

Poetry in Leitrim

TRISH BENNETT

The Day I Became a Royalist

The memory of that day's still sweet,
the way the sun filtered through hedges
beginning to explode
with blooms of hawthorn and chestnut;
the coconut trace that floated up
from yellow bubbled whin;
the excited buzz from her fans,
humming as I set to work.
Deaf as beetles they were,
yet they danced their tales
while their friends watched
and felt the vibrations.
I wanted to dance too,
but my rebel feet refused.

I looked the part.
In fact, I was smoking,
with all the right gear to meet a Queen.
No high fashion, fascinators,
stilettos or frocks,
demure — in loose white,
a veil over my face,
and gloves.

The roar arose from the crowd.
Herself was close.
Royal guards drew lances,
made charges as if to say,
'Your kind's not welcome here'.
I worked on — ignored the line,
like my Father before,
when I was a child.

When her Highness appeared in my frame of view,
maybe it was the alien look of her dress,
poured out in layers like dark chocolate,
or maybe it was her long legs,
that could do with a rub of the razor,
that made her look huge.
She walked that confident walk
of a girl at the top.
Her retinue fussed, had respect.
While her signature scent was strong,
they remained happy, loyal
content.

My senses captured it all
in a way no camera could;
that joy as I watched them dance and hum,
the chinook noise from drones,
the scent of our land collected, condensed,
mind-stamped into my memory cells,
that brought me home to childhood days
when my brother and I dug sections of gold
on our Fathers return.

The memory's still sweet of that day
when I turned,
on meeting the Queen
of Apis Mellifera Mellifera
my black honey bees

*Highly Commended in the
Baillieborough Poetry Prize 2018*

Rewrite

If only I could redraft
some pages of my life
to give them a second run.
I'd remove those wrong words
and highlight the names I'd loved.

*Commended in the '40 words competition' by the
The Bangor Literary Journal in 2018 and pub-
lished in same*

Weather Forecast for PMS

Starts off calm,
some sunshine
at times,
but changeable,
expect jolts of thunder.
Prone to outbursts,
resulting
in localised flooding
later.

*Previously published in Lagan Online's '
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Poetry Day Ireland 2018.*

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NORA MCGILLEN

Lament for Jean McConville

May the soft sand be a pillow cradling your head,
May the steady beat of the waves keep you company,
May the wind moaning against your eardrum bring you comfort,
May the salt tang of the wind moisten your lips,
May the excited chatter of swallows wake you,
May the breath of the seagulls anoint you,
May the sound of playing children weave a prayer for you,
May the Summers keep you cool,
May the raging Winters shelter you,
May the moon's radiance shine a path for you,
May the holiness of the morning ease your grief,
May the breath of the sea wipe away memory,
May the gentle rain wipe clean the blood from your head.

THOMAS O'ROURKE

My Breffni Home

Take me back again to my Breffni home,
To the peaceful Fort Lough at Augharan,
Where creatures of the night come out to roam.

Pebbles create a pattern on the loam
A regal swan extends her wide wingspan
Take me back again to my Breffni home

I've been here before by the lapping foam
My time is short, I take it while I can
Where creatures of the night come out to roam

I fought by the woods and wrote in Ogham
With the MacTire and wild deer I ran
Take me back again to my Breffni home

And now I know the reason why I've come
To that place where I grew to be a man
Where creatures of the night come out to roam

Now I must return to my cosmic dome
Carried off by an ancient Godly Clan
To take me away from my Breffni home
Where creatures of the night come out to roam.

Your Strawberry Necklace

From Augharan School, crackling yellow gorse
Childhood memories along the inclined narrow lane.
In the June sun nothing has changed,
Wild strawberries ripen on the dry mossy ditch,
At night there is the silence of the corncrake.

That once grey gravel now covered in tarmac
The sharp bend where my old bicycle skidded,
Crashing head first into the briars, thick and thorny.
Crawling out wounded, all blood, thorns and tears,
Buzzing black flies swarming around my dizzy head.

Gently, you picked the thorns from my tender skin
And soaked your handkerchief in the cold stream.
Soothing away the pain and restoring my pride,
Forgetting to hurry, we sat on the grassy bank
Our bare feet dangling in the cool brown water.

