

An aerial photograph of a rugged coastline. The sea is a deep, vibrant blue, with white foam from breaking waves crashing against a dark, rocky shore. The rocks are layered and textured, with some areas appearing greenish-yellow, possibly due to algae or moss. The perspective is from a high angle, looking down at the coastline as it curves away into the distance.

The Cathach

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE CATHACH opens with Joseph O'Connor's recognition that the battle of the books today pitches paper originals against electronic copies on the likes of the Kindle and iPad. Whatever form the book takes, however, its concerns are manifestly human. So we find Bernard MacLaverty wittily employing the titles of books to reveal a life. Elsewhere, he makes clear the difficulties of breaking a habit intimately associated with the act of writing that can subtract from the lifespan of the writer. The life of the writer as breadwinner is the concern of Carlo Gébler. And every aspiring writer should read his practical account of what a life in books entails. Not only does he illuminate how his writer's imagination works, he gives detailed practical advice on the craft of writing, and he speaks honestly about the mercenary realities of the publishing business. In Mary Branley's story the prize is literacy itself and the liberation it brings. Sean Golden's poem addresses a bookish man's life-changing encounter with lethal force violence. And Thomas Lynch returns to the famous judgement from 'The Battle of the Books' that established the principle of copyright by stating, "To every cow its calf; to books their copy": a civil notion that begat savagery. There is the psychological savagery too of withheld approval and the winning of a father's endorsement through words, in Mary O'Shea's short poem. Leland Bardwell considers the significance of 'your room' when you realise that your room is gone. While Galway poet Mary O'Malley reflects on the depth of meaning within a single word when we bring our dead 'home'. A world-wide-web situated literary journal, this volume of *The Cathach* delights in the notion that where the future of 'the book' is concerned the true binding material is the rich experience of being human.

- *Brian Leyden*

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Cover Image: Winter Headland by Cormac O'Leary

VIRTUAL REALITIES

Recently I read an article in the *New York Times* about the fact that Sony has developed an electronic portable screen onto which the entire text of a novel can be downloaded. And the fine people at Amazon have manufactured their own reading device, the Kindle, with a screen 'so paper-like, it demands to be read'. Amazing, isn't it? What'll they think of next?

I find these cutting-edge technological developments fascinating, of course, but a while ago I came across one even more astonishing innovation which I would like to recommend to you if I may. It's cheaply produced, made of entirely recyclable materials, user-friendly in almost any situation you care to imagine - even in the bath. It requires no re-charging, anti-virus protection or fiddly wireless connections, and it runs an extraordinary number of applications. It's called 'the book'. It's widely available. And it's even more paper-like than the Kindle.

The other night, my eight year old son asked me if I thought a time machine would be invented within my lifetime. It was nice to be able to tell him that the time machine was actually invented several centuries ago by that clever man Mr Gutenberg. For the book can transport you to all sorts of time zones and virtual realities, to distant planets, magical worlds, to anywhere you'd like to go. The territory of the novel, from the form's first appearance, has been vast, capacious and daring. The shipwreck, the riot, the revolution, the storm, the knights charging windmills, the madwoman in the attic, the children of the ghetto, the pickpockets of London, the explorer who finds himself in a land of little people, the Wuthering Heights, the depths. Through these territories, and many others, has gone wandering the storyteller, with only words as a lamp. He has seen the hunchback in the cathedral, and Huckleberry Finn, Madame Bovary and Count Dracula and Leopold Bloom. Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha and the Secret Scripture. What a pantheon, what a party, what a multitude of selves. The novel has the capacity to describe the drama of life as no other art form can do. The original Virtual Reality, it downloads more quickly than broadband, and its effects, as we know, are more widespread.

It's also the form that captures most affectingly what it's like to be a human being. We carry the past and the future as we go. We drag anchors that are attached to us - indeed we sometimes cling to them. The very essence of the human is to experience time in this way. In addition, we carry the pasts of those people around us, and frequently, also, their futures, which we embody, because we ourselves are *part* of that future, and will be part of our loved ones' pasts. Only the novel can describe what that's like. And when we look at the some of the oldest things any culture possesses, we see the modes of storytelling

everywhere. The Greek myths, the Celtic sagas, the legends of vanished societies. And what is the Bible, that stupendous work of storytelling, if not a kind of jigsaw novel? Four separate accounts of the life of its hero: Angels! Talking serpents! Dead men walking! In the beginning was the Word, the scripture tells us. But perhaps, in the beginning, was the story.

And consider those fantastic words at the end of the gospel of John. ‘And there are many more wonders that Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I think the whole of the world could not contain the books that should be written.’ How I love the childishness and innocence of that beautiful line. It connects us with the author across the millennia. We know exactly how he felt.

The world is stranger than we can hope to understand – to picture it, to imagine it, is immediately to make a puzzle. Human existence is so mysterious, a Rubik cube we can’t solve, no matter how many times we turn the squares. I like a novel that feels as though you can walk into it, look around, touch the walls, the way we walk into a piece of great music, like Handel’s *Messiah* or The Beatles’ *A Day in the Life*. These are structures we want to experience again: one visit is not enough. I want the *potholes* of a novel, the bumps, the flaws, the cracks in the ceiling, the draughts. I don’t *want* it to be smooth; I want to see the textures. I want fiction with *friction*, jaggedness, *juice*. I want the words to rub together so the sparks fly in my face. And I can say with the great French writer, Anatole Broyard, ‘the more I like a book, the more slowly I read it.’ This spontaneous talking-back to a book is one of the things that make reading such a pleasure.

Ugliness is so widespread and profitable and catching-on that if you could buy stocks in it you’d be a billionaire. There is a property crisis, we are told, but not an ugliness crisis. Invasions are justified on the basis of non-existent weapons, torture is called liberation, the hangman a hero, and everything Orwell told us has turned out to be true. Only his date of 1984 was wrong. Language is debased on an everyday basis, often by being made too smooth. The best readers, once remarked the American novelist Philip Roth, ‘come to fiction to be free of everything that is not fiction.’ But that beautiful remark is not quite true. The best readers come to fiction because of the paradox it offers. To know briefly what it is to transcend the self, and to imagine briefly what it is to be someone else, is to come to know more profoundly what it is to be yourself. I’m telling you, this is magic and it works.

It’s available in your local bookstore, for less than the cost of a round of drinks. So do yourself a favour. Dive in.

- *Joseph O’Connor*

A BOX OF BOOKS RECENTLY ARRIVED IN A GLASGOW CHARITY SHOP

PRAYERS OF LIFE

Michel Quoist

BONHOEFFER

Prayers from Prison

100 HIGH FIBRE DISHES

Octopus Books

Music for the New Rite of Mass

Colin Mawby

THE DIVINE OFFICE II

THE DIVINE OFFICE I

THE DIVINE OFFICE III

The Redemptorist Hymn Book with Music 2/6

The TASTE of HEALTH BBC

Gowers THE ABC OF PLAIN WORDS

Cancers of the Lower Bowel and their Treatment Lancel

Famous Irish Lives Martin Wallace

FAMILY HEALTH *The Macmillan Guide*

BOWEL CANCER

TOTAL RELAXATION IN FIVE STEPS: LOUIS PROTO

ERIC PARTRIDGE YOU HAVE A POINT THERE

KILLING PAIN WITHOUT PRESCRIPTION *Harold Gelb*

The Oxford Dictionary

Cross of the Christian Church

The Book of Ulster Surnames *Robert Bell*

Cancer A Positive Approach ~ Thomas & Sikora

Music and the Higher Life W.H.Jude

COPING SUCCESSFULLY WITH YOUR IRRITABLE BOWEL *Rosemary Nicol*

Thorsons Introductory guide to ACUPUNCTURE

The Documents of VATICAN II Walter M. Abbott, S.J.

The Irish Christmas Book The Blackstaff Press

- *Bernard MacLaverty*

Thank You for Venice

(for Jean)

All the cáilín damhsas
floating through the air,
in the Scuola Grande del Carmini-
a solid leg flung out
from voluptuous layers of yellow and red.
You and I still up there somewhere.

Our pirate vaporetto trips
up and down the grey green streets.
So clean. Wine on the Lido, desire.
Three caped and comic firemen,
that rainy night we left St Marks Square.
Our steady landfall steps on bridge
and stone, humming the tune to Inish Oirr.
Remember the uptight scentless rose
I bought and then got shy?
I meant to scatter the petals in our bed.
Instead I played a slide by ear
The Star above the Garter
and a reel by Lad O'Beirne
notes floating clear
from my black mandolin
through the open window.
My solid leg flung out
from under sheets
Vivaldi's tunes, my hand in yours
knowing I love you more
than music. All this
before we taste one, deep, prosecco kiss.
Thank you for Venice,
Venus hanging in the December air
a fullish moon, the whole world there.

- *Mary Branley*

SACRED SPACE

Young death is a savage thing, like an act of war. The mind, rightly, refuses at first to accept it. A year and a half ago, there was a car accident, one of many that night, in the city of Chicago. Over several days, a thread slowly and inevitably pulled from a tapestry, tearing my world, and the world of my family. Time began to behave erratically and people repeated phrases as if words might somehow help.

Solvitur ambulando: walking solves it, is one of the few dictums I have generally found to be true. This time walking will not solve it, but walking is all I can do. I walk the town and tired, find myself in Middle Street. The Augustinian Church is quiet. A man sits on a chair. A woman prays, seeming agitated. This is no San Sulpice, with its dark lowering Delacroix painting of a desperate Jacob wrestling with the angel, whose face is that of someone everyone would love, if only they could meet him. This church is neither Old Testament, nor enslaved to the functional. White statues, white altar, white faces of the little corner angel shaped like a capricious heart. This is sacred space, the trick of stone and geometry made light, drawing the eye upwards, through the arches poised elegantly along both sides, echoed in the high windows where the late evening is lined up, like so many packets of blue.

