

# Poetry

## ANGELA McCABE

### The Artist

*The soil in Leitrim is poor  
in places no more than an inch deep.*  
John McGahern, *Memoir*.

Broken egg shells  
still brown and white  
not fetid nor dug into soil or daub  
glisten in rain and sun.

It's March and Margot  
takes pictures  
of the compost heap  
for her art project.

She places them  
in an old valise  
returns to the soft blue wool  
of her Spiral Sculpture

lifts dropped stitches,  
contemplates the warp and weft  
of her journey to Leitrim,  
glad that she has left Paris.

### The Woman from Bornacoola

Aoife lives alone  
since her mother died.

The mother who bought  
clothes from a traveller once  
and was double crossed  
with articles, second hand.  
She demanded her money back.

As he was leaving  
with his hand full,  
Aoife edged her shotgun  
through the window  
yelling, *duck ma*  
and fired.  
He ran for his life.

She made scarecrows  
with the clothes,  
bought six cows  
with his money  
and turned the van  
into a henhouse.

## COLIN FLYNN

### The Geographical Realities

I spend a tremendous amount of time observing  
The geographical realities  
Receding as the arc of heaven is curving  
To where the Sliabh an Iarainn mountains please.  
Is there a better life than listening  
To birdsong in the middle of rolling hills  
When aerobatic swallows are on the wing  
And there's a moratorium on spills?  
I look at Leitrim in the distance as if  
It has the answer to the problems of life  
And it's no use going on a lyrical riff  
When discontentedness tends to be rife.  
The topographic details continue to stun  
From Carrick-on-Shannon to Manorhamilton.

### When the Turbulence Stops

The Sliabh an Iarainn Mountains tend to attract  
My scrutiny throughout the livelong year  
Until you think we have a secret pact  
To collaborate so contradictions cohere.  
They're pregnant with accelerating promise  
From a distance of a couple of dozen miles  
And help me not to be a doubting Thomas  
Despite my shunning of consecrated aisles.  
The quintet of unassuming eminences  
Is like the rhythm of a poetic line  
And anybody who's interested senses  
There is a cornucopia to mine.  
I continue looking at the mountaintops  
So the turbulence in my inner being stops.

*Angela McCabe won 1st Prize in the 2014 Leitrim Guardian Poetry Awards. She has a new collection of poetry which will be published in Autumn, 2015 by Alba Publishing in London. The working title is 'Journey to Leitrim'. See the Book Review Section for details of her first collection: 'Honeymoon in Coalisland'.*

*Colm Flynn and Mary Guckian are longstanding contributors to the Leitrim Guardian. Mary Guckian is a former Literary Award winner.*

## MARY GUCKIAN

### Cutting Turf

Cutting turf for our winter fuel  
began during summer months  
when my Father spent a day  
removing ashy coloured bracken  
from the top of a scrubby bank,  
flinging shovelfuls into black water  
he made a firm space for the barrow.  
With a sleen he cut into damp bristly  
earth and I caught dense wet sods,  
spattered with tiny branchy spikes,

I wheeled twelve of them a few feet  
out, and turned them into a heap  
over starched white bog cotton.  
The repetition went on all day,  
after school my sister brought tea  
with delicious ham sandwiches  
and a bottle of milk, reviving us,  
Cycling home our fingers sore after  
brambles stabbed, cracked our skin.

### Shannonside Walk at Drumsna

Sitting at a picnic table  
under the shading trees  
sun high in the sky beams  
on to the flowing water,  
a gurgling movement  
and slight shimmer turns  
bubbles into a ballroom  
of dancers, couples dressed  
in silver moving fast to music  
the darkness of the river  
becoming a polished floor.

In villages alongside the river  
Shannon, it has flooded, given  
life to perch, pike and lots of  
fauna needed to feed wildlife,  
causing havoc when young  
people give their sad bodies  
to the fast current, some go  
missing, are never found,

From where the great river  
rises at the Cuilceagh mountains  
in County Cavan many stories  
are hidden, yet it is so peaceful  
I want to sit here forever, but  
the dark cloud in the distance  
warns that a thundery shower  
is not too far away, leaving  
the Shannon river with many  
holidays boats sailing along.