I study my reflection in the shallow stream,
As I recall your soothing hands and gentle words.
That day I made for you a strawberry necklace,
They tell me you are nursing up in Dublin now,
I was privileged to have been your first patient.

MARGARET GALVIN

Observing the Sabbath

It was a fearsome cycle that Sunday
for Mary and Jean Devaney who took to the road,
the turkey hen fettered in the hessian message bag,
her head out, the perky bead of her eye taking in
the strange landscape beyond Ballina.

The information panel in the Museum of Country Life records
that it was, however, a non-event.
The stern Protestant lady, mistress of the flock,
sent them packing in a flurry
of righteous indignation.
Strict in her observance of the Sabbath,
she decreed that no turkey cock of hers
would stain and sully the Lord's day
but rather, be chaste and continent,
austere and faithful as she,
pure in demeanour despite temptation
from foreign birds, the kind **who's egg him on**
to strut and splay and capture.

CHRIS SPARKS

Mercury

Inside me,
inside my
bone caved, cranium-locked, deep-mined mind,
my sleeping self,
your blood-beat driven resonance
made its presence felt.

Some kind of mercury,
silver shoed,
liquid,
bearing messages,
shaping images,
sounded.

My unmirrored self,
a buzzing hum,
echoed
your older, deeper voice
and
when I heard you had died,
later,
suddenly,
out of the dark,
I remembered.

KEVIN MCMANUS

Thaddeus and Eleanor danced after the Storm

I
Thaddeus stood at his doorway observing the formation of an all engulfing storm.
He was no longer satisfied with silence or listening to the gentle sound of rain tinkering
against his window lulling him to sleep.
He wanted new challenges, new tumults to ascend, Thaddeus awaited the scream of the
wind. Above him his eyes lifted to the stratus sky line. The wind surged forward and
endlessly pounded like hammer blows upon the Earth.
Overhead in darkening skies cadaverous clouds streamed in abundant chaos.
Thaddeus welcomed the storm; in fact he embraced it and danced within its swirling torrents.

II
In a previous life he battled it. He outstretched his arms and cursed it.
The storm appeared never ending to him. It was all consuming, waiting to devour him. He
was pulled into the deluge and sank into the black depths of the dark water.
As he struggled to swim, to stay alive as the unrelenting waves battered him. To fight
against it appeared futile.
But he learned to endure the lash, the agony of its rampant fury. Thaddeus learned how to
stop fighting it, the more he resisted the further he sank.
Thaddeus learned how to float

III
His saviour was Eleanor. She taught him how to ride the storm, to ride the crashing waves of
the tempest.
She gave him safe harbour in the volatile chaos that was his life before, a shelter from the
swelling seas, a comforting light of hope that guided him home past jagged reefs into the
arms of a nurturing cove.
Her voice was soothing to him, her words like the melody of a familiar song he had heard
before but he couldn't quite remember where.

IV
When the storm was over and the carnage was complete. When the corpses had been
counted and the branch was on the bough. Eleanor took Thaddeus by the hand as they
transcended light and shade.
They ethereally floated spectres on the shrill breeze beyond time and latitude. With no
earthly constraints to hold them to root them to the ground, they rose together elegantly
upwards to glide upon the heavenly currents and when Eleanor took Thaddeus by the hand
they danced after the storm.

KEVIN GUIHAN

Invincible

The sun sets on the horizon
The clouds of darkness gather
It is a time of contemplation
I ask "Did I live today"
If I did my life was worth the fight
If not we fight again when the sun rises to a new day
For all is not lost
We live our lives for love and laughter and everything else is of
no consequence
So when you rise stand and be counted never give in to defeat.

KILLIAN MCGUINNESS

Retired Blues

Aged man, I wake up in the nest,
Feeling sad and down
and really kind of tired,
Aged man, I wake up in the nest,
The house so cold and damp,
I feel almost expired.

I've got the retired blues,
don't hear my Grandson humming,
I've got the retired blues,
a whole week before he's coming
I scrub his little chair, make his little bed,
Clean his little shoes,
wish he was here instead.

