





## Samhradh

They came down from the mountains  
To salute tradition  
Music from ancestors  
Pipes, horn and fiddle  
Dancing arm to shoulder  
Hands crossed and tightly held.

They came down from the mountains  
Old men  
On chairs dancing  
Clasping son's hands  
Affirmation  
Blackened sardines and wine  
A lost key  
Together

*Bernadette Donohoe*

## Curlews at Cartron

The curlews are staying up late  
Out on the bay,  
Where the departing tides  
Have left their gifts  
Of ooze and refuse,  
Mud reek,  
Bladderwrack and ruin.

Their calls are coils  
Their cries whorls  
Spirals of lonesomeness.

Their voices own  
The still September night.

A quarter moon is a listening ear  
Leaning in to catch the gist;  
Venus blinks to ponder  
Curlicues, arabesques.

*Seán Hickey*

## The Bedroom Upstairs

Just to let you know,  
that as per tradition, frosts visit the cottage  
every new year to clear away the winter bugs  
and keep the place in order.

They thaw and freeze with muscular constriction  
until all the bugs are dead on the ground and the air,  
free of sickness.

As always, a key is kept under the mat and by the back door  
near stone steps down to the garden, you'll come across the flock  
of sheep-hardy snowdrops droving across this cold young year  
fearless of the frost. But pay them no mind.

With a shepherds' staff in each hand, they'll stoop past you  
on their Turas way with faces, grave as the black faced ram  
and fixed to the ground as donkeys looking into the ditch.

Shawls of heavy ice will hang from their shoulders  
like wicker creels of eelish wrack, collected from the sea pink  
gums of a long-receded shore and strapped to their pioneering  
backs, as they walk the long acre of frost-bitten grasses

for the cosy shelter of the crippled orchard with its grove  
of bearded apple trees that wait still near the mossy gable  
and the lights now not lit, in her bedroom upstairs.

*Cróna Gallagher*

## The Iron Cottage

*for Frances*

The April gust turns my new umbrella inside  
out and another squall forces us,  
two pilgrims from afar and I the local guide,  
to brave the briar barricade, escape the storm  
into this family reliquary  
to find unforeseen sanctuary, dry, even warm,  
the corrugated iron and seasoned timber still  
effective, though the cottage shows  
the signs of slow surrender to the inevitable,  
floorboards rotting, the roof sheets peeling,  
the sky peeping through iron gaps,  
and, like unhappy memories, erratic ceiling  
boards hang loose. In a place apart, we pause  
our hurly-burly, we cousins  
from opposite ends of earth, stand in sudden awe  
at the very spot where our mothers were born,  
where our grandmother's fever,  
her racking blood-flecked cough, gave warning.  
Taken to the sanatorium, then back again  
she was waked in this room, maybe  
lying in that corner before her final parting.  
We take in the stove's outline at the dead centre,  
the bare hearth, recall a time when  
this was their cosiest, warmest, safest shelter.  
We touch the walls, check views from windows –  
dim hills, whins and cut-away bog –  
take away with us priceless videos and photos,  
then scramble out into warm, erratic sunshine,  
through briars that will soon re-seal  
the place, as it resumes its secret, slow decline  
while we, gone far away, lightened, face the dark  
at the ends of the explorations  
which began here, in this desolate, proud landmark.

*Michael Farry*

## The Amusements

Eve works at Redemption. It's where they put the new girls, where  
customers come to cash in their tokens for prizes: cuddly toys and  
key chains, fridge magnets, jumbo bags of squishy marshmallow  
sweets. It's also the place for Lost Children. Eve is not allowed to  
touch the Lost Children. She has to ask their names and be  
reassuring but she must not lay a hand on them, even if they throw  
themselves on the ground and pound it with their fists. She has to  
make an announcement to ask the relatives of Hannah or Abigail or  
Gabriel to come to Redemption to reclaim their child. She has to  
smile a lot and act like she's enjoying her work. It's better than being  
on the Orbiter where Joy works. Joy has her own packet of vomit  
powder that she has to scatter on the ground to absorb the sick, and  
her own mop for other accidents.