I go to the small side chapel. Our Lady of Good Counsel, drawn by a glint of gold, needing the lustre of those remnants from an older church. I miss the candles, but I make my offering and make do with their poor electric shadows.

This alchemy is not, of course, purely architectural, but this is what Philip Larkin calls 'a serious house on serious earth' in his poem about an unbeliever's compulsion to seek out churches. Reading it brings a shock of recognition. The need for churches has not left us with the departure of both faith and superstition. They were where people congregated, where communities worshipped and wept, where some still do.

They are what all good civic space should be - for everyone, of any creed and none. This church stands the test of time. Here, the tabernacle, the nave and the apse allow the idea of values beyond concrete. They legislate for the sacramental. They provide little chapels of adoration, nooks and crannies of comfort in an age of nihilism and brutalist design:

*...In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognized and robed as destinies.'*

Four men, one of whom may be a priest, enter and recite a short liturgy, then leave. Paul Walsh's stained glass windows, situated behind the altars and in the side chapels,

fill with the cold intense light of approaching night. They have a wintery beauty, in this stark hour. Glass is my favourite medium, the only art I saw as a child. I wait as the light drains from the glass, keeping as best I can, a silent vigil with my sister in Chicago.

Like Larkin, I have tended:

*'...towards this cross of ground
Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt
So long and equably what since is found
Only in separation – marriage and birth,
And death, and thoughts of these – for whom was built
This special shell?'*

I am grateful for its vast spaces, towards the end of a hard bright day.

The streets are streaked with light as I make my way back across the river, to wait. So much of our lives are lived Elsewhere. In Boston and Chicago and San Francisco, In Paris and Beijing. We inhabit those places in our imagination, whenever our loved ones come to mind. Or if we have visited, we can see the kitchen, the street, smell the asphalt. Papers are written and conferences held on concepts such as *'place'* and *'home'* but when we hear *'They are bringing him home'*, hear it with a physical relief, each of us knows the exact road we will travel from Shannon. We know the lakes, the hills, and exactly where the land will open out into the sea. We know where that journey will begin, and where exactly, it ends. And hope there is peace there.

- *Mary O'Malley*

Room

Only when you've lost your room
Do you know the meaning of room
Which isn't only space
Only when you owned a room
And you've just found out
What your room had meant
Do you understand loss.

So outside my room
Which is no longer my room
I walk the river again
Till tears block my breathing
As I remember the garden
Outside my room
And below the garden
A man kissing a horse

- *Leland Bardwell*

Seven Rings

(In memory of Steffi)

She rang me seven times,
The dying woman.

Seven dying rings
On my answering machine

Seven times calling my name
Yet I was not there to hear her.

My name suspended in the air
Will float there forever

She wanted me to hold
Her voice in the air

So as the air would keep it for her
But she went, holding my name

As the thorn holds the web
The spider has woven.

- *Leland Bardwell*

READING THE SITUATION

Kitty was a bright girl with long plaits and the only Traveller in the school. The family was adamant she go there, although I thought she might feel isolated. She was capable and confident, a perfectionist really, with big brown eyes and a flair for putting people at ease, me included.

‘That other school might be good enough for some families, but it’s not good enough for us,’ her father told me. ‘We don’t want her mixing with them other Travellers.’

That was typical of the attitude of this group of families, who considered themselves to be designer Travellers, a cut above the rest. They wore designer labels and the latest fashions, they drove new vans, and they had bigger huts on their halting site. This was another concession won from the Council by virtue of their superiority, according to themselves anyway.

They were wealthy scrap collectors, with yards full of metals, neatly stacked into brass, copper, aluminium, and so on. They were also very traditional in their attitudes: set roles for males and females. The men left the children to school in the morning, and then set off for the day with the older boys. The women and young children were left all day, without transport. Most of them couldn’t drive.

As the first child on the halting site to attend secondary school, Kitty was always uncertain as to how she was doing. Her teachers spoke very highly of her, but Kitty didn’t believe these reports. Like most children new to secondary school, she was finding it difficult. But often parents can provide the necessary emotional support and contain the situation. Traveller parents, who have not been to secondary school, cannot provide the same reassurance. The children’s fears ignite their own, especially if they are suspicious of the level of care in the second level system to begin with.

‘I can’t do the maths,’ Kitty told me. ‘I don’t understand them.’

In my role as a Visiting Teacher for Travellers I had called into the halting site to see her after her first few weeks in the chosen school.

‘Can I arrange to get extra help in maths for you?’

Kitty wanted no extra help, no attention drawn to her, no concessions for being a Traveller.

‘An’ I can’t do me homework,’ was always her other complaint.

Her parents had little understanding of what she was going through, and her older sisters probably teased her about still going to school, when she should be out working like them. Not that they were working, they were attending a Fás course run in the

Traveller Support centre, for which they were paid a training allowance. The Travellers called this work.

Kitty missed an odd day now and again, mostly to care for her mother, who was asthmatic and nervous and clung to her daughter. It was easier to keep Kitty at home than have the older daughters lose out on money. It was also Kitty's ambition to join her sisters in the training centre after she completed her Junior Cert. But knowing how bright she was, I always talked up the Leaving Cert to her, and all the opportunities it would provide.

'I'll never be allowed to stay on that long,' Kitty said. But I could see her eyes glaze in wonderment at thoughts of what it would mean for her. And just in case she might be tempted onto the training course, I kept in close contact with the tutors and the director of the support group. 'Under no circumstances can a child under 16 be admitted to Fás, regardless of what the story might be.'

We were all singing from the same hymn sheet. If one child slipped the net, the precedent would be etched in stone, and there would be no holding back the others. The rules of course were never the rules, mirroring the dominant culture.

Kitty went missing for two weeks in October of her Junior Cert year. I got a call from the Principal. 'When no-one returned our calls,' the Principal said, 'Our Home School Liaison teacher went to visit. She was told that Kitty wasn't returning

'I'll go straight there this afternoon,' I said. 'It's imperative to get her back before too long.'

I remembered another Traveller's remark on his children when they were suspended for a few days: 'It's amazing how quick the young ones get a different life style, and they want nothing to do with school after that.' He meant freedom for the boys; but for the girls it was full time babysitting or caring for an elderly relative. Even that kind of responsibility was probably easier than school which, even in the best of situations, is an alien environment, with all the pressures of peers, teachers, time tables and homework.

I arrived at the halting site early on a Wednesday afternoon to try to get an accurate reading on the situation, and determined to wring a promise from her parents to send Kitty back to school. However hard school is, it is doubly difficult if your parents are not supportive, and fail to see its relevance in the present or the future. Traveller children are also capable of winding up their parents with tales of teacher unreasonableness; of how boring or indecipherable the plethora of new subjects facing them, such as French, Business Studies, and Science. Like all children, they protest their innocence and ignorance of the code of discipline when hauled up for detentions or suspensions. Adolescence, like other stages of maturity, is cross-cultural, but Traveller parents tend to regard their children as young adults after Confirmation. More is expected of them. Though a little acting out from the boys

might be tolerated, girls are highly accomplished child minders, cleaners, cooks and carers from the age of ten onwards. And probably earlier.

But what was the situation with Kitty? I knew if it was a case that she had made her mind up to leave school, all the tea in China wouldn't get her back. Often the brighter children are more stubborn, and part of Traveller parenting is to let the young people make such decisions for better or worse.

When a really bright fifteen-year-old dropped out the year before in the other school, I visited the family for months, each time entreating Marie to go back. To no avail, I went with teachers, support workers, and the EWO: Educational Welfare Officer.

'It's a lost cause,' the EWO said. 'What's the point going again?'

'Who knows,' I said. 'She might go back in years to come. Whatever happens, she'll remember the umpteen visits we made, and can't say that no-one cared, and she was let slip through the system. That's why. And if I thought it was a lost cause I'd have hung up the chalk years ago.'

I really wanted to be a continuous persuasive voice for education. But when Kitty saw me coming she hid in the trailer to the side of the hut. 'Oh oh!' Not a good sign.

Luckily, both parents were just after their dinner of bacon and cabbage and in relaxed humour. The warm smell of food and turf lingered in the spotless kitchen. The range was going full crack; it was roasting. I sat as far back from the range as possible and took off my jacket; it was going to be a long afternoon. I said yes to tea and no to cake, and slowly but surely we got down to business after several minutes of general chat.

'Is Kitty sick?' I asked, knowing full well she wasn't.

'Not at all,' the father said, 'she's fed up going to school. She's no' able to learn in it, so we took her ou'.'

'I can't believe it,' I said. 'I've heard she's one of the best pupils in her class. So they tell me.'

'But she's here every evenin' cryin' over the homework,' the mother added, 'and tellin' me she can't do it.'

She mustn't be enjoying school any more so, I thought: too much exam pressure coming on. 'I know the homework can be a hassle,' I said, 'but it's not the main thing. Maybe we could get a bit of help for her.'

'But she can barely read,' the father said. 'Her sister in the primary school is better than her.'

This wasn't making any sense. 'How d'ya mean? I thought Kitty was a great reader.'

'Well,' says the mother, 'we've a prayer on a page there, pu' away, that Kitty can't read, but her sister can.'

I was baffled. Kitty was well up with her class until now. Who was fooling who?

'Show me down that prayer,' says I, 'til I see it.' And the mother reached down the prayer from the top of the cupboard. It was a prayer to the Blessed Virgin of Guadeloupe, translated from Spanish into archaic English, containing words I had never read before, which even I didn't understand and unfortunately can't recall.

'Sure I can hardly read this myself,' I said. 'I don't know where they got these words from but no one uses them now.' Thus risking my reputation as an educated woman - and over all the schools as the Travellers thought of me. 'I don't blame Kitty for not being able to read it. But what kind of genius so is your youngest, Sara?'