My dog he wants his walkies,
He's such a blooming pest,
My dog he wants his walkies,
And all I want is rest.

I've got apples in the shed
in order to make cider,
But the opening in the crush
needs to be much wider,
They are rotting on the floor
attracting all the rats,
Enjoying all the slush,
I need a swarm of cats.

Aged twenty when my blood was up,
Needed someone in my bed,
Aged twenty when my blood was up,
Now, just give me a glass of red.

I've got the retired blues,
bad limp, bad hip, bad spine,
I've got the retired blues,
all I do is whine.

Loved?

Have you loved in the days that past
Or even for just one given moment in time
If not you are lost to this life

For love is what we all live out our days for
And it comes in many loving forms
So glance into one's heart and whisper "Have I loved".
And if you have let the world take you within its arms
If not, do not stray, for you are loved eternally.

ORLA PARKINSON

Armistice Day, 2009

Today we are revising history in stone,
Remembering our young dead, left unmarked before.
In grey Glasnevin cemetery, we not atone.

Let us their lives recall, their dignity restore,
No more their deaths disown, lives sacrificed; no shame
Remembering our young dead, left unmarked before.

Once hidden graves now visibly preserve their name,
Great War men, honoured, like our patriots revered
No more their deaths disown, lives sacrificed; no shame

If for a different cause their lives they volunteered.
Attending silently, these dumb headstones acclaim
Great War men, honoured, like our patriots revered

They gave their lives for what some thought just cause, not
fame.
We mark our common wealth of waste lives, mute men
Attending silently, these dumb headstones acclaim

The cost of war; that what was lost is lost again.
Today we are revising history in stone,
We make our common wealth of wasted lives, mute men
In grey Glasnevin cemetery, we now atone.

On July 15th, 2018 the Kilkenny Great War Memorial was unveiled. An extract from the poem *Armistice Day, 2009* written by Orla Parkinson graces this memorial, a place where one can publicly commemorate Ireland's war dead. Below are words from the speech from Mr Ger Cody that prefaced the reading of Orla's poem:

The poem, *Armistice Day 2009*, which I will be reading today, is the work of the talented Orla Parkinson. Throughout her life, Orla struggled with depression. At various intervals, she managed to free herself from this pervasive darkness, but on returning, each time, it was more intense. It speaks volumes for Orla's tenacity and battling instincts, that, in her lifetime, she achieved so much. She produced a large body of poetry, short stories, a two act play, obtained a Masters degree in Library science, was a graduate in History, English, Archaeology, and Mythology, had a day job, raised a family, was a prominent community activist and most importantly, throughout all the trials and tribulations, she managed to survive and to continue. In TCD in 1986, under the tutelage of David Fitzpatrick (Fellow Emeritus History TCD). Orla studied 'Ireland and the first world war'. At the time it was rather a taboo subject, but Orla, motivated by this unwritten period of our history, persevered. Reacting to the unveiling of a memorial in Glasnevin to honour the fallen Irish in WWI, the first formal recognition by the state, Orla wrote *Armistice Day, 2009*. This moving tribute was initially entrusted to the author to read but regretfully Orla passed away in May of this year. I ask that you remember Orla on this historic day as we gather to pay tribute to our long forgotten people. Today, at last, we acknowledge their existence and proudly bear testament to their sacrifice.

Orla Parkinson participated fully in all walks of life in her adopted home of County Leitrim. Her gentleness and generosity touched so many people during her life, through her work in the library, her many community activities, her creative pursuits including writing, acting, singing, and of course through the interaction of her beautiful family in all our lives. Orla was the winner of the *Leitrim Guardian* 'Leonard Perpetual Trophy and M J McManus Literary Award' in 2011, for her short story, *The Removal*. To Orla's family and loved ones, we extend our heartfelt sympathy. Her loss is immense. May her community spirit live on and flourish in her memory. May her gentle soul rest in perfect peace. Suaimhneas síoraí dá h-anam uasal chineálta.