All the cute boys are on Relief. They're trained on all the rides so if  
it gets busy, or if one of the regulars can't make a shift, a Relief boy  
takes over. Eve reckons she's in with a shot with the ginger-haired,  
freckled guy. He's smiled her way a couple of times on his way to the  
Turtles. She reckons Hope has her eye on him too. Hope is one of  
the Café girls. She has a face on her that says, 'I'm better than this'.  
Hope and Joy are close. If Eve does well, she could be moved to  
Horses, or the Photo Booth or The Slip. It's something to strive for.  
Nobody wants to be stuck always working at Redemption.

*Bernie McGill*

## The Light From Here

*After Dermot Healy*

Tonight, up here – because the light's stayed longer –  
we fly kites. They weave and waltz  
and orbit. Tiny diamond trails shadow dance  
each jewel – the same as moons. We feel the pull  
between stone walls inside the fields  
on still grass. Stars slide out  
unnoticed, out of the blue so dark  
it's settled – the sky's always been like this.

Of course, I'm left to reel them in – the kites.  
Slowly. One by one. To make sure  
they're not tangled. In the clear it's me  
and just the stars. I see things.  
Draw lines out there of old shapes.  
Trace names into the nothing  
scattered across night's acres – remains that shone  
and died, unconcerned, leaving space

for unseen worlds to track tomorrow's suns.  
Years – millions of years from now –  
maybe someone (or thing) up there  
might in a moment  
treading water on a dark rock  
gaze out to their alien sky alone and – unknown  
to them – catch the light that slipped through here  
tonight, out of our fading star.

*Patrick Stevin*

## Ouroboros

Beneath the flinty chop of Top Lake lies a giant,  
A Wild Goose battle savvy from The Seven  
Years War put him down. I swim there

in my neoprene suit, turn summersaults  
in his brain cavity, snake eye-sockets,  
in one out the other, do slow laps to infinity.

Surface by *Lám na Héilte* where Cuchulainn's  
hound chased a deer out of time to other time  
they swim, hound on deer's tail – deer on hound's.

Crawl Castle Lake, past the mildewed mausoleum  
Margaret lies in a glazed sleep as Henry winds  
a timeless gold time-piece. Slipstream now

to The Pool where the whooper swan  
howls out winter and grey heron draws  
enraptured trout to the beat of her stillness.

There the progenitors of my clan, blessed by  
eternal fishing, cast ideal flies in perfected arcs  
to the mouths of willing salmon.

*Eileen P. Keane*

## Welcome

*the island speaks to refugees*

I open up my craggy arms, my cliffs,  
this shift of whirling gulls,  
stretch my beaches wide,  
reach out my hands  
made of coral, stone and sand,  
scatter islands like roses  
or breadcrumbs, to show you  
where to land

and when you're close enough  
I'll lift up the rough cloth  
of my hedges, fields and loughs,  
wrap its patchwork cloak around you,  
gather the lush green folds  
and rolls of sequin blues  
to make an earth cocoon  
for you to grow in

because when you're rested  
and ready to stir  
it will be my pleasure  
to watch your wings unfold,  
unfurl in my cloud-thick hair,  
sprout your new roots feet deep  
into my lungs and feed me  
your fresh air.

*Jessamine O'Connor*

## Out of Season

This frayed end of year  
I feed on summer;  
sea-green, graced  
like crepe de chine  
gathering pleats of sun  
and sand-eels silvering  
the corners of sight,  
the sluice of sand,  
loll of a lone jellyfish.

So far now from brine,  
from my body, slick,  
flicking a performance  
of pure pleasure.

We're out of season  
so, I skirt your edges, stamp  
my plodding prints and watch.  
A cormorant springs up, all sleek  
plumage and nonchalance.

I'm jacketed, buffeted,  
hands in my pockets  
finger stones, sea-glass  
and tiny nuggets of amethyst  
sucked clean from rock.

It's winter.  
These appeasements I must take  
from the tongue of the tide.

