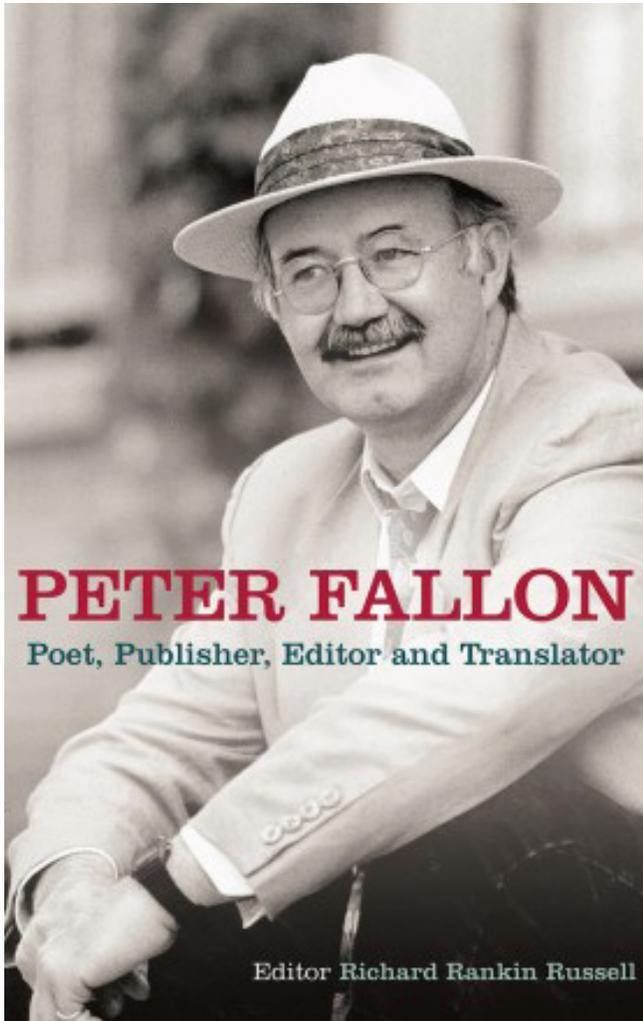
About the Book

Leontia Flynn's book is the first ever study of Medbh McGuckian that offers close readings of the poet's early work, then pans out to discuss her later career in an attempt to do justice to the poet's complexities, while remaining clear and accessible.

Making use of new research suggesting that much of McGuckian's poetic language is borrowed from other sources, *Reading Medbh McGuckian* begins as a series of close readings, analysing the poems and textual materials from which the poet has been found to have borrowed.

The book seeks to give a sense of the difficulty of McGuckian's project, and the poet's evolving style over the last three decades, trying on several critical perspectives to examine how the poet seeks to make us think differently about women, poetry and tradition. However, while delving into McGuckian's meanings where possible, the author insists that the mysteries – and pleasures – of the poetry remain intact.