Electric Soundy

Enthralled by stories of Dervla Murphy cycling on a man's bicycle across Arab countries, we danced in our flats to Dinjoe and Ceilidhe House, waking up on Sunday mornings to Mo Cheol Tu and Sunday Miscellany. Along came Gay helping us to metamorphose, while Marion on Liveline became a filter for our hurts. Chat shows continue to counsel as political debates inform, before bedtime, turning in to Radio 1 and Rattlebag.

Threshing Oats

Authors note: Threshing Oats is included in a new publication *The Lea Green Down* edited by Eileen Casey. Eileen wanted to celebrate Patrick Kavanagh's poetry and his poems are included alongside each poet's poem. 64 poets are included and each chose one of Patrick Kavanagh's poems and wrote a poem in response. I picked his poem *Threshing Morning*.

Time

MONICA CORISH

Light House Pass Time

i
Climb the tower.
Start the stopwatch,
touch the lantern,
down the granite steps,
cross the compound,
open the gate,
through the gate,
close the gate
(for fear of goats among the cabbages),
descend three hundred and
eighty five steps,
touch the derrick,
turn,
climb,
count the steps,
your heart a storm,
count the steps,
open the gate,
through the gate,
close the gate
(for fear of goats among the cabbages),
cross the compound,
count the steps,
your heart a storm,
touch the lantern.
Press stop.
Breathe.
ii
Cuan na mBád
clear water, swaying kelp, moon jellyfish
lure of silken goat hair

The Fastnet Rock Goes Travelling

for Dick O'Driscoll, last keeper on the Fastnet

She is An Charraig Aonair,
the Solitary One,
but her lovers are keepers.

They talk for her to the men on The Bull,
send flashes of Morse around the Mizen,
bounce light off low-lying cloud.

On the first day of May
she visits her herd:
The Bull, The Cow, The Calf, The Heifer:

booleys them out to the summer pasture,
west of Dursey Island.
She sets forth at dawn, a queen of the sea,

trailing her skirts of lacy waves,
seals in attendance, bow-riding dolphins,
the granite-cut lighthouse her elegant prow.

The men on watch see wonders:
mirages, shimmering,
tricks of the light.

The sleeping keepers dream:
they are herders, driving lowing cattle
between Bealtaine fires.

The Ninth Wave

I turned my back on women's storms.
A lighthouse man on a northern isle,
the ninth wave held me in her arms.

I walked away from my mother's scorn,
the risk of a wife, the dream of a child.
I chose a life without women's storms.

Each grey seal had her name, her charm,
the sea and seals a wordless choir.
The ninth wave crooned me in her arms.

I gave my brother the keys to the farm,
to mind our women, our land, our kine.
I left him to battle with female storms.

I longed for days of rules and norms,
a monk's pure life my holy grail.
The ninth wave blessed me in her arms.

The first wave struck with a fist of thorns.
On a night of wind and winter hail,
a shattered light, a killing storm,
the ninth wave buried me in her arms.

TRISH BENNETT

The Soul's Veneer *In Memory of Dermot Healy (1947-2014)*

The Mother and I went home that night
filled with the glow of the fierce moon,
theres less of a grip — slow down —
by the wood,
the leaves have started to fall, Mam said,
out of the trees, a fox leapt
onto my road
I thought it a dream,
I know it true,
herself gave out
that's not a ferret,
that's a mad looking fox
he's meant to be red
— not white like a ghost
last night on
a different road.
He jumped out again
wore a moon coat dappled with oak,
those feral eyes

Peter Fallon spoke, of how
he polished and published your work
it takes generations to domesticate the fox
but you, will always be safe, he said

I saw
— your life, in a parade of snaps
in a place where I worked in another time
when I wrote words of a different type. Now
the workshop is clean
as if polished white — reborn
and me — standing there, in fear of rebirth
— you, framed at the spot
where the sander stood, a machine
that transformed the rough wood
to paper thin sheets of polished veneer;
I smelt wood shavings, falling like leaves,
into a mound where your feet would be, if you
leapt from sepia, into my path
— daring me.



