Poetry in Leitrim

2014

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

1st PRIZE

SLIABH AN IAREANN (THE MOUNTAIN)

Angela McCabe

Morning mist,
trees in a row
painted by Cezanne or Derain.

Patchwork of fields in different shades
of mauve–a colour that some say
doesn't exist.

Cinnamon, saffron, nutmeg.
Cake of granite, rendered and folded
changing minute by minute in a reflective sun.

Cloud above to tease you
move, dance and turn again
and fog your grey blue hue.

Some people meditate by the sea,
but you are far from the ocean.
No waves to erode you.

To contemplate in front of you
and send a silent prayer to Heaven
reminds us of a stillness long forgotten.

Wrinkled summit like the faces
of wise and silent men and women
who give all through steady endurance.

Risen sun reflects off white rock
like an oyster pearl,
turns to a morning star new risen.

Translucent white cloud passes over
and carries on, leaving us to catch
glimpses of you, hour by hour.

You are there in our mornings
at our Angelus, our nights
and in our daily plights.

We go to your ridge.
No endless chatter here
silence, save the bleat of sheep.

And if we could live as you
cloud by cloud, sunset by sunset
we might know what it is to be still.

2nd PRIZE

A LIFE'S TIME

Keith Nolan

I opened my eyes and saw my life.

I blinked and I was a teenager.

I blinked again and became a parent.

I blinked once more, a grandparent.

My eyes are tiring now.

Adjudicator's Comments

1st PRIZE

Sliabh an Iarainn

Angela McCabe

This poet has a superb talent, her writing is spare and concise conveying ideas, impressions, memories and sensations in just a few lines; Sliabh an Iarainn: an idyllic description of the stillness, colours, beauty and silence of the mountain. It's like an oil painting in words.

2nd PRIZE

A Life's Time

Keith Nolan

This is a delightful short poem. In just a few lines the poet articulates clearly and simply the swift passing of time in a person's life.

3rd PRIZE

Parcel from America

Mick Geelan

'A very funny, brilliantly structured account of the many uses the poet's mother made of a very large velvet dress that arrived in a parcel from America.'

3rd PRIZE

PARCEL FROM AMERICA

Mick Geelan

In the golden days of childhood as the seasons came and went
The parcel from America was an annual event.
But the one I most remember, though it followed the general rule
Came in the last November that I spent at national school.
It brought a camera and sunglasses, and a little fireside rug
And Uncle Toney's leather jacket that was lovely, warm and snug.
There were Christmas Decorations and a hand carved set of chess
But folded neatly in the bottom was Aunty Maggie's dress

Now Aunty Marge was very large, she was very big and stout
In fact a journey round her edges would leave you worn out.
It was made from softest velvet, her admirers to impress
And there were lovely golden buttons on Maggie's beautiful dress.
The belt was made from satin, as were the cuffs and collar
You could see the Yankees liked their style, God bless the mighty dollar.
My mother held it up and Looked at it, you'd know she was impressed
There was an acre of material in Aunty Maggie's dress

Now the curtains on the kitchen, they were getting kind of thin,
The years had worn the fabric and the light was getting in.
So the scissors and the singer were employed with mighty glee
We had new drapes on the windows, before we got our tea.
The scissors and singer came into action once again
She made covers for the armchairs and an apron for my Gran
The twins got lovely velvet jackets and my sister got a shift
Then she picked the trimmings off the floor and made a patchwork quilt.

Now my mother's velvet curtains were admired for miles around
At the hearth in our kitchen a little rug lay on the ground.
And the virgin on the mantelpiece had hand carved knights for friends
But the camera was abandoned, because we couldn't afford the film.
Though Uncle's leather jacket took a few more years to fill
It lasted several winters; I think my brother has it still.
I still don't know why she sent it, but thanks to her largess
I think recycling was invented with Aunty Maggie's dress.

LAST RITE

Órla Parkinson

You got good value
out of that pin stripe
you bought for my wedding.

It saw you through
the usual run
of rituals.

And now your last.

I reach in the pocket
and you gift me
three more sucky sweets.

I eat one,
then put the other two
back in your pocket.

Just in case.

UNINVITED

Órla Parkinson

Uninvited,
your silence woke us,
stilled us.

Unbid,
your arrival cocooned us,
seduced us.

Unexpected,
your coming warmed us,
melted us.

Unwatched,
your presence burnt us,
transformed us.

Unwanted,
your departure startled us,
renewed us.

Unknowingly,
your absence numbed us,
stirred us.

We long for your return,
Uninvited.