***Peter Fallon: Poet, Publisher,
Translator, Editor***
by Richard Rankin Russell (Ed.)



About the Book

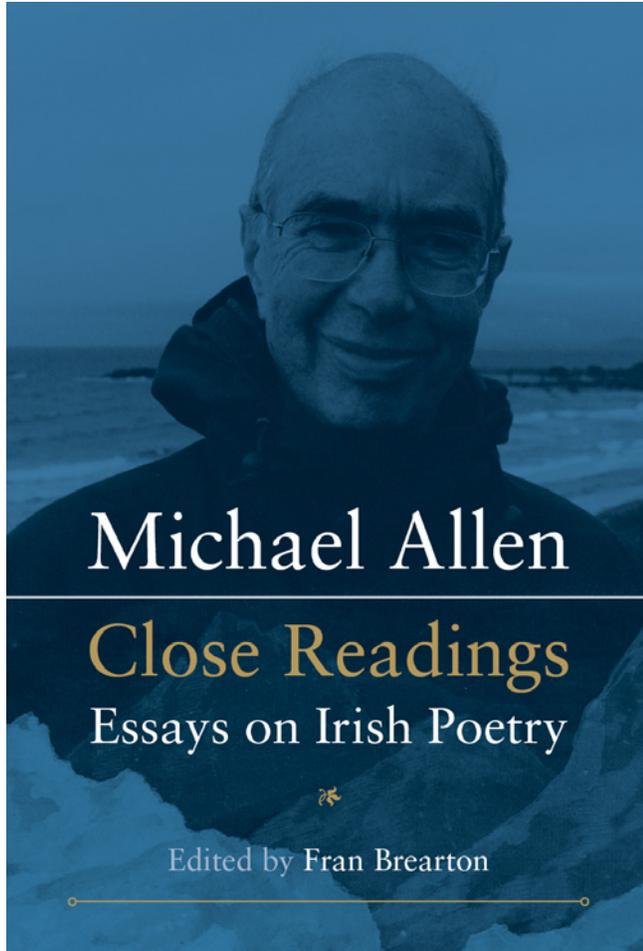
In this unique and beautifully produced edition, a stellar line-up of Irish writers pay tribute to the immense contribution made to the literary arts in Ireland and abroad, by Irish poet and publisher Peter Fallon. Writing on Fallon's life and literature are such acclaimed writers as Seamus Heaney, Dennis O'Driscoll, Derek Mahon, Maurice Harmon, Justin Quinn and Richard Wilbur. Part Four is an exclusive contribution of new poems in honour of Fallon's legacy, by Seamus Heaney, Medbh McGuckian, Paul Muldoon, Derek Mahon, Ciaran Carson, Dennis O'Driscoll, Conor O'Callaghan, Vona Groarke amongst others.

Peter Fallon has run Gallery Press since 1970, publishing hundreds of titles in Irish poetry, drama and fiction, and with Timothy Engelland established Deerfield Press in Deerfield, Massachusetts. Fallon has written many volumes of his own poetry; co-edited, with Derek Mahon the influential 1990 collection *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*; adapted into dramatic form Patrick Kavanagh's novel *Tarry Flynn*; published an acclaimed translation of *Virgil's Georgics* in 2004 and will shortly publish a translation from *Hesiod, Deeds and Their Days*. In 2009, he received an Alumni Award from Trinity College, Dublin, and in 2010, was appointed Adjunct Professor of English, and is a member of the prestigious arts group, Aosdána.

Given Fallon's crucial importance as the leading publisher of Irish poetry, as editor, translator and as poet, this beautiful collection in his honour carries contributions from a number of the poets he publishes.

*Michael Allen: Close Readings
in Poetry*

Fran Brearton, editor



About the Book

Michael Allen *Close Readings: Essays on Irish Poetry*
Michael Allen was a towering figure in the Northern Irish poetry scene and a leading critic of modern Irish poetry. This book contains the first publication of his ground-breaking work on Michael Longley, with an Afterword by Edna Longley, and illuminates the work of major Irish poets – Kavanagh, Longley, MacNeice, Heaney, Mahon, McGuckian and Muldoon.

Michael Allen was a member of the famous ‘Belfast Group’ of Ulster poets in the 1960s, and one of the most authoritative critical voices on poetry in the North of Ireland until his death in 2011. Intimately part of the North’s poetic movement, he taught at Queen’s University where he was tutor to Paul Muldoon and a colleague of Seamus Heaney, who called him “the reader over my shoulder.” Allen’s precision and subtlety as a poetry critic, and that he was the friend and mentor of poets in Belfast for nearly fifty years, made him a significant figure in the broader field of Irish literary criticism and a vital presence in the cultural and literary life of Northern Ireland. These essays reveal Allen’s special, often surprising, perspectives on modern Irish poetry, and are indispensable reading for anyone interested in the development of Irish poetry during the twentieth century.

About the Editor: Fran Brearton is Professor of Modern Poetry at Queen’s University Belfast and Director of the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry. She is the author of *The Great War in Irish Poetry* and *Reading Michael Longley*.