Dermot Healy

Photographer:
Noel Kilgallon

Note: This poem is a memoir of events that occurred on the weekend of the 'Fierce Moon' Festival in 2017 (in memory of Dermot Healy) at the Glens Centre in Manorhamilton. I saw the fox as described in the poem and thought no more of it until I came across this photo of Dermot (by Noel Kilgallon) hanging on the wall of 'The Leitrim Sculpture Centre'. The Sculpture Centre was once the site of Merenda, a veneer edging manufacturer, where I worked a lifetime ago as a Quality Engineer. The urge was always there to write, but I wasn't brave enough then. The leaves have started to fall now, I have to get on with it. The poem is meant to be read vertically and horizontally.

The Soul's Veneer was 'Commended' in the **Headstuff 'Surprise Encounters'** Poetry Competition by Judges Colm Keegan & Erin Fornoff in 2018. **Twitter:** @baabennett **Facebook:** trishbennettwriter Blog: <https://trishbennettblog.wordpress.com>

The Sharp Knife

The brown handle had faded
so that marks of hands
shone in the wood like fading stars.
The steel blade glistened
an early morning mist over the fields,
as your small hands carefully cut the white soda bread,
and a rare treat on the kitchen table,
the shivering slices of cheese.

You laid lino too with the same knife,
cutting and fitting with an alchemist's precision
on the uneven cement kitchen floor.
The remnant of red carpet that covered the stairs,
and cradled our bare feet,
you cut into place with patience and prayers.
The Sunday roast, I can taste it still, pink juices running wildly,
as your knife generously cut.
And that night your voice thrilling and strange,
anointing the house with 'She moves through the fair',
and the knife on the top shelf resting, and something in us being awakened.

You made our coats, our First Communion dresses,
bending to the gentle weary hum of the sewing machine
I see you still.
Or awakening in the night,
hearing your hushed breath,
whisper a prayer over us.
In the morning our gleaming shoes laid out,
new soles carefully cut into place,
not a mark of the knife visible.
Everyone came to borrow it,
ours was the only sharp knife on the street.

You made clothes for neighbours too.
A mother's shabby coat meticulously transformed
Into a child's coat, the knife snipping away the buttons,
and finally revealing the inside out,
pure and perfect as a peacock's plumage,
a godsend for Sunday Mass.
A wedding hat, its lace veil transforming a threadbare life,
shone radiant under the wings of your hands,
or the small child swaddled in smocked dress,
stepping with wonder into the world.

Sometimes they couldn't pay, but you never once complained
'every hair on their head is counted' you would say.
You cut away our fear, whittled our grief, mended our hearts,
implanted patience, poured in truth, made us brand new.
You are gone now and we cannot find the sharp knife.
But its sheen is here somewhere inside us.

(In memoriam, Kitty Dunphy)

The Toolmaker

It was the tools brought you to mind
on a damp day in Castlebar.
Seeking shelter in a pound shop,
I find them arrayed in rows of gleaming chrome
and you cutting through memory.

The tool room was your chapel.
There you cut and moulded steel
the mutant shapes transformed
under your steady hands,
the noise blasting your inner ear,
the flashing lights exploding
against your retina.
There was no other way to earn your living.

They lie now subdued, some encased
in pigskin bags,
their sharp points excavating memory,
and I see you running through the meadow field,
or going obediently to school on dark Winter mornings,
your wellington boots skimming the puddles.

Your first dance, your first love,
I was there unknown to you.
I rummage in memory and twenty years on
you shuffle towards me, clutching the wall.

I linger by the gleaming objects
unable to name them.
Reaching out I touch them reverently
their cold surfaces landsliding in me.

(In memoriam Martin McGillen)

KEVIN PATRICK

A Love for Every Season

It's not the years that matter; it's the moments in our lives
away from all the chatter, where Love in layers thrives.
For Love itself's not measured in weeks or months or years
but in small moments treasured in shared laughter and shared tears.

For wives and husbands truly know that loving is an art
that yearly grows and reaches those who stay to play their part
in married life, where married bliss, can buckle under strain
yet coming through the fires of life is stronger yet again.

For early Love; sighs and desires, gives way to something more,
the fruits of which are even now complaining that they're 'bored'
but they mature, away they go, as once again you're two
as older eyes, see other signs that Love's again renewed.

For soon enough, Grandchildren come and all at once you're busy
with voices small and wonders large, your house is all a tizzy
and full of fun and laughter like the time when THEY were small
but now you've time, for joy to find - you enjoy it even more.