'Wait an' you see,' said the mother full of confidence. 'When she comes from school, she'll read it for you.'

'That'll show me up rightly so,' says I laughing. 'Where's Kitty, I'd love to see her.'

'Oh, she's hiding outside when she seen you coming,' the father said. 'Bu' I'll ge' her in and she can tell you herself.'

Out he went and in came Kitty. He stayed outside. Relatives of this family had actually sent their son to England avoiding the secondary school altogether. This was extreme, and thankfully not all that common, though I'd often heard it threatened. Kitty marched in, hand on hip, leaning against the kitchen counter, her face set.

'I'm not going back to that school,' she said to me. 'No ma'her what you say to me.'

'Did something bad happen? I asked her, 'I thought it was going well for you.'

'Well, it was going well,' she faltered just a bit. 'I can't do me maths.'

I nodded. 'What about the reading and all your other subjects?'

'I'm not doing Irish,' she reminded me. 'An' I don't understand some of me geography either.'

'But do you tell the teacher when you don't understand something?'

'They don't want you axin' any questions.' She was adamant.

'I know one or two of them might be a bit awkward,' I said, 'but I'm sure if I had a word we'd work out something.' Kitty's arguments were folding. The mother was looking uncomfortable.

'What's really going on?' I asked the mother.

'Ma'am is sick,' Kitty said. 'She's afeared of gettin' an attack of asthma, and there's no one around to help her.'

'But there's loads of women around if you weren't feeling well.' I looked at the mother. 'Are your daughters-in-law not here?'

'She doesn't ge' on with any of them.' Kitty was in charge.

'This is your time Kitty,' I said. 'Can one of the older sisters not stay at home to mind her? You have to be in school until you are sixteen or do the Junior Cert.'

The father had just come in for my last entreaty.

‘Look it, Ma’am, he said, ‘I’ll do a deal wi’ ya. I’ll send her back after Christmas.’ I laughed in relief. Here was an opening. ‘No,’ I said. ‘After Christmas is too late, she’s already missed out on so much in two weeks. This is the exam year. It’s really important to get her back as soon as possible.’

I had been there for two hours. ‘Now we don’t have to fall out about it,’ I said. ‘I’m only here to help Kitty in any way I can.’

‘We won’t fall ou’ wi’ ye Ma’am. We might as well tell ye the truth, she’s needed here at home, cos me wife isn’t well.’

I turned to the mother again. ‘Is there no-one else can see to you?’ I pleaded with her. It’s so important that Kitty gets the chance to do her Junior Cert.’

‘The older girls is in the workshop, and doin’ very well for themselves.’

‘But the Junior Cert is more important, I said, getting hotter. A film of sweat had gathered on my upper lip. I breathed out a long sigh. ‘By God, I’m earning me money today,’ says I. We all started to laugh.

‘Fair play to you ma’am you don’t give in easy.’ The father was smiling at me now and in walked the youngest in the family.

‘Here’s the scholar,’ says I. ‘I hear you’re the best reader on the halting site.’ Sara beamed at me. ‘I hear you can read the hardest prayer in the whole world. Even I can’t read it, Kitty can’t read it, but you can. Get it down quick until we see you do it.’

Sara sat on her mother’s knee, her gorgeous brown eyes and long dark plaits made her the pet of the family. She took a look at the prayer, ‘at’ she said, ‘the’ and ‘now’. She looked up.

‘Dya see?’ said her mother proudly. ‘She can pick out the words she knows.’

‘I know,’ I said, ‘she’s a great girl, but that doesn’t mean she’s reading it. You have to put all the words together to read it.’

‘Oh,’ said the mother, truly amazed, ‘I don’t know any of the words at all, so I thought she was doin’ be’her than Kitty. She looked at her older daughter. ‘Kitty, she said, ‘if you want to go back, we won’t stop you at home.’

Tears came to Kitty’s eyes. ‘I’ve no uniform,’ she said, ‘I threw it away.’ Tears were in my eyes too, but my mind was flying to the school, constructing a possible approach to the Principal to fork out for another uniform.

‘Ok, I’ll ring the school now and see, but I want you back in for Monday, and we’ll try to get some help for homework.

So off went Kitty back to school and did her Junior cert. The day the results came I went to visit the family again. By now Kitty was out of school and awaiting a place in the training centre. ‘You got eight honours,’ I said, practically beside myself with glee. Kitty was flabbergasted.

'I don't believe you.'

'Call the school then.'

So she did. She spoke with the principal, her smile spreading from ear to ear as she wrote down the results. I tried everything under the sun to get her to go back to do her Leaving Cert. She was having none of it.

- *Mary Branley*



Da

Cathy Carman

Baltic Amber

Someone said I would uncover pieces of amber
from long-dead trees, on this Baltic shoreline.
Day by day, I leave the cottage, walk the sands
to the headland village. Nobody understands
what I mean when I mention amber, their minds
instead engrossed by hazel branches hung
with painted eggs, catkins, or hyacinths in bowls.
The time for hyacinths is long gone, I tell them.

I am in need of something that has survived
more than winter, hardening to translucent gold,
enclosing – perhaps – one small seed,
to honour the month and the Easter I was conceived.

I have grown five decades, like aeons,
and my tears have surely become like amber,
enriched and smooth, taking tawny colours
for blood. Next week I will be more casual
about the search for Baltic amber,
will uncover nuggets beneath tree fragments,
inhaling salt and resin as I turn freely
from eggs, catkins, those April fevers.

- *Mary O'Donnell*

THE BAD HABIT

Your man was once asked what he wrote with and he said, 'A cigarette and a typewriter.' So it was hard for him to give up. He tried not going into the room where he normally worked. He tried not thinking walking up and down the hallway smoking one cigarette after another. But every time he lit a cigarette he coughed and thought, 'What if... ?'

He was besotted with the Hollywood glamour of being a writer. Writing two short stories and passing one to the woman he loved. But all she said was, 'Think of what that is doing to your brain.'

And then one morning after giving up for five years he forgot himself and went into the room where he worked and without even thinking he just started writing. And that was him. Back on again.

- *Bernard MacLaverty*

Riverscape

From Carrick the boat begins
To move through the silken
Waters of the river, and
Body remembers the womb
In which she once was carried.

Moored at Drumshanbo
Under a chip of moon
Asleep on our narrow berths
Body remembers the cradle
In which she once
Was rocked and rocked.

We turn into the day.
We float towards Tarmonbarry
Past swans resting,
Past gangly herons
Unfolding out of the reeds

Past Rooskey,
Past families of moorhens,
Past browsing sheep
In fields with no fences,

Past cattle sipping
At their drinking-place,
Past all the hard work
Of the year

Slipping away.

- *Bernadette McCarrick*

TIME & PLACE

I like these early morning starts when I creep slowly from the warm bed and watch my sleeping wife roll to my heat. She wraps the blankets round her shoulders against the predawn cold. I know she is awake within her mind, but she fears the sea and will not look at me before I go.

I move quietly through the door giving no reason to disturb her pose. Now that we are alone in this house of ours, there is a need to care more kindly. Like most children from this land, ours too have flown to England and America to work in cities full of people. I know they will come back some day, to sit and talk around our table. They will need to walk the rocky fields, to feel the sea breeze on their faces, to feel the certainty that was theirs before their need to travel.

The wind is shifting to the south, gathering force; a storm coming that will whip up white horses on a dark grey sea and lash rain against our rooftop. But I will be home by then, the lobsters safe in the holding tank, the baited pots reset in sheltered places. And for now, there are only slender signs of what is coming. The sea is calm, pink light reflected from the dawning sky, no waves, just gently rolling swells that started somewhere near America. But the gulls know what is out beyond the line of sea and sky. They lope gently from the ocean, seeking shelter on the land.

Fallon likes these mornings too, his nose held high, smelling the clear air, his mind gone wild with rabbit fantasies. He has the excited energy of the young and hunts in the clumps of gorse and rushes that run up the hill and down to our little pier. The rabbits recognise him, and watch quietly by their burrows, waiting for the noise to pass. He is their morning entertainment. He has disturbed the black faced mountain ewe that trots reluctantly across a field of blue campanula. Her lamb, its long tail twirling, follows noisily trying his luck to coax her for some milk. As the ewe turns her head to watch the dog, her shining eye shows white; sheep anger, a tinge of fright. I know her well, a high strung lady from a long line of agitated mountain sheep that have kept me fed with rich herb flavoured meat, as long as I remember.

It is more than a hundred years ago since the lighthouse authorities built this little pier to serve the comfort of the keepers when my people rowed them out in long tarred canvas boats to watch the weather and the sea. They were impressive men, dressed in neat blue suits and peaked caps, their white shirts gleaming, crested ties lending an air

of authority. They came in sidecars from the town with cases full of clothes, boxes of supplies, all carted to this small pier and loaded on the boats. There was rapport between my people and these men; they were our charge. A forebear stood on that rock, her long red petticoat blowing in the wind, a small brass telescope to her eye, awaiting signals of their safety. If a need arose, our men would row out their boat to bring a sick or injured man ashore. The lighthouse still stands tall against the sky, perched on its island three miles out. Its ancient ancestor, the top blown off and broken in the sea, stands small beside it like a child. No men need rowing to that island now, no men to call to from the sea, no friendly place to pull my boat. Like most men that I know, the keepers are a note in history. Batteries and sensors do their work. Computers send reports to Dublin on electronic waves that vibrate silently through the atmosphere.

I am still alive; flesh still hangs on my ancient bones. The pots weigh heavy loaded with their rope and stone, hard pulled from twenty fathoms deep. The lobsters that come up are small, not worth the effort for the money that they make. Yet there is adventure in it and Fallon here will watch for me. We like to dance across the water, the little engine buzzing, him sitting on the boat front, bow spray blowing in his face. I need the sea, the swaying of the boat, the wind and sky, the sparkling bubbles of the mackerel rising from the deep. The diving gannets and the cormorants are my friends. The twin tailed terns call greeting to me on their wandering tours. A passing whale will come and touch the boat, and sometimes jumping dolphins guide me home.

