

Where the hazel falls

AN ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN IRISH VERSE



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"Sinend, daughter of Lodan Lucharglan son of Ler out of Tir Tairngire (Land of Promise, Fairyland), went to Connla's Well, which is under sea, to behold it. That is a well at which are the hazels and inspirations of wisdom, that is, the hazels of the science of poetry, and in the same hour their fruit and their blossom and their foliage break forth, and these fall on the well in the same shower, which raises on the water a royal surge of purple. Then the salmon chew the fruit, and the juice of the nuts is apparent on their purple beffies. And 'Seven Streams of Wisdom' spring forth and turn there again."

*From Whitely Stokes' translation of the Connla legend,
Revue Celtique, xv. 457 (1894)*

Introduction

You might be forgiven for thinking that poetry is a dying art in Ireland, what with the ubiquitous reality television, myriad magazines, game consoles and four-wheel drives to distract us from older cultural activities. You might be forgiven for thinking the art of conversation is dead, traditional music is silenced and the poet, formerly much loved in Ireland, has become mute.

What has surprised me, is not the demise of these great art forms but their strength and endurance against a backdrop of modernity. In the case of poetry, the country, it seems, is overflowing with poets. A short run of Toddy Kennedy's first collection *Introduction* was lapped up like hot cakes, leading to second and third runs of the same which prompted us to consider poetry on a wider scale.

The moment the seed of that idea was planted, no end of poets began to appear out of the woodwork. To my great pleasure and amazement nine poets of merit found their way to my desk without one single notice or advertisement, which for a small and almost unknown publisher is quite incredible.

This collection features poets of greatly varying age and background, with differing styles and interests and that is reflected in their work. What strikes me most about this collection is the connection to this land that is evident as a common thread running through this book.

Perhaps in these times of economic expansion, mass development and cultural change we need to listen to the voice of the poet even more than in former times. In this age of lightning fast communication, how much of it is really saying anything? Amidst the stress and logic of modern life there has to be room for reflection and appreciation of all that is good and bad in life; and I believe that poetry is as relevant to the understanding of the human condition now as it has ever been.

L. Eastwood, Editor

Ann Dalton

Ann Dalton has recently returned to her native Cork, having lived in London for over 10 years. She first started 'exposing' the poetry she had written when she discovered London's poetry performance circuit in the early 1990's. During this period she co-ran a poetry and acoustic music club in North London and, in collaboration with 3 other artists, produced a CD of poetry and music called *Freshtracks*. Her poems have been displayed on London Buses and included in an anthology of poetry by Irish women living in London, published by *Survivors Poetry Press*. She continues to write and is delighted to be part of this new collection.

July Lady

Count the lilac trees in London in July,
In the gardens while you walk by on the street,
While you pass by on the bus
Or on the back of someone's bike.

Count the little girls in lilac dresses in London in July,
In the parks or in the playground
As you pass by in the middle of a crucial decision.
Count the women wearing lilac lipstick in London in July,
On the underground
While you remember that you're not in love
And wonder if you are in fashion,
As you sit there in your blue dress and pink lipstick.

Last Summer you were someone's July lady,
And you can't recall what colour was in fashion,
But who cares when you're in love,
You throw all colours in the face of fashion
And say 'Heh',
'You could never be in love like me!'

*In love, out of fashion,
Out of love, back in fashion,
In fashion, out of love,
Back in love, out of fashion.*

It's July in London
And you're not in love.
Perhaps you should wear lilac lipstick
And count the lilac trees by day
And by night dream of Springtime,
When yellow might be the colour,
But you might be in love and count daffodils
And wear bright orange
Just to be out of fashion.

Sparkle

I have a feeling that I know what you're feeling,
A closed red door
With a sign that says 'no smoking',
A man alone on a naked stage
Makes my heart stop beating
Momentarily
A single chord
Tells me you are leaving.