*Denise Nagle*

## Baby hare

His pupils had collected a basket of words given to them by  
neighbours, which his black pen tipped neatly onto a page in 1935.  
Pocharrion, puth dearg, push-a-haw, push-a-han, putch-ar-on.  
Repeated because the source word must have been unfamiliar to  
him, the original Irish chewed up and spat out in varying forms.  
Now, over eighty years later, the root word was unfamiliar to me  
too. With fair but fading book-Irish, I twisted and turned the sounds  
trying to seek out the mother form. Unsuccessful, I turned to one  
better versed in the tongue. He proffered *patachán*, meaning leveret  
or young rabbit. But that didn't quite make sense. Old dictionaries  
were in agreement, but also offered 'plump little creature' and 'weak  
young boy'. At first these seemed more likely, but as the weeks  
passed, leveret took hold. Leveret: a way of creating distance  
between a never-child and the community. A word that diluted a  
father's shame for allowing his newborn to die unbaptised; a word  
that absorbed some of the mother's grief. Less awful to pass a fairy  
fort encircling the bodies of lithe leverets, than a waste field choked  
with dead babies. *Patachán*, a word used in parts of 1930s Louth for  
babies who died before baptismal waters had cleansed their souls.  
These little lost leverets, soaked in original sin, were buried in  
unconsecrated ground, stranded forever in the grey nothingness  
and nowhere of limbo.

*Marion Dowd*

## The Clump

We never thought it a strange word,  
it's what everyone called the constellation  
of sycamores, patterned in a circle, at the end  
of the white path behind our back gate,

an exit that was always closed. We chased down  
the driveway, asteroids orbiting the corner,  
up the steep slope and on to the band of light  
leading to our hideaway of exploration.

Expeditions around the world, easily accomplished  
from one edge of our galaxy to the other; hide and seek  
between leafy branches and behind wide trunks;  
footballs were retrieved by young boys keen

to be supernovae and kick the ball back to their stars.  
We never questioned the wood's origin, or worried  
about its future, as we picked leaves  
for school projects to impress our earthy teachers.

Today's children, schooled in deforestation,  
would relish our tales of hut building and bluebell  
gathering in the forgotten stand of trees  
shining right there at their own back door.

*Jean Tuomey*

## Lipstick

She had been up early to bring in turf to light the fire in the range,  
milk the cows, and feed the hens before she roused the children.  
She urged them to get dressed quickly or they would be late. The  
shoes she'd polished the night before were lined up at the door and  
as they put them on she dug her chipped fingernail into the bottom  
of the lipstick holder and scraped out a tiny bit of pigment to smear  
on her lips before they went to first Mass.

It had come in her trunk from Boston when she came back home  
to marry. The trunk bore the shipping stickers of her voyage to  
Cobh. It contained her finery from her six years in America; taffeta  
dresses in subtle shades of pink and blue that no longer fitted her  
swollen waist and were now flittered by moths; stilettoes that were  
too small now for her bunioned feet; strings of pearls and compacts  
of fusty gone off face powder. These were now the play things of her  
growing family, who loved the clipping sound the heels made on  
the bare cement floor in the kitchen. Anything else of use had long  
since been cut up and painstakingly hand-stitched to make outfits  
for her little girls. She said she didn't care; she had no place to wear  
them anyway. Except the lipstick, she kept that tucked safely in the  
pocket of her sensible Sunday coat.

*Rose Jordan*

## Two Loughs

i.m. Cat McCrory

Introduced for the fifteenth time in ten years  
we shook hands one night outside Voodoo  
or the Duke of York or Katy Daly's  
and since promises tell the future, vowed  
from now on, to know each other by name.  
The glasses of beer wouldn't drink themselves.

At the megalithic tomb at Carrowkeel  
a wrong turn is a shriek of agile sheep  
who scatter and leap the dry stone walls.  
In bed somewhere someone imagines this.