## MONICA CORISH

## Hitting the Rapids

*for Tom Sigafos*

Not the boat of you and me, love.  
For now we are at lake-rest,  
Lough Melvin in the evening,  
watching the same two swans.

The boat  
of my family  
has hit the rapids -  
the sisters and brother  
who shared  
my mother's womb -  
my father,  
old and halt -  
my mother,  
lungs overwhelmed  
by cancer-  
it hurtles  
through whirlpools -  
slips in circles -  
gathers speed -  
white-water races -  
rushes -  
rocks lie hard ahead -  
no rest -  
until - after the final narrow cataract  
all will disappear -  
boat, river, mother -  
into the salt-dissolving sea -

We rest from rowing, trail our hands  
over the side, in water so pure  
there are trout found nowhere else,  
Sonaghan, and Gillaroo, butter-yellow,  
flecked with fire.

## Holly

Walking in the half-woods, I met a man  
in an orange visi-vest, bright against  
the bare-limb trees, the grey-ice lake,  
the snow-clotted conifers.

He has managed forests,  
he tells me, for twenty-two years.  
He walks the woods with an assessing eye,  
judging what to clear away - undergrowth  
and the un-wild, the Lodgepole Pines  
that block the light; and what to keep -  
specimen trees, native trees; how best  
to make spaciousness for fauna; how best  
to make a welcome for the old, wild life.

He is, I'm thinking,  
the archetype of the gardener,  
as much concerned with pruning as with growth.  
I tell him I have heard rumours of deer.

He points out an Alder - *that has to go,*  
*but the Holly* - he nods toward the stretch of land  
between the path and the lake - *that should go,*  
*but I won't cut it back unless they tell me to.*  
*And anyway, he says, if you coppice Holly*  
*it just grows back more densely.*

We both know he's inventing reasons  
for an irrational affection.  
He just likes Holly, smiles fondly on her,  
indulges her wild tanglings.

## ROSEMARIE ROWLEY

## A Lament for the Bees

Wild forces and wild horses held me down  
Deep in the earth where the voles slumber  
And nature's enemies offered a crown  
To me if I help eradicate their number  
Their dancing and humming all of summer  
With golden suits and stripes to match  
Their giddy flight and queenly hummer  
Their love of the earth and ours to watch  
And keep guard, like being in clover  
Their golden hoard of honey and wax  
Bees which were wanted on the list  
Of the apothecary's potions foreign to the earth  
To mint new prescriptions and poison mist  
Like talc for the corn, so no plants would give birth

## Bird thou never wert

O wild bird of my inward mind  
I see you have been on the dark fantastic  
Who could accuse me of being unkind  
In telling the truth, you're dead with plastic  
Bottle tops and caps, so bright and garish  
Attracted your attention and were fatal  
To your life and flight now nightmarish  
The pre-figurement of the visual Babel  
Scooped up, swallowed in the plastic curds  
Your warning to us shows your sacrifice  
As if foretelling, the augury of birds  
Of humankind's intrinsic deal with dice  
There's still time, thank you for the warning  
Each day reckons on still another morning.

*Rosemarie Rowley is a published poet  
based in Dublin whose parents hail from  
Leitrim. [www.rosemarierowley.ie](http://www.rosemarierowley.ie)*

*Monica Corish 'Holly' first published in  
Slow Mysteries, Doghouse Books 2012.  
Hitting the Rapids' first published in  
'The Shop'.*

*S A Murphy 'A Test' is published in his  
collection, entitled 'September 2013'.*

## S A MURPHY

## A Test

A test of man's not how he deals with life where nothing's wrong  
But how he copes when hope has gone, while darkness and despair  
Surround his every waking thought, how then he must go on  
To rise again as resolute to fill his lungs with air.  
Though night surrounds us all at times, and life is often bleak  
We're yet the masters of ourselves and in that mastery  
We can choose to focus on our strengths, on what makes us unique  
And through the choices that we take create who we will be.  
But when the darkness comes again as winter falls in time  
The noble and the truest friend shall be the one to climb  
Not to a height above himself, but to a one below  
Who reaches out to those who need a hand that says 'I know'  
And when the test comes to an end, if ever he is asked  
He can meet the gods as equals and tell them that he passed.