The people that I know are here. The veil between us all has thinned with time. I can reach out and touch them with my mind, listen to their words within the waves, see them rowing the long tarred boats to the lighthouse. They still watch from small hills along the shore. Others walk slowly toward the train station, their hands filled with empty cases. They know the rocky reefs that lie beneath these rolling waters, the blue fields of campanula. They know the rabbits and that black faced mountain ewe. I can walk with them out here, touch their eyes and smiles, wander through their gentle minds. They are my tribe, my people. When I sat like Fallon on the bow and watched their strong backs pulling on the oars, there was no symptom of this passing. They held my hand and walked me through the life we lived together. When I was strong and rowed the boat out on the sea they held our children's hands. We fought our battles but when it was time for them to go I held them in my arms to give them comfort on the road. The tide has turned again. Now I need a steady hand to hold. Hold off your barking dog. Yes, yes, I know the wind has turned and there is danger

in it now. I see the waves are rising, the white foam breaking on the lighthouse shore. Maybe we should ride out the fury of this storm, let the wind and rain lash into our faces. We could fly this little boat far out into the ocean and in the high waves, turn, and chance our luck for home. There would be some elation in an enterprise like that, excitement that might make us young again.

There is no fun in cautiousness. But if we race before the wind and sea, then lose our way and tumble in the tide, will all my people vanish? Is it just my aged mind that holds us all together.

Bark on dog, you're right. There is comfort in this furrow that we stumble in. Our children might come home. 'Tis time to turn the boat for the shore, and nestle with a book in my armchair by the fire, imagining.

- Des Burke

Cold Eye

A total stranger did me
grievous bodily harm in Madrid.
Throttled me from behind,
a choke hold that left me helpless.
Abrupt, silent, expeditious.
It had to be but was no joke.
A commando lift called
mataleón – the “lion-killer”.

Then I knew,
this is the way it ends;
as well me as another,
as well dead as maimed.
I was done but for some passers by.
He fled empty handed,
left me flat on my back,
with a whacked throat.

I hailed a taxi back to the hotel.
Hours later my body panicked.
The bruised windpipe seized up,
again I could not breathe.
Cold compresses and sips of water
opened the trachea,
gave me time to get to the doctors
and cocktails of drugs.

A son awaited me in China the next day
so I went.
Things do not stop.
For six weeks I had no voice.
My body mended.
Much worse has happened to many more.
Some deaths linger;
some are sudden.

My brother was a policeman,
battered seriously several times.
He tells me get over
what's past.

I recall the vice grip of a forearm on my throat,
the effort to end it quickly, for a pittance.
The little I might have done that I didn't.
The cold eye he cast before he ran.

Other strangers saved me.
I do feel the pain and suffocation.
I do feel out of place in company.
I do seek a loving touch.
Relief when the day ends, but no rest.
Something lurking there
to be got on with,
and no use thinking about it.

- *Seán Golden*

A Lapsed Votary

Bada Shanren,
the painter,
at odds with the times,
banished talk,
posted Mute on his door,
but succumbed
to ferocious bouts
of laughter and tears
in the throes
of work and drink.

- *Seán Golden*



Head Fissures

Cathy Carman

TRIESTE

James,” said Nora, “I think I may be pregnant again.” My brother looked up from the kitchen table. “Are you quite certain, dear?” Lucia's pacifier, a rubber dummy with a soiled pink ribbon, fell out of her bassinet with a clatter, and she began to cry. I leaned over to retrieve it from the floor, but Giorgio snatched it up and ran into the bedroom.

“I'm not entirely sure,” Nora was saying. “You know how unpredictable my insides are... Stannie, would you be a dear?”

I took the wine-bottle and corkscrew that she held out to me. On the stove, a tea-kettle began a wet wail, and Lucia cried more loudly in her crib.

“Where is Eileen?” I asked. Our childless sister seemed to have a soothing touch with Lucia. Giorgio peeked out of the bedroom, doing his best to look innocent and wide-eyed. The dummy was nowhere in sight.

“Eileen is at the market,” Nora was saying, “and if she doesn't get back soon...” She looked at the three boiling pots on the stove. Steam filled the small kitchen, and streaks of condensation ran down the walls. The corkscrew squeaked as I twisted it.

“Is this an old bottle?” I asked.

“I believe that Eileen borrowed it from Signora Lombardi down the hall,” said James.

“Nora, can nothing be done about Lucia?”

“Stannie,” said Nora, “perhaps if you held her for a while...”

“Do you want me to hold the baby or open the wine?”

“Mama,” said Giorgio, “I think Uncle Stannie took Lucia's dummy.”

“Did you, Stannie?” asked James.

The corkscrew bent in my hands, and I slammed the bottle down on the table. “I did not take Lucia's dummy! Or anybody's dummy! I am the dummy here!” I pushed away from the table and headed for the stairwell, desperate for a breath of cool air.

“Perhaps a screwdriver would work, Stannie,” said James. “You could force the cork down with a screwdriver.”

The cat jumped down from the shelf, dragging a sheet of paper from the stack where it had been sleeping. The page was thick with notes and corrections surrounding a column of printed words. “James,” I said, “is that the proof copy of Dubliners?”

“No, that's Stephen Hero,” said Nora. “At least I think it is. Does it have any scorch marks on it?”

“I believe that's a cigarette burn,” said James.

I tried to read the marked-up page. “Weren't we supposed to send the page proofs back to Dublin last week?” James looked at Nora. She said, “I think Eileen mailed them.”

“Eileen? Does Eileen speak Italian? Does she even know where the post office is?”

“I remember explaining to her about getting the stamps at the tobacco shop,” James said. “And there are plenty of fellows on the street to rescue Eileen if she gets lost.”

“Do I hear someone calling my name?” Eileen pushed the door open with her foot as she carried in a sack of onions. “Oh, hello, Stannie,” she said. “James, you won't believe what Mrs. Lombardi gave me...”

“Eileen,” said James, “did you remember to get matches?”

“Here are some matches, Papa,” said Giorgio, producing a box from his pocket. The dummy also fell out of his pocket and landed in the cat's water-dish.

“For God's sake, James,” I said, “do you permit Giorgio to play with matches?”

“Did you know that Mrs. Lombardi has a brother in the Army?” said Eileen.

“He's dreamy.”

Defeated, I sat down again at the table across from my brother. He was scribbling notes on the tablet where Nora wrote her shopping lists. “What are you working at, James?” I asked.

“It's an outline,” he said. “I have a notion to write about a night when I drank too much and lost my way...”

“You have plenty of those for inspiration,” said Nora.

“...and father's friend Mr. Epstein found me and dusted me off and took me to his home for a cup of tea.”

“Is that supposed to be a story?” asked Eileen.

“I'm thinking there may be a novel in it, actually,” said James. “With classical references.”

Giorgio retrieved the dummy from the water-dish and put it in his mouth. Lucia continued to wail.

- *Tom Sigafos*

Putting the Baby into the Postbox

We don't write about it, do we?
What it's like, sending
Our babies into the world
Not knowing. Has this child
A face only a mother could love?
And the ones we send
Are those we chose to keep
Not the darlings we agreed to kill
So the chosen few could survive
The chosen few we nurtured
From spark to embryo to birth
And then all that fussing
Over clothes and full stops.

- *Monica Corish*

Zizous's Reflections on Reality

The lure of The Book is obvious.
When you realise that along the axis
Of what constitutes The Book
Are the words:
This is not exhaustible
And
This is not sufficient
Then you realise
The distinguishing co-ordinates of The Book
Are both equal and unequal to the world.

When Zinedine Zidane talks of experience experienced
But not in *real time*
Is he talking about his objective understanding of fragmented reality?¹
When Zinedine Zidane arrives at a given stadium
Sensing profoundly that the story
Of the night to come
Of the match to come
Has already been written,
Is he saying
That time or consciousness echoes persistently
That life in some oblique otherness is absolutely fulfilled
That what is is available as a constant perpetually?

The imagined world
The authored story
Equalities and inequalities in alliance,
As Stevens says in
Final Soliloquy Of The Interior Paramour,
'The world imagined is the ultimate good'.²
But are the apparent sublimities of the imagination's projections
Merely the phantasms of its own desired unities?

¹ Douglas Gordon & Philippe Parreno – Zidane, a 21st Century Portrait

² Wallace Stevens – *Final soliloquy of the Interior Paramour*

When Zinedine Zidane receives the ball
And knows that he has scored before he strikes
Then is he realising an absolute reality
A co-incidence of being
With the echo of having been?
And have we all been
Just as we all are
Or is it simply a fanciful posthumous image
The magic and the lure of artifice?

Is time ubiquitous or not?
And does time slow when you look at things?
When we sit as writers in the world
And we are all writers in the world
Waiting for a function of mind
To realise a world in which
Hazel catkins frillullate the skin
Or a woman muffles a child to death
Or roses fall in atomic ponds
Or a man walks with his severed earthquaked arm.
The light of evening
The abomination in glory
The adoration
The deception
The path of war
The bliss of being
The elevation of knowing
The wonder in reflection.
How all life would be devoured
If we were certain of one thing
If only we could be certain of one thing
And in lieu of being certain of one thing
We chance that in mirroring beauty
We enshrine meaning
And in holding that mirrored world aloft
We frame ubiquity.