SHADOWS

Tony Fahy

Shadows all glimmered
As the candle flickered out
Another crazy dream in a hazy waterspout
I reached into the abyss
Felt my way along
Opened up my eyes
My dream became a song
Inched along by inch by inch
Suddenly it gave away
I fell into a harmony
Plucked upon a sunray
Rainbow crystall'd fountains
Shivered with delight
I peeled away my brand new skin
Felt my bones grow tight.
'At last! at last! at last!' I cried
And scrambled from my bed
Pulled the morning over
The Sun was dying red
The globe was getting hotter
My feet were all ablaze
I poured a jug of water
And the sky was shot in rage
Ravens, starved and hunting
Scavenged on the land
And the people tried to feed them
From some bones they called a hand
Trees fell down
Leaves turned brown
The season came too fast
The Moon was falling
A voice was calling
'At last! at last! at last!'

DIRECT ROUTE TO GOD

Ann O'Hagan

Bring back the days when Blackberries
Were the kind we loved to eat
And people exchanged their news and views
Over a cuppa when they'd meet

When children walked to and from school
Got fresh air and were much fitter
And the sweet singing of birds along the way
Was the nearest they got to Twitter

There was no mention at all of computers
No Facebook, YouTube or Skype
No TV to follow Fair City
Our soap was of a different type

People worked hard and helped out each other
In the hayfield, on the bog, everywhere
Material things, so unimportant
'Well Off' meant true friends and real care

We can now go from A to B faster
But more than ever, we haven't got time
To reminisce with friends and with family
It's a real pity it isn't a crime

My advice is turn off the computer
Put the Blackberry phone in your pocket
Do a good turn for someone less well-off
Go on, try it, don't stand there and knock it

If and when you go try out my theory
I've no doubt, when to me you get back
You'll agree that what seemed one step forward
Has resulted in quite a few steps back

There's no need to keep up with the Jones'
Be yourself and on no-one else trod
Be kind to all you meet on your journey
Your reward–A Direct Route To GOD

MOWING WITH SCYTHE!

Andy McGovern

O precious ink, you switch at my heel,
You are my open window as the memories reveal.
Time has stood still in my tedious mind,
Vivid pictures I now leave behind.

Weights of memories press the switch down,
Many pages from the past turn around.
I will release this vision before my going,
A lone shadow of the great man mowing.

The scythe placed carefully on rafter high,
Secure in time as winter months go by.
Wedges and ring of iron bound together,
Carefully preserved by old worn leather.

With one Gallus up and another let down,
The dark shadow swings scythe blade around.
A swart of grass with scythe now kissed,
Not one single 'traithnin' ever missed.

O rich meadow now pared to ground,
Such skill as scythe is swung around.
Flowery rich leafy grass still standing tall,
One lone dark shadow does it all.

Beads of satisfaction on his weary brow,
Crystal clear memories fill me now.
A time to stop and sharpen blade with care,
Whicka, whicka...echoes through summer air.

Scythe on shoulder now takes rest,
Swift movements of scythe stone know best.
Blade restored to razor sharp,
Ready to challenge another swart.

A welted, worn hand reaches into the shade,
To taste buttermilk and bread just made.
Viewing the meadow now falling to it's side,
His heart enriched with simple pride.

A spit to hand ignites the work he loves,
Corncrakes race to the Heavens above.
Man and nature sharing God's span,
A bee's yield her honey to an eager hand.

An era now slips from our world so fast,
I try to preserve and make it last.
That shadowy figure now beckons at my side,
You were my flesh, my blood, my heart's pride.

In Twilight days with foot on switch,
I'll release my longing so bewitched,
The scythe to me is a thing of past,
I'll do my mowing with this cast.

The precious vision of my father, a lone man in the meadow cutting with scythe is embedded in my memory. Disabled now with Motor Neurone Disease, having lost the use of both my hands and arms, the relaying of this vision would be an impossible task without the use of modern technology. Thank you to the staff at the Central Remedial Clinic *in Clontarf who provided me with a computer and foot switch–the vital link needed to communicate and release those trapped memories to the outside world. In 1938, I was a carefree five year old child, running in that meadow. Alert enough to thankfully capture the scene and hold it in my memory all through those 75 years.This poem is my own personal tribute to that now nearly forgotten era. My dearest wish would be to preserve that era's memory for the future generations, so that they may treasure it as much as I do.*

AWAY IN AUSTRALIA

Willie Keane

Our youth are growing taller
Day by day
They're boarding planes and,
Flying far away.
To a land of gold and wonder,
In that hemisphere down under.
There they hope to see,
A brighter day.

Old Ireland's in distress,
Our finances are in a mess.
Yet with drive and innovation,
We will raise this ancient nation
As first among equals evermore.

Way down in Aussie land,
Irish boys and girls grand,
Will enhance each undertaking,
Finding friends in the host nation,
Some day they'll swim together,
Out from Bondi Beach.

HEAVEN CAN WAIT

Willie Keane

I dreamed I met St. Peter
Who with a cautious nod
Showed me to an open gate
In, I hoped to God.