Writing words without a pen,
Keeps my heart invisible,
From those who rip my belly open,
Only wanting caviar.
While others who are keen observers,
Stand right back and read these eyes
That cry out in the faintest whisper
'I have a feeling...'

Ted Sludds

Ted Sludds is a writer of fiction, non-fiction and poetry. His publication credits include *Books Ireland*, *Start Magazine*, *Reach Journal* and *Poetry Ireland Review*. He is a past winner of the Impressions National Poetry Award and the Clogh Writers' Prize.

Hard Love

I'll quicken my pace just to get clear of it all.

Family stuff was never my type of business
and she knew that from the start.

I'm impatient with a temper - a dangerous combination
when you're surrounded by kids all day and
a wife who can't look at you without disdain.

It's best all round, I've come to convince myself of that,
though I'm the victim in all of this really.

I wanted the terminations and to keep things open
but she wouldn't hear of it, told me it wasn't love
if we could do it with whoever we wanted,
told me with each new arrival they'd
help cement things between us.

"Cement," now there's a word with love in it.

Mangan Still in Dublin

How shapeless it all seems,
caught fighting to make things clear,
to catch the ear of an echo...

Hearer then of just the word,
lost in the chatter of the everyday,
the voiceless listener, quenched by thirst...

Confused and forgotten,
signature of the solitary figure,
his statue in this public garden,
speaking freely at last...

Joseph Dawton

Joseph lives near Bunclody, Co. Wexford; he has a chequered past, having worked in a wide range of jobs from journalist to car park attendant. Joseph has travelled extensively and followed many religions during his life but has found a spiritual path he feels content with in modern-day Druidry.

He has been writing poetry since his teenage years but this is his first collection to be published. His poetry focuses mainly on the natural world, romance and the bizarre workings of human society. Joseph is also author of the spiritual epistle *The Journey*, also published by Electric Publications.

Why?

Do we live to earn
Or do we earn to live?
Why must our days be filled
With concrete, plastic packaging
And oven-ready, frozen meals?
Is there no place to run
From the pearly-white smiles
Of advertising dreamland?
If life must be this grey
Just what is the point?
What is the fucking point?

London

The lazy willows sway in unison
As a warming breeze rushes through the park
While the lunchtime sunbathers lie
In still, brown indolence
And the tourists' cameras click
Towards Horse Guard's Parade.

The Mall, lined with gaudy Americans,
Lush green poplars and flags,
Steams in the blazing heat;
As the taxis and cars squabble like children
For a few feet of tarmac,
Pushing and screaming all the way.

And the pavements of Knightsbridge
Whimper for one moment's mercy
Under the endless weight of rabid shoppers
That stumble about like a herd of cows,
Choked in a lead smoke atmosphere
With hands clutching at their hoards.

In Hyde Park a tramp burns slowly,
Motionless in a drunken stouper,
His dirty skin baked hard
And his sunken eyes, open but surpassing
The panting joggers that pass him by,
Flushed and cloaked in sweat.

Tonight he will sleep alone
In a subway or deserted backstreet.
While society couples dine and dance
Into the early hours,
His scrawny back will grow cold as steel,
His tired blood run cold.

And tomorrow the sun will rise
Over the shining city,
Floating on a seething pool
That bubbles below the surface
And slowly seeps through the glitz
Of good old London Town.

Adam Dunlea

Adam Dunlea grew up just outside Tralee, Co. Kerry and moved to Gorey, Co. Wexford in 1998. Always he has been inspired by the Darker side of Music, Poetry, Stories and Art. His inspiration as a poet comes from Pagan Celtic/Norse Mythology and the sheer Purity of Nature. Adam's poetry is featured on poetry.com.

All his poems reflect in one way or the other the meaning of Love, Sorrow or Hate. All that he seems to believe are intertwined in the concept of the Human/Animal Psyche. "For Life is Death and Death Life, like the absence of a Dream within a Deep slumber."