And once again, unspoken then, you meet each other eyes
and know full well, that time did share a secret with the wives
and husbands too, who have come through, the decades,
years and seasons
that Love is not, in years gone by, but in each act of breathing.

For respiration freely draws, on Love that is returned
by breathing out to call her name, as she calls yours in turn
like oxygen, to flame again, to brightly burn with reason
a Love so true, entwined in two. A Love for every season.

Red & Gold

Sunny September slides into my life
as returned scholars scowl at August died
I shiver at my memory of strife
when life was measured in the school bell chimes.
That rang for me and all my unripe youth
so giddy in our lives at what we'd do
yet still recall how we were so uncouth
as Halloween and Bonfires blazed anew.
So little did I hope or look to know
my life would lead me to a life with you
for hearts untested, by Love yet to grow
are hearts wide open welcoming and true.
As leaves turn red and gold and fall apart
I'm glad I have a home within your heart.

EILO MOLLOY

Let us Pray

When we were young you taught us to pray:
To ask The God to: *save us from*
Sin, Shame, Scandal, Accidents or A Sudden Death.

We prayed. The God said nothing.
When your day came
The God saw there was no sin, no shame,
No scandal, no accident, The God ensured
There would be no Sudden Death in store for you!

You lay in your hospital bed for months
With a stoic type of dignity and a humour
That carried an unspoken resignation
For whatever might lie ahead for you.

The tumours were primary - they warranted removal.
Even that radical act did not remove the confusion of your brain.
When we'd visit you'd light-up like the proverbial Christmas-Tree,
You were joyed to see us. You laughed and chatted, praised the hotel
And the woman who ran it - *just like clock-work.*
Once upon an afternoon not knowing of my tedious journey
My shattered wind-screen you noticed how tired I looked;
You advised me to rest ... I'd
Feel refreshed for cocktails at seven! As if ...

October came. Mornings turned crisp and bright -
The best time to begin a journey - your mantra!
Your death when it came was early morning-ed. Mild-mannered.
A simple gasp, a surrender to the pillow and you were gone.

We were not there but the nurse who was told us
It was an easy death. Peace-full. Beauty-full.

TREVOR CONWAY

April

February crawls.
March stands up.
April moves at a jog.

I hardly remember the whole white breath of winter,
Waking each day as vigorous as a river.
There's always been a sadness in my mother,
This time of year,
Days like these
Seen through wistful eyes.
I never realised why
Till now:

It was a day like this
Pearse died.
I've seen his face in pictures,
The uneven sweep of his curls,
The charming grin
Of a nine-year-old boy.

The football rolled
Across the road.
He followed.

Mum became the youngest child.

She never let us play out front,
Said it was for the flowers.
But I knew what blooms she sought to protect.
By curling balls and bending legs on sunny days,
We brothers fought and loved.
Flat balls still litter the edge,
Orange bladders like open wounds.

Pearse would be a man now,
Too old for games,
His curls withered,
Chin stubbled,
Driving to Ballyshannon.

Mum sometimes kicks the ball.
She smiles, though her chin hangs low.
When I kick the ball in April,
It goes faster than any car.

In memory of Pearse Devins (1958-1967)

COLM FLYNN

The Narrow Road to Aughavas

There was the enjoyability of joining
A pair of friends in a Carrigallen bar
And a fundamental feeling of purloining
Time from the Grim Reaper who desires to mar.
The music emanated from the room
With its comprehensive display of photographs
And in defiance of impending doom
We had a superabundance of hearty laughs.
There was a spooky drive on a narrow road
Eventuating in the townland of Aughavas
And it was phantasmagoric the way it flowed
With its median of viridescent grass.
A super supper of ambrosial lamb
Was consumed without a solitary qualm.

The Emergence of the Moon

It's not uncustomary to have waited
In Blake's of the Hollow for a wonderful friend
And it's so long since a sonneteer has dated
There is a feeling of going round the bend.
A busload of Americans arrive
In order to have a solitary drink
And there's a versifier who used to jive
With enthusiasm to the music of Twink.
The buddy of forty-seven years appears
As a shoulder to cry on if there is a need
And what's the point of escathological fears
If the Deity answers when we intercede?
There's no better way to spend an afternoon
Than drinking till the emergence of the moon.