Spotlight on two new poetry titles

from Wake Forest University Press

Geis

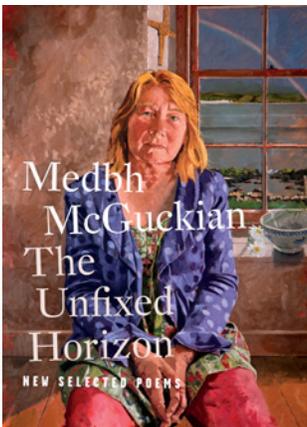
By Caitríona O'Reilly



Geis is a word from Irish mythology meaning a supernatural taboo or injunction on behavior. In her third volume of poetry (following the critically acclaimed *The Nowhere Birds* and *The Sea Cabinet*), Caitríona O'Reilly examines the geis in all of its psychological, emotional, and moral suggestiveness: exploring the prohibitions and compulsions under which we sometimes place ourselves or find ourselves placed. In poems that range from the searing personal to the more playfully abstract and philosophical, this poet's characteristic imaginative range and linguistic verve are everywhere in evidence. These are poems that question our sometimes tenuous links with the world, with others, and even with ourselves, but which ultimately celebrate the richness of experience and the power of language to affirm it.

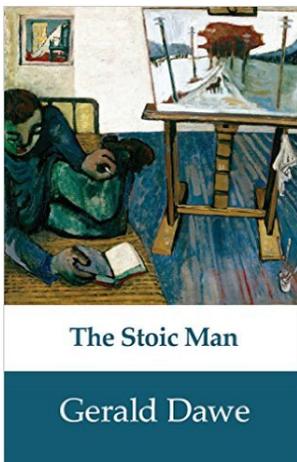
The Unfixed Horizon: New Selected Poems

By Medbh McGuckian



The Unfixed Horizon traces Medbh McGuckian's remarkable trajectory through fourteen volumes published between 1982 and 2013, amply displaying her bewitching, opulent imagination. A comprehensive introduction by editors Borbála Faragó and Michaela Schrage-Früh offers a rare insight into the work and the myriad influences—both private and public—of this mysterious poet. Their selection perceptively charts the history through which the poet has lived. McGuckian's poems are "firmly rooted in Northern Irish soil," yet encompass a world of interests erotic and maternal, spiritual and sensuous, private and political. Readers open to her enigmatic syntactical structures, wide-angled metaphors, and metamorphic images multiplying in dream-like fashion will be richly rewarded.

Des Kenny Reviews Gerald Dawe's memoir, *The Stoic Man*



The structure of Gerald Dawe's Memoir "The Stoic Man" recently published by the Lagan Press follows much the same general outline of his "Selected Poems" published in 2012 and could easily be subtitled "A Tale of Three Cities" beginning in the troubled city of Belfast continuing on to the cultural melting pot that was Galway during the 1970s and 80s before moving on the comfortable avenues of Dún Laoghaire and the ivory towers of Trinity College.

The opening paragraph, though somewhat surprising in content to anyone who knows the author, sets an even tempo to the narrative that despite the turbulence that was directly to follow, continues throughout the book:

"The two who called to our front door are probably well into their sixties by now. My mother was expecting the call but when the door bell rang we were both still taken a little by surprise. *Could she allow me to join a band? I would be well looked after. I need a black polo neck and dark trousers. There'd be rehearsals after Scouts and occasional week-ends.* She agreed and thus began my very brief career in a 'rock' band. It probably didn't last more than six months and I played I think about three times on stage 'live', so to speak."

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From playing in a 'rock' band Dawe graduates to acting with the Lyric Youth theatre and a life of literary activity. The Belfast he describes is at peace with itself and a somewhat enclosed society. He describes a trip to Dublin as an eye-opener:

"Maybe in the mid-sixties we were lucky to make the break when we did, so that we could see what were the immediate parameters of home and family, neighbourhood and city. That trip to Dublin was as subtly subversive and potent an experience as any similar journey I have since taken."