A Deep Sorrow Floats Upon the Night Wind

A Deep Sorrow Floats Upon the Night Wind's Rage
As the Moon Reveals a Path Beyond the Shadow
Through Scourge and Flame, Blade and Blood
This is Untamed Fury that Burns in the Darkness Bright
There is and will Forever be no Hope to cleanse the Earth of its
Suffering
For The Four Storms of Hate Rage upon this Land
And Seas of Blood will Flow over the Mountains High
And The Forest's Trees will Rot and Crumble
For it is Men that Shall Destroy all that was once Beautiful.

When Shadow Falls

When Dusk has Fallen upon the Earth
The Moon Embraces the Dark in Perpetual Rapture
And All that was Once under the Sun's Glare
Has Fallen into Shadow
From Deep Within the Enchanted Forest,
I hear the Echoes of Trees Whisper upon the Wind
And I see the Flaming Eyes of a Wolf within the Stars,
Upon the River's Reflection.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Poet, and Musician from Dublin Ireland: born 1968, graduated UCD 1989, postgrad COCR 1990. She is Editor/Founding Editor of the Pagan Poetry Pages www.paganpoetrypages.com. Her published works include Bealtine (Jane Raeburn Anthology The Pagan Muse) Irish Cowboys (Prairie Poetry, July 2004) Dowsing (The Digest, The American Society of Dowsters) The Homecoming (Prairie Poetry, June 2006) among others: several pieces including Bealtine have been performed by groups as both theatrical and "ritual" performance.

Cliona by the Shore

I let myself in
with the key of the kings and
wrapped red ribbons
around my poor head.
'I thought you were dead' said
my mother.

I fired up at this and she waved me aside
'I merely remark' was her only reply

I heard on the news that the Temple had fallen.
I am aghast at their simple faith
And men search their words
For slivers of meanings
shards and remnants
of a truth they will hate
'you came home too late', says my mother

The debt I repaid is burning a hole in my pocket
For the cruelty of martyrs is mercy.

The wet grass smelt sweetly
Giving me courage
I willfully left there
and drove to the ocean
but none of the fishermen
put out to sea.
'Are you leaving me?' asks my mother

I smiled in return and released her to fade.
For I am the prophet of beauty decayed.

We dwell by the shore now
And bless the white thimble
The rue grows around us
like weeds on a grave and the favour still warms us
in cottage or cave
'We'll save the world later', my wise mother says.

Night Chorus

Across the last plains
under leaden skies,
the ground peat-brown beneath;
Turf cutters pausing to point
at the summers last black-breasted flight,
across the dark eddies and whirlpools,
the silver line of the river beneath;
Over the wild heathers of the stone hills
from the Cairns of the west
to the graves of the silent east.
A black sunset, the death of a new day remarked.

Shrill and defiant in calling
the passage of the long evening mourned.
The gravel paths of the interlopers,
darkened by the cloud of dark wings,
stirred by the shadow of the future.
The reminder that death precedes life,
The smoke of the fires rising slowly;
the wheel of the wing on the turn.
The veil drawing over the midlands,
the song of the night slowly silenced,
the call of the dusk borne away.

Wil Kinghan

Wil is a Shamanic Practitioner in the native Celtic traditions and has been exploring the Irish and North European mysteries since childhood when, aged 15, he bought a book on Runes.

He has explored many diverse paths of magic and spirituality and is currently working in the mysteries of Merlin and is training as a bard with the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, he is also involved in the development of native men's mysteries and rites of passage.

He believes strongly in nurturing the links between the land, ancestors and people today, and in the creation of new accessible myths to help us reforge the bridge to the world of our allies, the spirits.

His primary creative skill is as an artist and he creates ritual tools in bronze, and paintings and icons of the Celtic deities and spirits. Wil is also a qualified Counsellor and Hypnotherapist, which he feels is an important occupation in today's society given the lack of support available to people in daily life.