I sought the beatific vision,
The sacred three in one.
The many mansioned edifice,
Those scenes of life to come.

A voice from out my schooldays
Came softly to my ear,
You seldom missed an answer,
Remember why you're here.

In this place of some correction,
For those of little faith,
Who walked on the wild side,
Move in to the heat.

I awoke to a rousing dawn chorus,
Sun shining through mist and, cold air,
Still in the land of the living,
I love it, and Heaven can wait.

THE WRATH OF A WOMAN

Peter McGeever

What is this strange and terrible beauty that is woman
that can crumble the heart and frame of a man
She may be petite, small frame and sweet
But can reduce the male of high stature in tail
to a pale and crumbling wreck.

Her vision of life is more than that of a wife
and her mind is of different direction,
waiting for her to hear his confession.

This man of high stealth no longer has wealth,
befitting the man he once was
He's now just a shell reduced by her spell,
licking the wounds from her claws.

MEMORIES

Peter McGeever

Empty years, empty spaces behind the tears
Going through life with all its fears
and collecting memories.
Lost thoughts and memories I had in my mind
Two for a penny and one of a kind
What brings to mind…reflecting memories
Laying in the sand touching your hand
I see in your eyes, only sorrow and lies
We're two of a kind
With memories

A GRAVEYARD IN AUGHAVAS

Colm Flynn

A perambulation in County Leitrim ends
In an ancient graveyard with a view of mountains
And as far as I'm concerned the day transcends
The loveliness of paradisal fountains.
The tolling of the bell for the Angelus
Is reminding me of organized religion
And I am finding a reassuring plus
In the repetitious cooing of a pigeon.
I rest in the roaster on a tremendous rock
Beneath the wispy cirri of the sky
And resist a powerful temptation to mock
The Church of Rome because it is awry.
A ringlet butterfly is like a soul
Who's in pursuance of a purposeful role.

AT THE INHUMATION OF SEAMUS HEANEY

Colm Flynn

The air is full of pieces of thistledown
When Seamus Heaney is being laid to rest
And I hope he has a transcendental crown
As a consequence of his having been the best.
They're burying him in the shade of sycamores
On an afternoon you couldn't criticize
As the everlasting part of the poet soars
Into Elysium where there are no sighs.
The uncustomary deepness of his grave
Is immaterial because his soul
Has gone to a place where there is no need to be brave
In the face of a stroke diminishing his role.
More power to the elbow of Liam O'Flynn
Who plays the uilleann pipes with such discipline.

CHARLEY FARRELLY'S

Colm Flynn

We pay a visit to Charley Farrelly's bar
When 2012 is coming to a close
And all of us hope the coming year won't mar
Us with the misfortune of psychological lows.
A horseshoe hangs in harmony with a picture
Of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the wall
And there is not a solitary stricture
Expressed by anyone to make us stall.
I am surrounded by unperfidious friends
Whose conversation covers everything
Including all the contemporary trends
As we look forward to another spring.
We don't regret a single moment spent
Inside the door of the ancient establishment.

RED SQUIRREL

Colm Flynn

I drive as far as Aughavas to bring
Friends to a funeral in Tarmonbarry
And it's a lovely morning in the spring
When troubles do not have a tendency to harry.
As I park my Volkswagen in the gravelled yard
I see a squirrel climbing up a tree
And the beauty of its redness means I bombard
My friends with questions so typical of me.
It is a wonderful privilege to sight
The bushy-tailed creature with its nimbleness
And it has helped an utter Cavanite
To realize how County Leitrim can bless.
We head in a southwards direction to condole
With the relatives of the late-lamented soul.

WHERE THE EARTH MEETS THE SKY

Colm Flynn

I feel great distances are separating
Me from The Leitrim Mountains with their boon
And is there anyone who isn't waiting
For satisfaction as they importune?
My brain is teasing with the thought I could
Be in Carrick-on-Shannon or in Ballinamore
And I am staring at the far-off wood
Of Sitka spruce with a clearing at its core.
The summer afternoon is busy building
Tremendous cumuli above the hills
And a multitude of buttercups are gilding
The fields of Leitrim so there are no ills.
I continue looking at where the earth meets the sky
So there's not a single reason for a sigh.

HOME

Josh McLaren

It's small and full of small hopes and dreams,
And when the dew sticks to the dark morning grass,
It feels like it hides many secrets and a very rich past,
And yet I know that one day I will wander from
this small town,
To the wildest corners of this large earth,
And yet I will still call this place,
With its dark fresh plains,
And the open blue sky,
Home.

AN IRISHMAN'S HOME IS HIS COFFIN

Kevin Patrick

An Irishman's Home is his Coffin
in two paces, of God's Holy Ground.
No more will his aching bones pain him
the sleep he shall have will be sound.
Above him the world keeps a-turning
as he takes it all in on his back.
While the tides of the world keep a-rolling
He's perfectly still all in black.