Then comes the shock of seeing British troops on the streets of Belfast and the turmoil of the following years, the sharpening of literary teeth so that by the time he reached Galway in 1972 we see the maturing though relatively unknown poet.

"The walk by Moon's Corner, the post office, down to the Law Court and Library and over the Salmon Weir Bridge stays in my mind in slow motion." This walk over the Corrib was the crossing of a personal and cultural Rubicon for Dawe and one he welcomed with open arms. He quickly immersed himself in the literary and cultural life of the city and indeed added to it in many ways, not least by founding and publishing the thought provoking critical review "Krino".

It is at this point of the book that its real narrative theme begins gently to emerge. As his collections of poetry begin to be published at first by the Blackstaff Press in Belfast and then by Peter Fallon's Gallery Press in the Republic, Dawe begins to question what the writer's role should be in Irish society. In the chapter entitled "Unhealthy Intersections" he writes:

"The actual tradition of Irish writers from Wilde and Shaw and Joyce and O'Casey through the 20th century is one of artistic defiance and imaginative challenge rather than one of cultural compliance and orthodoxy". Despite this, Dawe continues, the country seems not to have gained anything by its cultural inheritance and speaks of the "aesthetic impoverishment of so many of these places (towns and cities) along with large swathes of the countryside".

Dawe believes that "the writer is once again asked being asked to perform his/her patriotic duty as part of the expectation raised in various quarters that culture and 'the Arts' in Ireland will, and should ride to the rescue of an incompetent state and the exploitative class of bankers and others who squandered the resources of the boom, having first lavishly secured their own futures while bequeathing to the taxpayer the cost of the bailout."

This is not the writer's job. What is needed now is an "outward looking, clear-sighted and buoyant appreciation of where we are in the world". He then presents with vignettes of four people who achieved just this.

Gerald Dawe's "The Stoic Man" is a fascinating book in many ways. It is informative, thought provoking, challenging and entertaining. It certainly is well worth reading.

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Bio

Des Kenny was born in Galway in 1950 and was educated in Scoil Fhursa and Colaiste Iognáid before attending University College Galway. Upon graduating he obtained a grant to study at the Sorbonne where he obtained a Master's Degree in literature. After returning from Paris he entered the family business. He is a regular contributor to Books Ireland and is the author of *Kennys Choice: 101 Irish Books You Must Read* (2008), which will be reissued later this year. He is married to Anne Gilmartin and they live in Galway with their children and grandchildren.

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New Poem by Gerald Dawe

from 'John Cheever's Dublin'

4 Clarinda Park

I'll know when
to do the right thing -
hang up my boots,
put the easel away,

snap shut
the conductor's baton, whatever -
when the foot-sized
imprint of a foot,

or, could be,
the side-on march of a boot
in the late parched tree bark
in Clarinda Park,

where we stroll
most nights and days,
when that particular item
no longer holds sway.

GERALD DAWE



Bio

Gerald Dawe is an Irish poet, professor of English and Fellow of Trinity CollegeDubin.

He has published nine poetry collections with The Gallery Press including Selected Poems (2012) and Mickey Finn's Air (2014). The Lagan Press series of his literary journalism concluded with The Stoic Man (2015).Cork University Press will be publishing in October 2015 Of War and War's Alarms: Reflections on Modern Irish Writing.

Ellen Birkett Morris reviews

Nine Bright Shiners by Theo Dorgan

Theo Dorgan's poetry collection *Nine Bright Shiners* takes as its subject matter nothing less than time itself, the resonance of love and the suffering that unites us all. Though broad in its scope, it successfully illuminates those fleeting moments of grace, understanding, and pain that define our lives.

The book has five sections. He begins with a section called *Messages From The World*, whose poems dwell on collective loss. The *Angel of History* lets the reader look over the shoulder of an assassin as he scans a list of potential target. Another poem, *Aftermath* speaks to the collective mourning brought on the terrorist attack of 9-11.