A path more stony pilgrimage than desire:  
horseflies, heather, banks of yellow hair grass;

Lough Gill miles away in the sun  
like a bowl of mercury;

an itinerary of weeping; but you know this—  
wounded with all knowledge as you are now.

Word comes unflatteringly over these hills  
and finds me deer-footed in espadrilles  
and stops me here, above the tessellate fields,  
the islands floating in the lough

named for her who was called bright  
and to whom every harbour was known.

*Stephen Sexton*

## Tableau

It came from Islandeady in a truck, from a carpenter. A novelty to  
the house full of other people's things. Furnished by thrift shops, all  
other belongings came with marks. Desks stamped with trace  
lettering and pooled ink. Coal-bruised rugs and frames with trace  
dampened backs. Sideboards and candle trees with the dust of other  
homes in their grooves. Revenant mirrors and books lined the walls,  
inscribed with messages of 'At Christmas' or 'With love always...'

Room among them was made for the new table's arrival. The floor  
swept, over scores of dancing heels on boards of splintered pine.  
Where a plate chipped, where a leak seethed.

It was a disappointment at first. Oddly high, it made children of  
them both; forbidden elbows and odd stretching. It had to be  
pitched on its side, the rusty saw taken out and its stilts cut down a  
measure. Capsized, they each wrote on its belly the date and  
occasion. A practised signature and a young scrawl. Saw dust settled  
in the skirting, the table was righted and found its place. Marked.  
At home at last, its cut-offs bolstering where the casters of a couch  
had been missing.

*Julianna Holland*

## Breaker's Yard

She knew her mind was scuttled  
when she saw the rats jump ship,  
watched them tumble  
from the counterpane  
in a tangled hiss of brown.

She repeated the old story:  
a ransacked house, the furniture  
upended, tables overturned,  
drawers emptied in a heap  
at the centre of each room.

'We must break this one  
before they come,' she  
whispered,  
'take down the curtains,  
burn all the books. Topple  
walls, fill up the roof with sky.'

We moved her out but  
still she cannot settle,  
like a dog she turns and turns,  
fidgets till she flakes  
like plaster; her words resist

positioning, refract in splinters  
sharp as broken glass,  
barbed as the slivers  
of the mirror she's dashed  
against the nursing home wall.

*Geraldine Mitchell*

## last

After the shave, sits at the kitchen table, hard seat, cold seat, is he  
daft, why not the settee but he might never get out of the settee, sink  
into its foam so deep so wrapping it'll close over his head, but maybe  
wouldn't that be nice anyway sure? Irene's knick-knacks, statues  
with no bloody faces, they'll all go the same way, bucked in the skip  
with all the other rubbish, everybody round here with the same  
bloody stuff, same bloody nonsense, the nesting tables always  
fucking nesting, crispy dried flowers at the window. Last time  
opening the curtains, greasy old touch, orange ripples, and that  
cooker's been there twenty, thirty years, oven and grill filled with  
bills now and all the nonsense coming through the door, Chinese  
menus, blister packs of tablets in the old fruit bowl. Fair's fair, not  
been a bad old house, looking out on the green, hot day smell the  
cut grass, cold day the churned up earth if kids have been kicking.  
Saw them the other day, the kids, scraping the cement out your  
man's wall with sticks but he let them get on with it, nothing to do  
with him, scrape away scrape away, first time those kids clocked him  
wearing his new last coat they shouted stuff, look at that stupid old  
fucking bastard, but wouldn't he have done the same if he had been  
them and seen himself, yes he would, would've shouted you stupid  
old fucking bastard

*Wendy Erskine*

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# The Cormorant

a broadsheet of fiction and poetry



Edel Burke, Anne Walsh Donnelly, Bernadette Donohoe, Marion Dowd, Rory Duffy,  
Wendy Erskine, Michael Farry, Olivia Fitzsimons, Cróna Gallagher, Kevin Gallagher,  
Seán Hickey, Margaret Hoffmann, Julianna Holland, Jo Holmwood, Rose Jordan, John Kavanagh,  
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Gerard Reidy, Stephen Sexton, Patrick Stevin, Jean Tuomey.

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