- *Frank Golden*

Wax

candle
blackwicked
into
creamy pools
of time
well spent

- *Patricia Curran Mulligan*

Soul

The scent of the rose
Is a path to the moon
The full moon
Is a butterfly's wing

- *Vincent Woods*



Paper Boat Series

Patricia Curran Mulligan

Tommy Gralton, Pitman

We lean on the stone wall
of your farmhouse in Faulthee;
The April evening bright,
bird song drenching all.
'I love them,' you say,
'I do feed them through the frost.
Some experts say it's wrong to feed birds,
but I think myself they'd starve without.'
We talk about the coal pits in Arigna:
'I started when I was fifteen,
couldn't wait to get away workin'
Forty years I was underground,
a long time to be out of the light.'
Your breath catches:
A whirl
 of phlegm spiralling
in your lungs.
'The rock dust is the worst,
many 's a good man it killed.'
I don't know why I ask –
Some instinct:
(and I think I thought
of Chatwin's brothers,
'On The Black Hill')
'Did you ever fly? –
Ever go up in a plane?'
'No, I never did.
I'd love to have gone up,
but I think I'd be afeard.
Though once
I went on a boat
out to a liner at Cobh.'

Your eyes shine sloe-bright,
Your big claw-hand
Grips my hand.
I remember standing in this place
 with my father,
me a boy of nine or ten,
The two of us
(well, him and me for company)
taking a cow to the bull at O'Brien's.
We'd always stop at Gralton's ,
'Great people,' my father would say,
'Friends of our own -
 now there's workers for you.'
We'd stand in the shade,
the cow flicking flies,
the bull bellowing up ahead,
all of us alert to this invisible scent
of sporing-beasting-life in the air.
Sometimes we'd meet you on the road home,
Yourself and your brother Phil Joe,
Springing up the Black Road from the pit lorry,
Like young dogs
light and fleet after the day of toil,
Going back to work the land
and eager for work -
footing turf loying ridges planting seed mowing meadows snigging hay
digging praties milking cows spreading dung cows calving stooking oats
Up with the light
No day too long
Sunday, Day of Rest,
Me an altar boy, watching.
The chapel full
The two of you
Decked out in your blue suits,
Crisp-clean shirts and ties,
Big handsome men,

Chests like juts of rockface,
First up to the altar rails for Communion.
I hold the small gold-plated shovel
Under your chins.
The white host fluttering,
and gone.
Today you stand before me,
shrunken to a small, spry frame,
bentbacked; nails calcified to talons
for digging in the ground you love.
Your hands stained brown-black,
each groove and line ingrained.
We shake hands three times.
Your voice high and pure:
'I do miss Phil Joe,
It's a lock of years now since he went.'
The grimed-white woollen jumper is too small,
Baubles of colour on the chest,
Blue, green, yellow, red.
I think what drove you back to work,
What made you break that strike
in the pit in '69
was you couldn't bear to be idle.
For years you bore the name 'Scab',
Bore the weight of local hatred.
Now you say
'No man should ever pass a picket.
It's a wrong thing to do.'
'And did they ever thank you?' I ask,
The Bosses...
'O no, O Jay no,
the same as we never done it.'
April evening
A week later neighbours, old miners
are leaning on shovels
at your graveside.

They dig and fill, the soil rich
and black.
Your pit lamp and a sod of turf
are carried to the altar for your requiem mass.
They say you went from knowing in death,
went back to youth, filled out, proud-chested,
straight-backed again and handsome in blue suit,
white shirt and tie - as if
your strength and flesh flourished
in that fall on stone in the street of the local town;
Or maybe after, as your soul looked down
and you forgave us all,
gripping a branch of rowan
as you straightened up to skim the light.

- *Vincent Woods*

AT SITGES

People had begun drifting away from the beach and stood casting long shadows as they waited for the local train. The heat had gone out of the sun and the low light was yellow. Quite a crowd had gathered. The central island and the tracks were all on a level. To enable passengers to cross from one side to the other wooden sleepers had been laid between the rails. A trans-continental train hurtled through with a deafening roar and a hot following wind.

A man in his early twenties with black stubble on his wet chin came onto the low platform. He wore a yellow T-shirt and had no laces in his canvas shoes. He took short steps, pushing his feet along, barely lifting them - like a child playing trains. All the time he grinned and made a grinning noise and held his hands out in front of him as if begging - but he was not interested in money. Everyone tried to ignore him. As he approached they turned their shoulders a little more towards their companions. Their conversations became more intense. A girl standing on her own moved towards the notice board as if to look at train times.

Three young girls, barely into their teens sat on the central island. They wore shorts and brightly coloured tops. They did not see the boy cross the sleepers towards them. Everyone seemed concerned that the boy should cross the track before another train went through. His laughing and grinning continued all the time. When he arrived behind the girls they looked up and laughed. The youngest one stood up and ran, covering her mouth with her hand. The others followed across the tracks not bothering to hide their embarrassment. The boy turned slowly and clumsily, his arms outstretched and followed. The watching crowd registered - it's girls he's after - and became more tolerant. They even allowed signs of their amusement to show - an eyebrow raised, a smile, a nod which indicated the boy to someone who had not yet noticed him - for there were some who were too engrossed to look up.

- *Bernard MacLaverly*

Argyle's Stone

Around his neck Argyle wore a stone:
green marble from the strand at Iona
where Columcille and his banished tribesmen
landed after bloody Cooldrevny claimed
three thousand lives in 561 AD.
“To every cow its calf; to books their copy!” –
that civil notion begat the savagery.
His ruminations on such histories
put him in mind of how most mortals kept
committing the same sin over and over
like calving cows or Psalter manuscripts –
each a version of the original.
Among his pendant stone's known properties:
general healing, protection from fire,
shipwreck, miscarriage and other dire
possibilities that might imperil
a pilgrim of Argyle's appetites.
Foremost among the sin-eater's lapses
were hunger, which was constant, and then thirst,
and all known iterations of desire –
craving and coveting, lusting and glut:
whatever was was never quite enough.
So, for ballast among such gravities,
Argyle wore the stone for anchorage.

- *Thomas Lynch*

Fatherly Approval

After twenty years,
For the first time,
Your face beams in one
Unbroken smile as you turn
The pages of my first book.
“Rocks I can’t sledge,” not the reaction,
This time. Instead phrases like:
“Begore.” “Look at that.”
“Where did she get it all?”
A landscape you can tap
On the flank as you would
Your old Hereford cow,
As you herd her in for milking.

- *Mary O’Shea*

The Beaten Sound

The first rock I had
in my hand today

had a hem of a dress
turned to the side;

it was split down the centre with the chalk line
of a crack in the sea. In my palm the second stone
rested like a calm ocean; next I lifted the remains of a parade

in a Brazilian street that the north-east wind had sharpened into a blade
to cut wheat. There was great give to the west the day
the forces hung a chiselled apron round the tall coral frond

of the fern I found
scored by winds

long gone silent at the storm
within the beaten sound.

- *Dermot Healy*

'The Round Stone'

The round stone
has been through it all

and sits, higher than all the rest,
above the sands

crowding round the walking sticks of the bent grass.
They have shaken off enemies on all sides
and lie content till the next tide.

Back on the beach sit the estranged -
the broken-backed beggars, the misshapen,
the maimed. They make altars from the past. Baskets of elves

sit in their laps. Amethyst looks
into the eye of quartz

as wealth is measured out,
aloud, again, in salt.

- *Dermot Healy*

'The Cold Snap'

The cold snap
on the stairs

to the Chinese Pagoda
is lit by a red bead
of Ecuadorean sunlight. A fog has settled on the temporal lobe
off Cloonagh. A warp in time stands to attention in a garden
of small lime rushes and loose wrack. Lookouts have fallen

asleep at the entrance to the cave. Inside, the shapes
wait for the fire to take. Here is an unattended bed. There an orphan.
This is a squall. The quake sits alone in a puddle. Spent.

From Durak comes the smell of burning kelp.
Up goes the whoosh

over the buckled wall.
in the Night Field.

- *Dermot Healy*

'This is the Calm'

This is the calm
before the storm,

the arguments that started
before you were born.

This is the stone scalp torn from the head
of an alt in St John's. We speak in languages that carry
messages from the dead, and hand on

our own into the silences that will never be read,
but are known to you as you bend your head low
and make the promises that time has kept.

Someone else said
it will have to stop. Someone else nodded,

then heard himself say
I'm not ready to go yet.

- *Dermot Healy*



Treegirl

Alice Maher

BEING A WRITER

To secure a new publisher I needed a book. I'd no new novel in my head but I had had fourteen stories, published over the previous ten years. Write a further three, I thought, and I'd have a collection.

I put together the volume *W.9. & Other Lives* and offered it to some London publishers. They all declined. Short-story collections didn't sell, they said. Blackstaff made encouraging noises but balked when they saw the finished manuscript; it wasn't Irish enough for them, I gathered. Eventually, in 1996, the Lagan Press published the collection minus 'Preserved in Amber'. In 1998, when Marion Boyars published *W.9. & Other Lives* in Britain and the United States (my first US publication since *Driving through Cuba*), I reinstated 'Preserved in Amber'.

While I worked on *W.9 & Other Lives*, I also wrote a short novel about a group of children in the Fermanagh countryside who find that their closest neighbour is an arsonist; this was a true story - our nearest neighbour in Fermanagh had torched his place and my children played in the burnt-out shell of his cottage for years. This book, *The Base*, wasn't published by Egmont Children's Books until 1999 but writing it led to my meeting the senior editor there, Miriam Hodgson. She commissioned a novel for young adults about bullying at a girls' grammar school in a provincial Irish town. *Frozen Out* (the title was Miriam Hodgson's choice, I wanted *The Lie*) was published in 1998.

My next published adult novel, *How to Murder a Man*, owes its existence entirely to HMP Maze where, from 1993 to 1997, I worked intermittently as a part-time creative writing tutor. The prisoners I taught wrote about everything, including what had got them into jail. While some of this material was in the Irish tradition, which goes back at least to works like Dan Breen's *My Fight for Irish Freedom* and Ernie O'Malley's *On Another Man's Wound*, and explained individual acts of violence as unavoidable and part of a necessary struggle, some (which I hadn't expect) concentrated on the fiendish complexities of killing, getting away afterwards, and the courage the writers had brought to the murder business.