The poems, though often melancholy, are never grim. Some, including *The Lost Gaeltacht of Lower Manhattan*, are funny, as a ticket taker inquires of an Irishman '...do they still speak Irish over there?'

Others are sensual as in *Time on the River*, from a section titled *House of Echoes*:

Time on the river is deep and slow,
you said so this morning, coming up
with tea for the helm.
You were stood at my shoulder,
gazing back down the beaded wake,
a small shiver in your neck,
your cropped head warm on my ear.
Deep and slow, you said again,
And I felt it opening in my bones.
The weight of the river fell against us
on a long, dark curve and we leaned,
hip to hip, to bring the bow around,
at one with the boat, the river and each other,
subtracted from the known world.

The couple is both a part of the flow and apart from the world. The romantic reverie is broken by an explosion, a church on fire, the intruding world.

Later we meet lovers in solitude in the comfort of their home in *This Gifted Life*. Dorgan offers the full picture of a long time relationship, saying that each threatened to walk out over the years, but leaves the reader with this:

Let me speak a hard won truth:
I'd perish without you.

So, let the rain fall; the fire is bright,
the kettle coming to boil soon
I'll make tea, we'll settle for the night,

Let the phone ring out if it rings,
The life trail out behind us as the world turns.

Here we are, with all the time we'll ever need
and nothing to do but work, talk, or be silent, as we please.

Dorgan gives a nod to Jack Kerouac in *The Bodhisattvas That We Were Are Still on the Road* as he describes reading *On the Road* as a boy and:

puzzling it all out, the wild hammering swoop of it,
the dizzy rising and falling and unfolding.

In *Learning Death* two lovers lie together talking as one is struck by the realization that one day there will be an "end to words." But the last poem in the volume, *Instructions*, embraces eternity:

I am going nowhere.
I love this earth too much.
I could never love you enough but now
I have all the time is there is to go on trying.

Dorgan's voice is intimate, his language beautiful in its simplicity. His elegies will stay with me long after I set *Nine Bright Shiners* aside.



Bio

Ellen Birkett Morris is the author of *Surrender* (Finishing Line Press). Her poetry has appeared in *Thin Air Magazine*, *The Clackamas Literary Review*, *Juked*, *Gastronomica*, and *Inscape*. Morris won top prize in the 2008 Binnacle Ultra-Short Edition and was a semi-finalist for the 2009 Rita Dove Poetry Prize. Her fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Shenandoah*, *Antioch Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *wigleaf*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, and *Paradigm*. She is the winner of the 2015 Bevel Summers Prize.

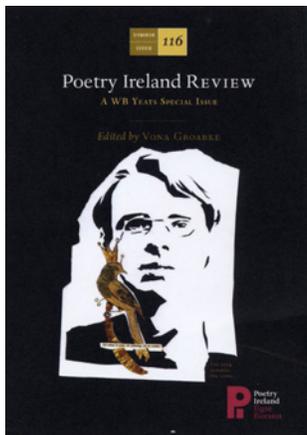
Hollow Bones

Crows have hollow bones
Elegant scaffolding designed for flight
Had you hollow bones I could lift you from your bed
Carry you outside to feel the sun
See the clouds drift across the sky
Watch the shadows lengthen

But you fall into a darkness I cannot penetrate
Your bones riddled with tiny holes
Like a fossil found on the river bottom
By a small boy who shouts to his father
To announce his find
As a crow soars overhead

Ellen Birkett Morris

Little Magazine focus: Poetry Ireland Review No.116, Special Issue on W.B. Yeats



One hundred and fifty years after his birth W.B. Yeats remains as prolific and important a voice in Irish poetry as he was during the height of his career in the early twentieth century. Olivia O' Leary argues that one of the reasons for Yeats's enduring appeal, aside from his obvious poetic genius, is that "he was one of us because we claimed him. He helped create the necessary myth which built a nation, and he knew it." With seventy contributors comprising both Irish and international artists, writers, poets, and public figures, this tribute to Yeats illustrates how enduring the poet's influence is over a widely disparate community of writers and intellectuals. These include novelists Colin Tóibín, Margaret Atwood, Neil Jordan, John Banville and Joseph O' Connor. Irish poets contributing include Harry Clifton, Gerald Dawe, Peter Fallon, Eamon Grennan, Rita Ann Higgins, Thomas Kinsella, John McAuliffe, Medbh McGuckian, John Montague, Sinéad Morrissey, Paul Muldoon, Richard Murphy, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Maurice Riordan. Critic Fintan O' Toole is also represented, as are the historian Diarmaid Ferriter, and Yeats biographer and scholar Roy Foster.

