

Poetry in Leitrim

2 0 1 6

The poetry competition was adjudicated by Mr Fergus Mulligan, Publisher & Writer, Dublin

1st PRIZE

ATONEMENT

Esther Hoad

*I heard a story today
about a woman
and her dog
out walking
near their home
past a ruin
of a cottage
where the dog refused
to pass or go in*

*he barked and barked
but would not pass
or go in*

*but the woman did
and she stood
among the nettles
before the hearth
beneath the sky
within the walls
wherein she felt
such sorrow
such loss and anguish
so overwhelming
that she left
and went home*

*where she cooked potatoes
in their skins*

*and she left her offering
served with butter
milky and soft
at the hearth
beneath the sky*

2nd PRIZE

THE BROWN COAT

Nora McGillan

*Today you will leave again,
taking the hill with you,
the sad stones that lie along the roadside,
polished with our footsteps,
the bank blued with bluebells,
frail as the veins that thread your hand.
In your eyes the plans we made shining deep,
what we cannot recover no longer matters.
Words on your lips unspoken,
that brings a distant sheen to the soul.*

*I remember you leaving from Sligo station,
tiny in a brown coat,
to nurse in England.
There was love, and children, and duty,
God's duty.*

*I remember early morning mass,
the gasping of candles,
our bare knees scraping the wood,
the slam of the confessional door.
A single bell ringing,
the shining white of the host,
slow muffled muttering of prayers,
snatches of our conversation behind cupped hands,
the clatter of our footsteps on the silent street.*

*The two ice-creams you bought,
the banned books we smuggled home,
to read through the night by a dim light,
and today the words are in me,
propelling the pen.*

*Now you tell me
"We've seen the world,
We've done it all,
there is nothing more."
Your words fall on me,*

making a crater in the soul.

*You tell me
You gave away the brown coat recently,
after forty years,
forgetting that tucked in its deepest pocket,
was the fare home.*

3rd PRIZE

EMERALDS

Lionel Mullaly

*With Dad, I braved across the slowed traffic
His hand holding mine through the crowds of Blue and Gold.
'Flags, scarves and head bands' called from the corners
As I gripped my Crepe paper hat.
Lifted over the stiles,
On Hogan's bench we settled and
I watched as he followed each ball and score,
Surrounded by rising and ebbing rows,
Half standing and shouting,
While I wrestled with the Emeralds wrappers to share;
Gripping my knee he'd point and ask and I'd search the field for the answer,
Checking the board as our team won.
His head bent to mine, asking for my man of the match;
'Hickey', he suggested to my agreeing nod
And we smiled.
Hands held again as he fluently guided home across Clonliffe Road.
Never closer.*

*Now,
Decades on,
My hand now held.
I pointing and guiding through the same familiar streets
The same colours calling from the same corners,
New Hogan's seats cradling us
And through the rising and ebbing rows I'll ask,
'Did you see?'
And his little face will smile, and look, and search
And we'll share the Emeralds.
Heads bent together at the end to name the best;
Brogan, we'll agree on, or Diarmuid, and smile.
Growing closer.*

Fergus Flood Adjudicator Comments

1st PRIZE

ATONEMENT

Esther Hoad

A powerful account of a woman experiencing the aura of a ruined house and her response to the palpable suffering within its walls. Very simple, a lovely presentation and very moving. Abandoned houses like this have such stories to tell.

2nd PRIZE

THE BROWN COAT

Nora McGillen

Highly evocative poem about a homecoming, leave-taking, religious observance and memories of past adventures, all told around the symbolism of an old brown coat. Lines like "Your words fall on me, making a crater in the soul" are so powerful. An excellent piece of writing.

3rd PRIZE

EMERALDS

Lionel Mullally

A lovely poem about the excitement of going to Croke Park with your Dad and then repeating the experience decades later with your own son; emotive without being maudlin.

WESTLIGHT

Gerard Gill

*Misted lands, horizon strewn,
Daunting and sharp,
Freeze me in freeze frame.
Look at the little streets
Upon the clouds
And imagine flying faceway
Towards the brimming Westlight.
What a sight to behold,
Flanked and frozen by cloudiness.
Through this psychiatry of sky
The world emits its' euphoria
While snarling a crooked breath.*

*But what has happened
That it darkens so,
Darkening down to demondark,
Dark swathes of thunder,
Smouldering and black,
We draw the pretty clouds
Overtly through a foreign face.
And the rain fell then,
Light and clinging lumps of rain
Under laces of yellow thunder
That thread the veil.*

*The sun rolls back
With sweetish song,
A smarting gaze,
A runaway cloud.
It was near perfect then
As I stepped outside.
The wild ragged ends
Of fairy bit clouds
Clench in misted rain,
And watching through the window
The sun trifling with the wind,
Making hours out of each whole day,
And suddenly the drowsiness of normality
Is not easily overcome..*

GYPSEY

Angela McCabe

*YHe came each season, alone.
Made a bender along the roadside.
The canvas patched a hundred times.*

*Rumour had it he killed a man
in his own clan.
The scar on his face
evidence of that bloody fight.*

*Neighbours argued
whether he did or didn't.
He's far too clement for that, some said.
The quiet ones are the ones to watch,
others proclaimed.*

*My brother mitched from school,
drank black tea
and smoked cigarettes by his fire.
Helped him with his tin-smithy.*

*Women thankful for new handles on pots.
Men with pitch-forks or switch hooks
as they passed him, just in case...*

*On a frosty morning, walking to school,
the roadside empty
as if it had all been a dream.*

*My brother made a bender
in our field, hammered
at old pots and pans, drank black tea
and smoked roll ups,
quiet and contemplative.*

*When February winds blew,
curls of smoke appeared
beyond the meadow.
Brother stole cigarettes
and ran to him.*

Gypsy and rogue alive in him again.