At the Christening of Janine

it is exhilarating to be present
At the christening of Janine in Aughavas
And if the morning's weather was unpleasant
The rest of the day is going to be class.
Fr Declan Shannon is officiating
At the ceremony with considerable elan
And an a-la-carte Roman Catholic is waiting
To see if there's a providential plan.
Janine is blessed with the oil of a catechumen
So she's without the slightest sign of sin
Resulting in the presence of a numen
Since the rite of baptism does what it says on the tin.
It is a marvellous afternoon for Janine
Whose immortal soul is certain to be clean.

Six Windows

Six windows opening out to light
 Each with a wish the world be set to right
 First, that the drab monologue of power
 Be broken under the campanile tower
 Second, that the votive bird of history
 Come back again to amaze us with his mystery
 Third, that the rhetoric of propagation
 Begin with faith to do without a nation
 Fourth, that the instance of the academy
 Be honoured in a flowering knowledge tree
 Fifth, that the crowd chanting at the gate
 Be admitted when they doff their hate
 Six, that your picture hangs in the Scholars' Gallery
 Providing that the future pay your salary.

Poet's note: *I was the first person from my school, Stanhope Street convent to go to any university — I learned later than John McGahern's mother had attended Trinity College in the 'twenties. In the sixties while there I did feel like a bird alone. So when John McGahern graced Trinity's well-known portals in the 'eighties, having been appointed Writer in Residence, it seemed as if the aspirations of the people of Ireland for education had found their realisation. He is our best prose writer since Joyce, and still unsurpassed. He kindly brought me to tea.*

Woman Writer

If interviewed on the subject of the sonnet
 What man has brought me endless cups of tea?
 They'll say I've got a Queen Bee in my bonnet
 The male groupies will not type my poems for me.

What golden mother lives without inspiration?
 What sister can be truly herself, and tackle
 The canon in the patriarchal cold, the purgation
 Of miles of libraries with the truth a hackle?

The worst thing is that there's no male muse -
 I don't feel the marginalisation or the neglect
 Quite as much as the possibility I might lose
 The reader in the absence of his call-collect -

And I must be very careful with my man -
 I lose a husband if I kiss a fan.

This poem was published when I edited the Rathmines Writers anthology Extended Wings, in 1994. Mary Guckian was one of the poets in the group and I admired her greatly for her authentic voice and memories of Leitrim, where I had visited often as a child in the 1950s. I visited my Gallogly cousins in Drumrane over many summers and loved the customs and the hard work involved on the farm, which Mary has written about so eloquently. The Galloglys were descended from two soldiers who deserted from Humberts army in 1798. When they marched through Leitrim they threw their muskets into the river Bonnet. Perhaps they were peace loving individuals. They then settled in Drumrane and in the 1922 census it shows five households. The story is told in Liam Kelly's "A Flame Now Quenched", which is a history of the 1798 rebellion. My mother was Nora Gallogly from Drumrane and we had a cousin Felix Gallogly who was informed on a visit to Lourdes that the name Felix was French. There are still Galloglys living in Drumrane, although we lost Vincent last year, and James a few years ago. The name, of course, means foreign soldier. They were always encouraging me - my mother would quote Shakespeare as she did the housework and made bread and boxty. However, even though my aunt Teresa Rowley published a volume of poetry in New Jersey, women writers were not very much discussed or reviewed at the time.

This poem is a humorous take on the idea at the time. It was published in my later collection In Memory of Her in 2008

Election Fever

I was going on for ninety when the general election came,
 And I struggled to the polling station, rheumatic, stiff, half-lame.
 'Twas my democratic duty to get out and do my stuff,
 Having listened now for months on end to the politicians' guff.
 A Taoiseach's own solicitor had voted twice, they said,
 And all said that "the other crowd" were votin' for the dead.
 They had bussed them from the mad house, from the graves and old folks' home,
 And impersonated emigrants gone to Sydney, Boston, Rome.
 So returning officers wrote to polling clerks at every station,
 That if some strangers came to vote "Look for identification".