Groarke writes in her introduction that her goal was to "put together a lively, in earnest but entertaining issue, with nothing po-faced or stuffy about it." Acknowledging that this agenda would constitute a balancing act, she further explained the motivation for her agenda thus: "Academics have filled umpteen pages with considerations of his work. Politicians have reduced him to sound bites. I wondered if there might be a space between the two." The issue takes as its starting point three distinct ways in which contributors were asked to approach Yeats, and the results make for fascinating reading given the diversity of the writers who participated in this issue. In broad terms, Groarke assigned

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1. Reviews of Yeats's thirteen collections by contemporary writers.
2. New poems with the idea of seeing where contemporary poets might walk with the first line of a Yeats poem.
3. Twenty-three essays offering readings and personal responses to Yeats's heritage and his poems.

It is beyond the scope of this review to address each and every one of the seventy thoughtful and thought provoking contributions. Instead, I will highlight a number of specific pieces which resonated with my readings of Yeats, yet also illuminated the poet's work by causing me to reflect on various poems and collections in a new light. By its nature this is a subjective list, and another reader might nominate a completely different selection from this issue, which I think speaks to the strength of the volume as a whole.

The iconoclastic tenor of the issue is signalled early on by August Kleinzahler's reimagining of the poem "Friends," from *Responsibilities* (1914). The opening line of Yeats's poem, which

celebrates three women who helped make him the poet he was, Olivia Shakespear, Lady Augusta Gregory and Maud Gonne, is as follows: “Now must I these three praise,” and is followed by “Three women that have wrought / What joy is in my days.” Kleinzahler’s playful interpretation, which follows the opening line, “Now I must these three praise,” with the line “Po’boys, gumbo, crawfish etoufee,” is a riff on the culture of the Louisiana Bayou, coupled with a commentary on America: “Americans, on balance, seem an amiable people, /If all about commerce, sports and steeples,” which also manages to work in a mention of Gonne and Georgie Yeats (one could also interpret certain lines about the restorative power of work to refer to the automatic writing of Georgie Yeats). The Indian born poet Vijay Seshadri, who won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 2014, describes how Yeats’s poetry resonated with him while growing up as a teenager in the American Midwest. For Seshadri, Yeats was the first poet who taught him that “the relationship between form and representation” was what defined poetry, and he credits Yeats with helping him read John Ashbery “far better than artists who came from Ashbery’s milieu and shared his project.” Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood subtly mirrors the reflective tone in her poem “Because We Love Bare Hills And Stunted Trees,” which is also the first line in the last poem that Yeats wrote about Maud Gonne, “Hound Voice” from *Last Poems* (1938-1939). Elsewhere, Sharon Olds gives us a feminist reimagining of Yeats’s “Crazy Jane Talks With The Bishop,” and one can imagine Crazy Jane writing and speaking the lines of Olds’s wonderful poem.

In his essay “A Kick In The Head,” playwright Frank McGuinness describes his ambivalent response to Yeats’s poetry and the “reckless way he went for his enemies, spitting blood in all directions.” He is also quick to point out that Yeats had absolutely no sense of humor, and McGuinness believes this resulted in Yeats often backing himself into a rhetorical corner, which resulted in “a mind so upstaged and confounded by its own machinations, self-perpetuating, self-defeating.” However, McGuinness also draws attention to how Yeats helped him in his translation of Greek drama, highlighting “Leda and The Swan,” which he characterizes as Yeats’s “greatest play,” as the poem that guides him in all his explorations of the theatre of Sophocles and other Greek masters. McGuinness writes:

[W]ithin the space of a sonnet Yeats becomes a monumental storyteller as he encompasses the whole Trojan War, its shocks, its sorrows, the cruel mating of god and woman, that strange congress of human with divine, then the casual, cunning, ferocious climax. “Leda and The Swan” is my key to everything I’ve tried to write about the Greeks, and it is still “as cold /And passionate as the dawn” as when I first encountered it.