Tuán's song to the sons of Nemed

Across the ninth wave
Brave Nemed's fleet
Thirty times thirty pale warriors
To defeat tall Eiru's cliffs.

I, Tuán, in my stony cell
Watch, disinterested...
From my eyes, farseeking,
A new shell.

Brave stag of seven tines
Accomplished war-leader
Of the hooved hosts
In a new shape before hunters.

I will see fair Fotla's history,
Though they see me not.

Sea Spell

She plays catch with Manannan Mac Lír
Old sea god and young sea child
Blond hair like kelp
Wracked upon a roaring sea-horse
That surely bore Oisín to Tír na Óg.

I ply my boat in the shadow of rocks
Beach-combing the detritus of land
Fearing perhaps the careless beauty of my sea-nymph
Exulting in salt air and tidal pool she finds,
A piece of driftwood carved with runes...
To summon again the long ships from the sunken lands.

Toddy Kennedy

Toddy Kennedy began his dying the moment of his birth in 1963. Still alive at time of going to press. He has spent the last 25 years often as a bricklayer, more frequently as an unofficial and unpaid taster of stout. His first book of poetry titled "Introduction", was published by Electric Publications in Oct. 2004. He regards himself as an Arklowman.

A View From Barnisky

An October sky from where mortals lie
 To their eternal peace,
 Now understanding,
That the spark shall never cease.
 Dead! To just the living,
 Endless in their grave,
We know that we are immortal,
 To stand at heavens portal,
For our God will call the chosen
 In their time to gather hay,
 For we shall never
 Know the moment,
We won't see the light of day.

Even Barmen Retire

Like comrades standing
Cannons dry
In congregation gather by
This place of lore
And story told
In credit to your person fold
With fond abandon
Cluster near
To drink a toast to one so dear
When all the world
To patience tries
He shoots the breeze
Who's to wonder why?

Cait Branigan

Cait Branigan is Founder and Editor of Immrana Magazine and a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids. She facilitates the Full Moon Writing Circle, which seeks to enhance creative expression and poetic inspiration. Cait runs a healing practice in Wexford and teaches both in Ireland and abroad.

Epiphany

I saw here and there as she ran,
Holding aloft a blade of grass
Like some Elusinian vision,
That she was free.
Tasting all, experiencing all,
She bellowed her beauty
With full lungs.
She is no shrinking violet
Who shies from her senses.
Her eyes are of Hawk,
Spotting in obscurity
The key to her delight.
She is Sovereign unto
Herself, a blazing light
In the darkness of life's
Great Womb Cauldron.
And I see her, with her blade
Of grass, her epiphany, her
Mystery. I see my child
In full splendour – a child
Of the Great Goddess.

Of the Sorrows

The innocent bliss and glow of blood
In cheek. Dark as the Raven whose
Blood soaks the snow. You are more
Wonderous to me than the grains in the
Basket, for you are the sacred embodiment
Of colour. And I pine for you now.
And I call out your name.
Naoise, Naoise – treading the waves
Away from your death.
Shall I comb out my hair for the
Two unholy rams? I am the All-seeing
Most sacred eye. I have seen my own
Death in the goblet of wine. The heroes
Are spoiled with idolatry. Where have I gone?
I am lost to myself and alone.

Gemma McCabe

Gemma McCabe was born in Dublin but now lives in county Wexford. Gemma is a teacher and a counselor, she also works as a music therapist.

Expression

Harness it. Come One. Come One.

Let's get to it.

It started. It happened.

I saw it all clear and raw.

Me, the evolution.

The dream and the goal.

Blessed by a certain Vision.

Of the desire within.

Untouched by tongue.

And so it shall remain.

Connected

Shippers way and sailors delight
It's something I never thought of
Instantaneous lover's thought
Resides in melody.
It covers my memory.

And simply now
I come undone
Up front and next to none.

Poetic song
Like repeated bird
Awakes in me my love.