Yes, an Irishman's Home is his Coffin
he worked and saved hard all his life.
To be sure at the time of his passing
he'd enough, not to burden his wife.
With the cost of the oak and brass plating
and the plot and the drink and the feed.
It's enough to be spending a-plenty
while herself's in her new Widow's Weeds.

Oh the Wake that he had was just perfect
with neighbours and friends all around.
And the true tears of all his Grandchildren
as his coffin was slowly let down.
Yes they all came to praise and to bury
the rough clay all over his head.
And the old boys who stood still, remarking
"We'll not see his like here again"

He took a few pound for the journey
and whiskey to offer if when,
he meets old friends who are yearning
or to welcome his parents again.
He has all the room he was meant to.
He's all dressed in his best suit and tie.
No hunger or thirst comes to tempt him.
He's happy at last just to lie.

No more to be worrying 'bout money
or the roof that is over his head.
Or watching the weather and waiting
all that needs to be said has been said.
For he's truly no way of knowing
If he's heading for Heaven or Hell.
But for now his new home is just handsome,
God knows, only time now will tell.

WHITE FROST

Mary Guckian

White frost marks
Divisions of fields
And gardens of Cloncolry.
Overgrown hedges thorny,
Transform into pillows
Of ragged cotton
And tall trees dressed
In shimmering silk
Quietly glow.

Stiff rushes
Crunch underfoot
Where robins appear
Waiting for crumbs
To fall on hardened soil.
By midday, bright sun
Thaws landscape
Into winter greyness.

WALKING ON SNOW

Mary Guckian

On freshly fallen
Snowflakes,
Layers of delicate
Petals fragment
Beneath my feet--
The delicacy of nature
Fragile as relationships
Crumbling in the
Wee small hours
Of another night.

HAMMERING SOUNDS

Mary Guckian

Hammering sounds
From Barrow Street
Hang around my home
In the morning
As metal hits metal
And the Metro Verde
Building rises
To sixteen storeys.

I take milk from the fridge
And remember carts
Packed with creamery cans,
Horses and donkeys
Swaying side to side
Climbing Mary Ann's Hill.

Echoes of iron
Ring across the farm
As cans are pushed
Across the platform
Of Kiltoghert Creamery,
Emptied into vats
For buttermaking,
Then shifted back on shiny
Dark stone and refilled
With skim milk.

When my Father
Was in hospital
I waited at the lane

For a farmer
To carry our milk
To the creamery.

Despite packed carts
To my childish delight
One kind person
Always lifted a full can
On to his daily load.

PASSING SUN

Mary Guckian

Passing sun blinds my eyes
Shingle rattles under my feet,
A hairy dog snaps at my heels.
Proud parents struggle to push
Prams through damp sand.

Young boys fly a lone kite
Under delicate blue skies
Caressed by white steam puffing
From red and white chimneys
Of Poolbeg power station.

On level grey cement
Arthritic people exercise
After hip operations – crutches
And zimmer frames for support
While they adjust to plastic parts
Now helping aged bodies
To enjoy new life

MODERN TIMES

Angel McCabe

Iron mountain always near
despite veiled filaments of cloud
delicate as a Japanese print.

Silent grey ridge
home to ghosts of Ultacts
and Tuatha De Dannan

When I walk there
the rev of log lorry
disturbs my meditation

banishing
hidden links
to an invisible world

ST BRIDGET'S DAY IN BALLINAMORE

Angel McCabe

This St. Bridget's Day welcomed
more than any gone before.
Trepid are we in this rite of Spring

after a night of snow and ice.
Below ever changing clouds of
grey and gold and white.

this moving rhyme
of feminine fertility
keeps us hushed

as shoots push forth
through wetness and wind,
long in their coming.

Rushes twist in St Bridget's crosses.
We walk to her well to heal
a frozen welcome.

LEITRIM TO LOUGH NEAGH

Angel McCabe

He was always
curious about the swell,
the fullness, the flow:
bridges, inlets, islands,
the Finn, the Owenay, the Moy
and Gweebara Bay.

How the falls from Cuilcagh
and Marble Arch
converge and flow
from Fermanagh to Cavan.

But when my father drove
from Leitrim to Lough Neagh
by back roads,
no matter how many near cuts
he took
he mused at how
the distance
was always the same

STORM OVER LOUGH SCUR

Angel McCabe

Clouds burst rainfall
hits our secret gullies
in this height of tidal flow

floods itself in a sweep
running down our bodies
raincoats a useless defence.

Thunder cracks through our silence
a desolate song of summer
blips of lightening flit with no mercy.

When we surrender to walls of rain
that darken waterlogged skies
bind ourselves against the wind,

it passes, freshens the air between us.
Intimate scents of turf and grass
opens a window of sun.