Joseph O’Neill posits an interesting argument for the reading of one of Yeats’s most popular poems, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” as a poem in which the Yeatsian speaker “resists the very idea of Irish nationality,” seeing it instead as “a perfectly verbalized escapist fantasy.” Writer and filmmaker Neil Jordan addresses the mystical side of Yeats, with his emphasis on dreams and his belief in the quasi-philosophical, religious and mythical system he set forth in *A Vision* (published privately in 1925). For Jordan, the power of Yeats’s later poetry “comes from elements that are, at some very deep level, inaccessible to rationality.” One of the most interesting aspects of this essay is the poem Jordan selects to extrapolate upon his thesis, “On A Picture Of A Black Centaur By Edmund Dulac,” from *The Tower* (1928). Poet John McAuliffe discusses *Responsibilities* (1914), arguing that it is a deeply antagonistic collection,

which “shows Yeats’s grasp of his modern situation” and also reveals the poet trying to “find a way out of his earlier positions, as editor, booster and poet of the Irish tradition.” As McAuliffe notes, both the political events of Easter 1916 and Yeats’s subsequent “Easter 1916” caused the poet to “re-align his poems again.” Elsewhere, former Irish poet laureate Harry Clifton provides an elegant poetic response to the two stanza poem that comprises the fourth section of “Vacillation,” from *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933). Here, the middle aged Yeats writes, “My fiftieth year has come and gone, / I sat a solitary man, / In a crowded London shop, / An open book and empty cup / on the marble table –top.” The epiphanic moment in the second stanza, when the poet’s “body of a sudden blazed,” is transmuted in Clifton’s poem into a “finite afterglow.”

Thomas Kinsella centers the issue, both physically and psychically, with a close reading and analysis of two early Yeats poems from *The Rose* (1893): “To The Rose Upon The Rood Of Time” and “To Ireland In The Coming Times.” The conflict between Yeats’s occult pursuits and his nationalist politics is further explained by Kinsella in his subsequent commentary on the latter poem. Kinsella identifies Yeats’s desire to be accepted “as a poet of this world, in particular of Ireland, despite his preoccupations with things of the other world.” He argues that Yeats, who “had established himself early in London and made himself part of the English literary and publishing scene,” had inherited “a divided tradition, the outcome of colonial settlement.” As Kinsella writes, “It is on this basis, as an Anglo-Irish poet, that he is asking his future Irish audience to accept him, with all his mystic concerns, in company with the Irish poets of the past who wrote for an oppressed people.”

Kinsella’s contribution is followed by that of Peter Fallon, who reviews *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), and in the process, sums up the cultural world of the time by reminding us of the work that Frost, Eliot and Pound were doing around the time Yeats’s collection was published. Fallon further contextualizes the period by pointing out that Joyce had yet to publish *Ulysses* (though his play *Exiles* had premiered the previous year, and both *Dubliners* and *A Portrait* had been published), and that the Great War had taken its toll on the world of poetry with the deaths of Edward Thomas, Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen and Francis Ledwidge. Several important Yeats poems are contained in this volume, including the title poem along with “In Memory of Major Robert Gregory,” “An Irish Airman foresees his Death,” and “The Fisherman.”