One evening, discussing with an old school friend a play I'd just read (it was by a Loyalist and contained information on such things as how to get a gun through an army checkpoint), I remarked that it was a manual on how to murder a man.

"How to murder a man'," said my old friend. "There's the title of your next book." He was right, I thought.

Not long after this conversation, I was approached by Nicolas Kent, director of the Tricycle Theatre in London. During rehearsals for Bill Morrison's *Love Song for Ulster* (a recent Tricycle production), the cast used [my novel] *The Glass Curtain* for research and a section of the book was reproduced in the play's programme. Nicolas Kent hadn't forgotten *The Glass Curtain*, and now he wondered if I'd write a play for the Tricycle. At the time he made this proposal I was reading A. T. Q. Stewart's *The Narrow Ground*, which quoted from a Victorian memoir, *Realities of Irish Life* by William Steuart Trench, and I had an intuition that this book would help the play. So, I got hold of Trench's book and read it.

Trench was a professional landlord's agent and his book describes his working life. As one of the bad men of Irish history, a landlord's factotum who screwed the peasantry, his voice hasn't been much heard in Ireland since Partition. That's a pity because Trench is worth reading. He has a good, robust style and he tells some cracking stories. One of these caught my attention.

In 1851, Trench went to work on the Marquess of Bath's estate near Carrickmacross, County Monaghan. His brief was to make the estate pay by clearing out rent defaulters and putting in reliable tenants who would pay rent regularly. Moving tenants out, tricky at the best of times, was complicated in Ulster by the Ulster Custom, or Ulster tenant-right, which was prevalent in the province (though not elsewhere in Ireland), by which a tenant had certain rights of occupancy, disposal and compensation in regard to land he held. When a tenant vacated a farm the incomer had to pay him for 'improvements' he'd supposedly made. This payment might be ten, twenty, thirty, even forty times the annual rent.

To clear the estate Trench made an offer to the rent defaulters that they couldn't afford to refuse: he'd waive all rent arrears; he'd let the tenant sell all he had and keep the proceeds; and, finally, he'd give the indebted tenant and his family a one-way ticket to America. All that the tenant had to do in return was surrender his lease to the estate rather than to a new tenant.

It wasn't long before some tenants realized Trench's scheme was a bad thing, which, if it took root and established the principle that tenancies always reverted to the landlord, would lead to the end of the Ulster Custom and the loss of their most valuable asset. Those who were Ribbonmen (an underground, agrarian, largely Catholic organization dedicated to defending their members' rights and privileges against the depredations of the law, the police, the Orange Order and strong farmers) decided there was nothing for it but to kill the agent; they recruited two assassins, put them on a weekly retainer and warned Trench to leave or be shot dead.

Trench, never a quitter, reviewed recent Ribbon killings to determine his chances of survival. He noticed that whenever anyone was shot, bystanders immediately rushed to the dead or dying man, which allowed the assassins to get away. Here, Trench realized, was a way to stay alive.

Trench armed his bailiff and his adult sons and put the word out. His bailiff or his sons would be with him at all times. If he was shot, Trench explained, they would never, under any circumstances, come to his aid; on the contrary, they would chase whoever had shot him and kill or catch and hang them.

This strategy unnerved the assassins. They had a blunderbuss, which they could fire only once, and now, magnifying their problems, it wasn't only a matter of getting close enough to kill Trench: they had also to be certain of getting away.

Over a year Trench's assassins made numerous attempts (which failed) to kill the agent until eventually they were caught. In return for a new identity one opted to testify against his comrade. The second man was convicted, sentenced to death and hanged.

His account, vivid and compelling, was also intensely familiar for here were all the preoccupations with the difficulties of paramilitary practice that I had encountered in the work of prisoners in HMP Maze. Whatever the century, whatever the weapons, it seemed the Irish political assassins' problems remained the same: one, you had to get close enough to do it, and two, you had to be sure to get away.

I wrote *How to Murder a Man*, my fictional account of the Trench story, as a play for the Tricycle Theatre, using the men I met on the wings of HMP Maze as models for all the characters including, obviously, the assassins. Nicolas Kent deemed the finished play too depressing but I was not prepared to abandon the project. Since *Driving through Cuba*, my UK paperback publisher had been Abacus, who, at some point in the 1990s, had become Little, Brown & Co. In 1995 I took the proposal for the novel *How to Murder a Man* to them and was rewarded with a commission.

Now, looking back occasionally at the play, I wrote the story again, as prose, from scratch, as a conventional narrative in the third person. I had no fabricated narrator. This was a straight piece of omniscient narration, something I hadn't done, except in short stories, since *Work and Play*. I also abandoned the names, which were Trench's (I hadn't done this in the play) and gave every character a new one. Trench became French, for instance. By doing this I freed my imagination from any residual obligation to Trench's original and created the circumstances in which it was free to soar.

I started *How to Murder a Man* in 1995 and finished in 1997 (during its composition I was also writing *The Base* and *Frozen Out*, organizing my day so that I worked

on the adult novel in the morning when I was freshest and the children's in the afternoon). After publication in Britain and Ireland it was long-listed for the Man Booker Prize and published in the US by Marion Boyars.

Some time in the spring of 1997, I was offered the post of writer-in-residence at HMP Maghaberry. In March, just before I started, Billy Wright, founder of the Loyalist Volunteer Force, was jailed for eight years for threatening to kill a woman.

Shortly after his arrival in Maghaberry, Christopher 'Krip' McWilliams, a Republican serving life for murdering Belfast bar manager Colm Mahon on 15 December 1991, took a prison officer hostage in the Education Department using a smuggled gun. He claimed later that he had intended to kill Wright when he arrived for a class. McWilliams was disarmed before he carried out his plan and, following the incident, both he and Wright moved to HMP Maze where each now believed he'd be safer than in Maghaberry. (As paramilitaries, both had automatic rights of transfer.)

I started at Maghaberry in April. I worked from the Education Department. In my security briefing I was told what to do if I was ever taken hostage by someone with a gun. Over the following weeks, as I floated around the wings, I heard a lot about McWilliams and his antics, his gun and how he had smuggled it in. Then, on 27 December 1997, McWilliams and others, again using smuggled firearms, killed Billy Wright inside HMP Maze. Spurred by this, and all the stories I'd heard, I started *A Good Day For a Dog*, a novel about guns and a jail vendetta. But I would work on it only intermittently in the years ahead as I had other calls on my time.

Something else also happened in Maghaberry that became important later. On 15 August 1998 the Real IRA planted a 500-pound bomb in Omagh. It killed twenty-nine. In Maghaberry during the weeks following, Republican prisoners (both Provisionals and dissidents) told me that a maverick Provisional IRA man (they gave me a name), disgusted by the peace process, had quit the Provisional IRA, moved to an irredentist Republican dissident faction and made for them the bomb used in Omagh. These contacts also told me that in Republican circles it had been known for months that the Omagh bomb was coming, thanks to the efforts of this maverick. What nobody had known was where or when the bomb would go off. I filed this story away for later use.

The idea for making a new version of both parts of August Strindberg's *Dance of Death* came from Nicolas Kent late in 1996. I love Strindberg (I'd directed his short play *The Stronger* at university) and, though I knew these plays only vaguely, I agreed to the commission on the spot.

Then I reread them. Part I was good; it was easy to see why this account of the dreadful marriage of the Captain and his wife, Alice, is one of Strindberg's most often produced works. It is intense, tight, fluent and well structured, the equivalent in drama of a watch with a Swiss mechanism that keeps perfect time.

Part II, on the other hand, which shows how the children of warring protagonists transcend old feuds, is febrile, overwrought and melodramatic; if this had been a watch, I thought, it would be a shoddy copy that ran too fast.

So, how to proceed? First, I decided to locate the plays on an imaginary British Army garrison island somewhere off the north-west coast of Ireland, setting Part I in 1912 and Part II in 1916 at the time of the Easter Rising. Since the second play was largely about betrayal, it seemed to me that the Rising, which so many at the time regarded as a stab in Britain's back by Nationalist zealots, must be there in the background. Next, assisted by numerous translations and the Swedish edition, I set about creating a Hibernicized Part I. The text I produced was what Strindberg had written but made Irish. This was not a difficult task. The play slipped easily into its new mould and by making the marriage of the principals, the Captain and his wife Alice, mixed, the story was further embedded in its new Irish location.

Part II was a different proposition since almost all of Strindberg's text had to go. I extracted the usable dialogue (about five per cent of the original), then set about filling the spaces between these lines. It was not easy, but far from feeling constrained by having such a carefully defined writing brief, I felt liberated by it - liberated from the tyranny of limitless choice, that is. The result of my efforts was a Part II that told the same story as Strindberg's original but was calmer, I hoped, more dramatically effective and, because the watch mechanism was now fixed, kept better time.

Part I opened on Thursday, 19 March, and Part II on Friday, 20 March 1998 at the Tricycle Theatre. Not all the reviewers were enthusiastic but many conceded that, for the first time in their theatre-going lives, they had found themselves laughing through two evenings of Strindberg. I regarded this as a great achievement.

To date I had created several characters based on my father (Otto, Paul Weismann's father in *The Eleventh Summer*, for example) but none of my attempts so far presented the man in his full three-dimensional glory, with his anger, his left-wing politics and his sardonic misanthropy properly displayed. Of course I had always known that one day I would do this, but not while he or his last wife, my stepmother (with whom I got on almost as badly as I got on with him) was alive.