Well, I felt I didn't need this for I'd voted all my life
 At the same auld polling station so I went there with the wife.
 The polling clerk was always my auld neighbour, Matt Mc Stay,
 A petty clerk from the council staff, earnin' some extra pay.
 So why should I bring passport, driving licence or pension book
 To prove that I was who I was and not some dead man's spook?
 We toddled to the polling booth; it took us half an hour,
 For we wouldn't go in a party car and be linked with any shower.
 "How are you, Matt?" we said and he said, coldly, "How are you?"
 "But, officially, I don't know you. I've my duty for to do."
 "Have you some legal document to prove that you are you?"
 "If you've no identification I cannot let you through."
 Sez I, "You must be senile, Matt, if you don't know my name.
 Remember how I save your skin the day we played Drumlane.
 And when you were in court for poachin' salmon at Ballisadare,
 I swore that you played cards all night with me in Ballinaglare.
 Matt mumbled, "Rules is rules. I must apply the regulations,
 And I can't let you through to vote without identification".
 I was gobsmacked. I was livid and I didn't see the need,
 So I told him where he came from and the sins of all his breed.
 I stomped back home to get some bill, temper at fever pitch,
 Some stags in Carrick' saw my face and jumped over Lowe's ditch.

I was back there in an hour with a bag of bills and papers.
 I'd put manners on that upstart with his "duty" and his capers.
 I dumped out my electric bills and photographs I'd found,
 And it wasn't long 'till a crowd of curious neighbours gathered round.
 "There's a photo of yourself", I said, "naked from head to tail.
 We were mindin' you for six months when your mother was in jail.
 "And there's me changin' your nappie when yer father was out drinkin',
 There's you in the clothes we bought for you when yer own wee rags were stinkin'.
 There's yer First Communion photo and me givin' ye a pound,
 And there's me givin' ye a fiver when Confirmation came round."
 "There's you aged twelve in the photo when yer ma and da got wed.
 You'll remember gettin' drunk that day for that night you wet the bed."
 I couldn't stop. The crowd around were laughin' at Mc Stay,
 And Matt was sweatin' like a pig and prayin' I'd go away.
 "There's your votin' paper", he shouted, but I said, "I have lots more."
 "I've had enough", he roared and quickly shoved me through the door.
 I voted. Then I told that mutt just what he'd put me through.
 I said, "Next time you'll know me, sir, but I will not know you."

O'Rourke and O'Reilly

It is an uncriticizable afternoon
 As the month of September is coming to a close
 And is it a possibility to spoon-
 Feed everyone so nobody has lows?
 The Leitrim Mountains undulate until
 They peter out at the intercounty border
 And it would be wonderful if troubles were nil
 Resulting in unmitigated order.
 The river's meandering at Gulladoo
 Where the territory of O'Rourke came to an end
 And reasons for discontentedness are few
 When Breffni House contains a faithful friend.
 While standing where O'Reilly had his castle
 The thoughts are of a life devoid of hassle.

The Flypast of The Robin

The rumble of a transatlantic jet
 Is penetrating the cerulean dome
 And periods of great contentment whet
 Our appetite for the everlasting home.
 The kaleidoscope of colours fascinates
 A superannuated pedagogue
 And when we're presented with the pearly gates
 There will be a dissipation of the fog.
 The flypast of the robin is a boon
 For anybody who is feeling depressed
 And a versifier is going to commune
 With a steadfast friend in Leitrim to the west.
 It is a sunny morning at Hallowe'en
 When there is splendour in the autumn scene.

The Last Waterfall

Individualistic crows are crossing the sky
 With their scrutiny concentrated on the ground
 And is it any wonder there's a guy
 As worried-looking as a basset-hound?
 The matutinal stillness penetrates
 A person who is a dweller in the clouds
 And when we are accepting of our fates
 It doesn't matter if we're disliked by crowds.
 The saffron colour of the common beech
 Has a solitudinarian in thrall
 And will there be a paradise we reach
 Like a salmon leaping up the last waterfall?
 Life on the planet is an aperitif
 For what is coming after all the grief.