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Poet Bernard O’ Donoghue and novelist John Banville respectively contribute accessible and thought-provoking reviews of major works, *Michael Roberts and the Dancer* (1921) and *The Tower* (1928). Synthesizing the major themes of the poems in these volumes, O’Donoghue reads a stronger sense of history in the poems in *Michael Roberts*, combined with Yeats’s continuing interest in the occult and the mystical, which resulted in the extraordinary poems, “Easter 1916,” “The Second Coming,” and “A Prayer for my Daughter.” Banville reads “the theme of old age and approaching death” as permeating *The Tower*, which includes key poems such as “Sailing to Byzantium,” “The Tower,” “Meditations in Time of Civil War,” and “Leda and the Swan.” In Banville’s assessment, “these poems throb with a sense of the physical immediacy matched, among the Modernists, perhaps only by Joyce and Picasso.” Gerald Dawe manages in his review of *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* (1933) to succeed in complying with Groarke’s brief, that the review should be written “from a standpoint of innocence, as if the author were reading the collection for the first time.” Dawe reads the

poems in this collection as being underscored by “remorse and loss,” yet despite that he argues that in his mid-to-late sixties, “Mr. Yeats has fashioned a ‘miraculous’ poetry of redemption and recovery.” John Montague reviews *Words For Music Perhaps and Other Poems* (1932), and makes a key point that “a central paradox of Yeats’s career is that while he is tone-deaf, he is capable of great poetic music.”

One of my favourite pieces is Joseph O’Connor’s essay, “Yeats Is My Mother,” perhaps because it’s so funny and perceptive, and also because you really have to have been brought up in Ireland to get some of the references. There’s something to be said for demystifying the international Nobel laureate and bringing him back “among schoolchildren” to a question on the Leaving Certificate. Also demystifying for those who are daunted by the prospect of tackling Foster’s excellent two volume biography of Yeats, *W.B. Yeats: A Life* (1997) and *W.B. Yeats: The Arch-Poet* (2003), is an interesting conversation between Groarke and Foster about his work on Yeats. Two perceptive contributions by Paul Muldoon and Professor Geraldine Higgins close out the volume.

In addition to essays, reviews and poems Groarke includes a number of less orthodox contributions for a poetry review. There is a Yeats Quiz and a Maud Gonne Crossword, along with a number of pen and ink drawings and photographs inspired by various Yeats’s poems, and a hilarious cartoon strip on Yeats as an occultist. In addition, two historical curiosities, an anonymous review of *The Wild Swans at Coole* from *The Dial* in 1919, and Ezra Pound’s review of *Responsibilities* from *Poetry* in 1914, can also be found between the pages. In my view, these additions neither add to nor detract from the more serious content, and it is to Groarke’s credit that she is willing to try something different, even if the experiments are not all equally successful.

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Few modern poets have had careers as long or as complex as Yeats, and few artists inspire such ambivalent reactions in the encounter between personality and genius. As Fintan O’Toole explains, “The old bones of bad ideas and pompous prejudices peek through the beautiful flesh of Yeats’s poems. The old rags of snobbery and bitterness leave their musty smell on his lyric grace.” Yet what elevates Yeats’s art and contributes to its inherent tension is, in O’Toole’s view, the fact that “Yeats makes it from his whole self, including, crucially, the dislikable parts.” As O’Leary points out, “the richness of Yeats is the full span of his life and his work,” and in seeking poetic responses to an array of Yeats’s poems and eliciting critical reviews for each of his thirteen collections, Groarke succeeds in conveying the broad sweep of his aesthetic interests. The scope of this issue reveals the different historical periods in which Yeats lived and also reveals the major literary traditions of which he was a part: Romantic, Victorian and Modernist.

Given that Yeats was such a multi-faceted artist, this current special issue only makes one eager to read another that focuses on Yeats as dramatist, and as the founder and director of the Irish National Theater. One could also envision a separate issue dedicated to exploring Yeats’s public life through his literary journalism, his campaign to secure the Hugh Lane Bequest, his political differences with Lady Gregory during the Irish Civil War, and his six year term as a senator in the Irish Senate. Like any good literary work, the reader is left yearning for more upon finishing this W.B. Yeats Special Issue from *Poetry Ireland Review*.

Adrienne Leavy.