So I held back from writing about him and, inevitably, events occurred. In 1987 my stepmother died (which I hadn't expected as she was younger than him). In the

early 1990s my bereaved father became frail, and the Irish authorities (he was living in Dublin having returned to Ireland in 1972) insisted I made him a ward of the Irish courts. I became his guardian and suddenly his diaries and letters were mine. This would not have happened were my stepmother still living so her early death was a stroke of literary good fortune.

Next, in 1994, John Fountain, as Karl Gébler Mark I was now known, discovered that his father wasn't his mother's fifth husband, a Mr Fountain, as his mother had led him to believe, but my father, Ernest Gébler. John came to Ireland to see him (my father was now in a home), and on the same trip we met. Suddenly I saw I'd been given a new strand to add to the others from which I would make the book about my father.

My son Euan was born during the morning on 26 January 1998 and my father died that afternoon. Now, at last, I was free to start. Little, Brown & Co. commissioned the book and I began. I had three principles: one, I'd only include what I remembered and I would never alter it to make the story better; two, other than at the front, I'd tell the story in the order in which it had occurred, eschewing flash-forwards and authorial prescience; three, I'd restrict what I would allow myself to know to what I'd known at the time - thus, in writing about my 1963 self, I'd only allow into the narrative what I had known in 1963. With this approach, hopefully, the finished book would mature as I had. These rules decided, the writing was easy. *Father & I* was published in 2000. The reviews were generally good.

After I had finished *Father & I*, I pitched my jail novel, *A Good Day For a Dog*, to Richard Beswick, my editor at Little, Brown & Co. He thought the material too bleak and suggested, instead, a narrative history of the 1689 siege of Derry, when for several months a motley army of Presbyterian and Anglican Scottish and English colonists held the city for William of Orange against the Jacobite forces of James II.

I accepted the commission (on Grub Street you decline nothing) and began to read around the subject. Pretty soon I noticed a pattern in the way historians told their stories. They would usually start a chapter with an assertion, loop back into the past and describe events that justified their opening assertion, then end at the point where they had started. I also noticed different chapters in the same book often traversed the same chronological period but from different points of view (those of different historical personages), which required the reader, in order fully to understand what was happening, to continuously cross-reference between chapters. It occurred to me that if I was strictly chronological and if I described the way events (though in

different fields of action) happened simultaneously, readers would get a better sense of what had gone on.

To think this was easy; to do it was not. First, I had to break down all my source material into discrete elements; then I had to reassemble my shards of fact piece by piece into a timely sequence, a process much like making a mosaic. It was the work of years, partly because it was time-consuming and finicky, partly because I had to break off to do other things.

One of these was *My Father's Watch*. This was a memoir, begun in 2001, which I co-wrote with Patrick Maguire, youngest of the so-called Maguire Seven. Following the Guildford pub bombings by the IRA, Patrick and his family were arrested in December 1974. Tried in Court 2 at the Old Bailey, he and his co-defendants were found guilty of handling the nitro-glycerine used in Guildford. He was sentenced to four years in jail, but it was nearly twenty before Sir John May declared that the convictions of Patrick and his co-defendants should not stand. As I worked on this book it did not escape my attention that my pretending to write in the voice of Patrick Maguire (a working-class Londoner) was another variant of the authorial self-effacement I'd practised all my life, although instead of inventing a character to tell this story, I was now passing myself off as a living person.

Caught on a Train was another interruption on *The Siege of Derry*. It had been commissioned by Miriam Hodgson in 1999. On 31 December 1899, three men travelling by train from Dublin to County Mayo compete to tell the best Irish ghost story (all their stories coming from W. B. Yeats's 1888 anthology *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*). They appoint Archie, the fourteen-year-old waiter from the dining car, as judge. Archie is the novel's overall narrator, but within his account each competitor tells his story in his own voice, as Archie and the others listen. This novel, in other words, was built mostly from reported speech. Egmont published *Caught on a Train* in 2001 and later that year it won a merit award in the Bisto Prize for children's fiction.

A third interruption to my work on *The Siege of Derry* came in the form of an invitation from Nicolas Kent, just as I was finishing *Caught on a Train*, to write a play for the Tricycle Theatre about the Omagh bombing. As I pondered how to use what I'd been told in Maghaberry about the maverick Provisional who had made the bomb, an idea (or perhaps this can fairly be called an inspiration) came into my head: I'd take Arnold Schnitzler's play *La Ronde* (which I'd never seen or read, though I did know it was about syphilis) and re-set it in contemporary post-ceasefire Belfast.

Instead of venereal disease passing from one character to the next, it would be the knowledge that dissident Republicans were making a bomb. I would do this, however, without specifying the Omagh bomb, as that would snarl me up in matters of documentary veracity with which I had no wish to become entangled.

Then I read Schnitzler's play, and saw that my idea could work. I saw further that, though I would need to change the characters from nineteenth to early-twenty-first-century archetypes, I could retain Schnitzler's overarching structure with its ten scenes and ten couplings. All that needed to be new was the dialogue: in the final draft of my version, called *10 Rounds*, I retained only one line from Schnitzler's original. The rest was new. The first performance of *10 Rounds* was given at the Tricycle Theatre on 23 September 2002 and the play was subsequently short-listed for the Ewart Biggs Award.

After the production of *10 Rounds*, and with the publication of *The Siege of Derry* and *My Father's Watch* some years away because they had yet to be finished, and with *A Good Day For a Dog*, which I was still writing in my free time, incomplete, yet knowing I must publish, I went to Miriam Hodgson with a new idea. This was for a novel based on the body of Jewish myth about Rabbi Loew, a rabbi at the Prague synagogue during the seventeenth century. According to legend he had made a Golem from river mud to defend the ghetto against Christian mobs inflamed by stories that Jews used the blood of gentile children to make the unleavened bread eaten at Passover. This vile calumny was better known as 'the blood libel'. The book was commissioned.

The novel opens in a cave in the South of France, where (in 1944) a group of Jews are hiding. In order to pass the time, and also to engage the attention of a feral adolescent boy, they mount an oral retelling of the Golem cycle. This material forms the core of the novel (with, again, as in *Caught on a Train*, someone telling a story while others listen) but an omniscient third-person account of the everyday life of the refugees as they wait for liberation envelopes it. As it happens, the Allied troops don't arrive in time and they're all killed, with the exception of the feral youth. It was an unusually bleak conclusion to a children's novel but I thought the right one. *August '44* was published in 2004 and short-listed for the Bisto Prize.

The moment I finished *August '44* I went back to Miriam Hodgson with a new idea: a retelling of the Irish epic the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* or *The Cattle Raid of Cooley*, the story of the invasion of Ulster by Maeve, Queen of Connaught, and the single-handed fight against her army mounted by the semi-immortal warrior Cuchulainn. The book was commissioned.

I had two things clear in my mind before I started. The first was I didn't want to write another book that was largely or completely constructed out of reported speech.

I wanted to produce a more conventional novel. But I also knew my unconscious worked best when I was able to imagine that the text was authored by someone other than myself. So I adopted the conceit (which was in the Irish original) of a quest by Irish poets to recover the lost story of the *Tain Bó Cuailnge*. During the journey they meet the ghost of Fergus who (with others) delivers the tale to them. The party, having committed it to memory, then carry it home. Here, before an assembly of Irish poets, they retell it, though I present their retelling (which forms the bulk of the book) not as reported speech but as a third-person narrative. However, at the very end, as in *The Eleventh Summer*, we gather that a junior member of the party who brought the Táin home will one day become its pre-eminent disseminator, and that he may have delivered the entire narrative we've just read. (In my mind he did).

The second thing I knew before starting was that I'd be writing in reaction to the earliest and most famous English-language version, *Cuchulain of Muirthemne: The Story of the Red Branch* by Lady Gregory. With its ornate prose, indigestible dialogue and high moral tone, this version was part of a programme to raise the self-esteem of early-twentieth-century Irish readers, but nothing, I felt, could justify Gregory's sanitizing of the Irish equivalent of the *Iliad*. My version, therefore, as distinct to hers (and the value of writing against something can never be underestimated) would be in simple English with the humour and violence of the Irish original restored.

The Bull Raid was published in 2005, and *The Siege of Derry* finally came out the same year. In 2007 I wrote *Henry & Harriet*, a site-specific play for the Belfast theatre company Kabosh, which was published along with two short plays,¹ *A Good Day For a Dog* was published in the spring of 2008 and, a bit later, so was *My Father's Watch*.

Conclusion

In my years as a writer I've been lucky. I've been commissioned to write a lot of books that I wanted to write and those I was asked to write I might have wanted to write anyway. Whether or not I continue to publish, though, lies in the lap of the Gods. This is less because I've changed than because publishing has.

When I started in the 1980s, the Net Book Agreement (binding in the UK and observed in Ireland) ensured that publishers set the price at which their books were sold. According to its critics, it also meant that books were over-priced luxury items, while according to its supporters, it allowed publishers to predict income and guaranteed small bookshops a return on each book sold.

In 1995 the mechanism was abolished, those in favour arguing that this would mean cheaper books and more choice. As it's turned out, the only choice abolition delivered is that of venue. There are now more places than ever where we can buy books but the books we can buy in those places are limited to those of best-selling authors, like J. K. Rowling and Ian McEwan, and a whole lot of popular commercial authors. For publishers, the principal effect of abolition has been that power, which used to lie in their hands because they set the price, has passed to the retailers because now they set the price. And in this climate, where their margins are shrinking even as retailers are demanding greater discounts, publishers have had no choice, as they see it, but to cull less popular authors from their lists. I know of what I speak.

In 2006 both my hardback publisher of many years, Little, Brown and Company, and my children's books' publisher, Egmont Children's Books (following the death of Miriam Hodgson), said they didn't want to publish me any more. Each said I should go to a smaller publisher because that would be better for me but the truth was that I was just an author, like many others, who didn't sell enough copies. In the same year I also discovered several UK publishers had an enunciated if not formally stated policy of not taking on middle-aged literary authors.

Inevitably, with age, I feel increasingly that the world has 'gone to the dogs' and in particular that little bit of the world I care about most, which is the Kingdom of Literature: for on top of the abolition of the Net Book Agreement (and partly as a consequence of it as well) all sorts of other deleterious developments have worsened the lot of writers over the last fifteen years, among which, and in no particular order, are the following: the rise of branding; the enslavement of publishers to media endorsement by celebrity presenters like Oprah Winfrey to the extent this has become a principle measure of success among publishers; the obsession with the physical appearance of writers which in turn has meant publishers demand ever younger, ever more photogenic authors; the decline of the editor in publishing houses in order to save money; the rise of story-telling gurus (the best known is probably Robert McKee) whose courses give non-practitioners the false belief that they understand 'the secret of narrative' and therefore, are right to insist writers do exactly what they say (which writers then have to do if they want to get commissioned); the abandonment by publishers of the idea that writers have lifelong careers and that given the right support over a lengthy period they can develop; the failure of payment for literary endeavor either to keep pace with inflation or to reflect the actual amount of labour involved in literary production; the atrophy of community (writers, what ever is said to the

contrary, have never been more marginal and their enterprise more quixotic and ridiculous); and, finally, the eclipse of literary forms that once helped writers to survive, such as the short story.

All the above and more (this list is far from exhaustive) have changed the work experience of writers: however, I also know everything is cyclical: these circumstances and the conditions they have produced can't last forever. The trick, therefore, is to survive until things change back, in which case my best option, I believe, is to follow the strategy for successful living proposed by Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. I must endure cheerfully. In other words, I just have to outlive the fuckers.

Postscript

Over more than twenty-five years, I've written many reviews but the kind of critical scrutiny I've applied to other people's books I've never applied before to my own. It's been strange. I've had to reread books and disinter literary practices I haven't handled for decades; I've had to think about the way I've written and, in particular, whether my self-effacement strategy is still efficacious while simultaneously producing a book of interviews about suicide for *The Suicide Book*, a project that demanded extreme self-effacement. Now this essay is written and I'm at the end of this process of self-scrutiny, I've concluded that I've probably gone as far as I can with self-effacement and, in future, if I do manage to publish, I'll probably write in the third person without the buffer of an invented author between the reader and myself. This was what I did in *A Good Day For a Dog*, my last published novel. It's a lot simpler, I found.

- *Carlo Gébler*

¹ These were Elaine's Non-show, given its first performance at the Assembly Rooms, Belfast, 18th November 2003, as part of Vote! Vote! Vote!, and Silhouette, first performed at the Tricycle Theatre, London, on 24th November 2006, as part of How Long Is Never? Darfour – A Response.

² The Suicide Book currently languishes in limbo because of concerns about libel and breaches of the privacy laws and this is why it is absent from the bibliography.



Treeheads

Alice Maher

The Blackbird

Out of the night's curfew
you pass into morning,
alighting by my window,
with a seed of song.

Like the ark's dove
reversed, with nothing
tangible to sow,
besides music.

I have felt the sound
some evenings,
that comes far- travelled
out of dark passion -

the song of the heart
that cannot settle.

- *David Mohan*

Contributors

Leland Bardwell is from Leixlip in Co Kildare. She has published several novels, including *Girl On A Bicycle*, *That London Winter* and *Mother to a Stranger*. Her poetry collections include *The White Beach* and *The Sound of Masonry Settling* and the memoir *A Restless Life*. She lives in Sligo.

Mary Branley is from Sligo and has published two collections of poetry with Summer Palace Press; *A Foot on the Tide* 2002 and *Martin Let Me Go* in 2009. She was awarded the Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in 2008 for poetry. She is writer with *Kids'Own* Publishing Partnership, a not for profit arts based organisation, facilitating children's writing.

Des Burke is a retired mineral and oil exploration geologist living in Tipperary but originally from Tuam in Co. Galway. He took up writing in 2005 and is working on his first collection.

Cathy Carman is a graduate of NCAD. She is widely acclaimed for her large figurative work in wood stone and bronze. Her expressionist style is also evident in the many public commissions she undertook in the 1990s, notably at the Blasket Island Heritage Centre near Dingle, Tuam Square, Sligo County Council Buildings and Summerhill in Dublin. She continues to exhibit regularly, both in group and solo shows both in Ireland and abroad.

Monica Corish's poetry has been published in *The Stinging Fly* (Featured Poet, Spring 2009), *Southword* 17, *Books Ireland*, *Works* 7, *North-West Words* and *The Anam Cara Newsletter*. Her creative non-fiction has been broadcast on *Sunday Miscellany* and *The Quiet Quarter*, and her short story *The Black Rock* was published in *The Stinging Fly* in October 2010. Her first collection of poetry will be published in 2012.

Carlo Gébler was born in Dublin in 1954. He is the author of several plays for both radio and stage, while his novels include *The Cure* (1994) and *How to Murder a Man* (1998), the memoir *Father & I* (2000), the narrative history *The Siege of Derry* (2005). He has also written for children and reviews widely. In 2009 the Lagan press published his novel, *A Good Day for a Dog* and Fourth Estate the memoir, *My Father's Watch*, co-written with Patrick Maguire, youngest of the Maguire Seven. His new novel *The Dead Eight* will be published by New Island in May 2011. He is currently writer-in-residence in HMP Maghaberry, Co. Antrim. He is married, with five children.

Seán Golden was born in London in 1948 of Irish parents who emigrated to USA. He taught Irish literature in America before going to China in 1980. At present he teaches Chinese Studies in Barcelona. He edited *Soft Day: A Miscellany of Contemporary Irish Writing* with Peter Fallon and has translated classical and contemporary Chinese poets, as well as the *Art of War* and the *Daodejing*.

Frank Golden has published four collections of poetry the last of which was *In Daily Accord* (Salmon Publications 2008). A new novel *The Night Game* focusing on participants in a dissociative identity therapy group is due out later this year. His last solo exhibition *Living Through Air* was concerned with the aesthetics of brutality. He is currently preparing to shoot a short film set in the old fever hospital in Ballyvaughan.

Dermot Healy was born in Finea, Co. Westmeath. A novelist, playwright whose works of poetry from Gallery Press include *The Ballyconnell Colours*, *What The Hammer*, *The Reed Bed* and *A Fool's Errand*. He lives in Sligo.

Thomas Lynch is the author of the essay collections *The Undertaking* and *Bodies in Motion and at Rest*, his poetry collections include *Grimalkin and Other Poems*, *Still Life in Milford* and most recently *Walking Papers*. He lives in Michigan.

Bernard MacLaverly was born in Belfast. He is the author of several novels including, *The Anatomy School*, *Grace Notes*, *Cal*, and *Lamb* and several collections of short stories. He lives in Glasgow.

Bernadette McCarrick was born in South Sligo and now lives in Balbriggan. She has won several awards for individual poems over the years, including the Hennessey Literary Award for emerging poets 2007. Her first poetry collection, *My Father's Barn* was published in 2009.

Alice Maher was born in Cahir, Co. Tipperary. Awards include the G.P.A Emerging Artists Award, and nomination for Glen Dimplex Award, Residence at Centre d'Art d'Ivry sur Seine, Paris, Fulbright Scholarship, San Francisco Art Institute, and representing Ireland with Ciáran Lennon and Philip Napier at the 22nd Sao Paulo Bienal, Brazil.

David Mohan is based in Dublin and writes poetry and short stories. His poetry has been published in *The Sunday Tribune*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, *Abridged* and *Revival*. He has also won numerous poetry awards including the Hennessey/*Sunday Tribune* Poetry Award, as well as the 2008 overall New Irish Writer Award

Patricia Curran Mulligan was born in Sligo. She is a graduate of The College of Art Limerick and also an archaeology graduate of NUI Galway. She has had 14 solo shows to date and works across mediums. She has been writing since the age of 10.

Joseph O'Connor was born in Dublin. His novel *Star of the Sea* was an international bestseller, winning an American Library Association Award, the Irish Post Award for Fiction and the Prix Littéraire Européen Zepher for best European novel of the year. His most recent novel is *Ghost Light*.

Mary O'Donnell is the author of eleven books, both poetry and fiction, including the novels *The Light-Makers*, *Virgin and the Boy*, and *The Elysium Testament*, as well as poetry such as *The Place of Miracles*, *Unlegendary Heroes*, and her more recent critically acclaimed sixth collection *The Ark Builders* (2009).

Cormac O'Leary is an artist living in County Leitrim, Ireland. His work has won many awards and been exhibited in Ireland, the UK and America. New paintings will be shown in Cill Rialaig, Co. Kerry (2011).

Mary O'Malley was born in Connemara and educated at University College, Galway. She spent many years living in Portugal before returning to Ireland in the late 1980s and beginning a poetry career in 1990 with the title *A Consideration of Silk*. She has since published six other books including a New and Selected Poems. Her latest books have all been published by British house Carcanet.

Mary O'Shea lives and works on family farm in south Kilkenny. She is a local historian and has published books and articles on the subject. She has been published in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Kilkenny Anthology 1991*, *Connaught Tribune*, *Force Ten*, *Dundalk Anthology 1987*, *The Salmon*. She won an Allingham Prize in 1989.

Tom Sigafos is the author of *An American Scrapbook*, a series of radio essays broadcast on The Quiet Quarter on RTE Lyric FM. His work has appeared in *The Quiet Quarter Anthology – Ten Years of Great Irish Writing*, in *Crannog Literary Magazine*, and in *North-West Words*. His crime novel *Code Blue* is distributed on Amazon.com.

Vincent Woods is a poet, playwright and broadcaster. He lives in Dublin and presents 'Arts Tonight' on RTÉ Radio 1. He is a member of Aosdána.