

The Yellow Nib

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The Yellow Nib

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[THE YELLOW NIB]

JAMIE MCKENDRICK

FIVE POEMS TRANSLATED FROM VALERIO MAGRELLI

Child Labour

Look at this child
who's learning to read:
she tightens her lips in concentration,
draws forth one word after another,
fishes, and her voice a rod,
eases the line, flexes it and now
lifts these writhing letters
high through the air
so they shine
in the sun of utterance.

[POETRY]

JAMIE MCKENDRICK

The Memorious

Ingenious, my son shuts himself in the shower,
sticks a sheet of paper to the glass, on the outside,
and for an hour, enveloped in steam,
learns by heart the Ugolino canto.

Water and verses stream down; he murmurs on –
it costs me a fortune, but in the end
he emerges, cleansed and fragrant,
overflowing with hendecasyllables.

[THE YELLOW NIB]

JAMIE MCKENDRICK

I brush my teeth in the bathroom.
I have a bathroom.
I have teeth.
I have a daughter who sings
the other side of the tiled wall.
I have a daughter who wants to
and does sing.
Maybe, just maybe, that's enough.

JAMIE MCKENDRICK

Tombeau de Totò

As an old man, Totò became blind.
All that rubber-limbed gallivanting
just to end up in the dark.
A tentative groping,
a zigzag through darkness.
But the opposite is also true.
As a blind man, he became old.
I still remember him, nearby my house,
crossing the street for a funeral,
between two wings of a cheering crowd.
And he was playing along, disjointed, moving jerkily,
without seeing anything – that, I've only just understood!
Blind, old and mechanical,
but wound up by the steel spring of his Neapolitan dialect.

At least until, having lost his sight, he also lost his speech.
In his last films, unable to say his lines,
he had to be dubbed. The story goes
that having gone blind he then went dumb
in the film, while another voice had to stand in
for his own.
Blasphemous Totò-fakery, on the verge of darkness.

His vision extinguished, his speech annulled,
the ragtag body descends into the grave.

[THE YELLOW NIB]

JAMIE MCKENDRICK

Invective Beneath an Etruscan Tomb

Fatal Latin...

Apollinaire

Now they shall all speak the same,
the same language that stole away our own.
They've hunted down our alphabet among the fields
cornering it like a fugitive, a thief,
our father's alphabet.

No-one will understand us, and no-one, not even
one of us, will use the old words again,
crumbling, gap-toothed walls of our fortress.
They've only left us
the tombs, the last stronghold.

And so I speak from here,
a voice imprisoned in the dark
among painted shapes, forever motionless
like the final breath
of our utterance.

[POETRY]

LIZ ROSENBERG

Two Poems

When Winter Comes

When winter comes
And hammers the insects into the ground,
When birds swivel their heads and fly
South to St Augustine, two million
Of our children have no place
To call home. Gone are the golds;
When it's snowing buckets here, in the new
Old country, Ireland, it's raining with conviction
Day after day after day, and blowing ghosts
Off the Antrim shore, where last I walked
Holding hands with my great love.
How large were his hands?
Large enough to touch every part of me,
To melt a season in his palm.
Snow turns into rain; rain into snow.
Last night it blew in wedding veils
Across the black, shining lot.
Beside me, my dog, my daughter curled at a slant,
Where once he lay like a nightlight in the dark.

[THE YELLOW NIB]

LIZ ROSENBERG

Anniversary Poem

So this, my darling, is the very first anniversary poem
That you will not read. You will not stand here,
Leaning over me, one vast hand flat on the desk,
Trying to compose your features into the expression
You believe I'd like best. You won't nod or say awww
And you won't kiss me on the top of my head,
Or walk away and return with a gift wrapped up and taped,
With your beautiful, clear, printed scrawl.
The only voice. The only voice.

ALEX WYLIE

The Age of Austerity

Remember when you played the golden boy?
And suddenly the news is relevant.

This time it's actually goodbye.
She's dropped you: Operation Dumbo Drop,
a parachuted elephant
rescued from the war, killed by friendly fire...

Remember? When you thought you could lever
the Milky Way into position
with your back braced against Hale-Bopp,
immortally clever
strongman and metaphysician?

Now you can't get interviewed, never mind hired.
In the red not the pink.

A fat fiddling statue, if golden you were, that belly-flopped
into the world's
alkaline puddle, all your glistening gold
washed up to wafer-thin paint and alloy.

Don't you ever think,
perhaps you never were the golden boy –
that when everybody feted you,
loved you, in actual fact, they hated you?

ANDRÉ NAFFIS-SAHELY

An Island of Strangers

The rooftop was the place to be. I was fifteen
and in love with ash-cans, pigeon coops,
women hanging their laundry. There was a fifty-
foot portrait of the King – always smiling –

by the sea, overlooking a busy junction;
like an ad for toothpaste, or mouthwash.
At night, the shore on the west side of town
was the quietest, where hotels, Natashas and *haram*

coalesced into parties. Every half-lit room
was a sure sign of orgasms and the passing
of money from stranger to stranger. Anything
interesting and pleasurable was *haram*. I envied

the King, and his sons, all eighteen of them.
The King was virile, a patriarch, Abraham on Viagra;
his people, on the other hand, were on Prozac.
Everywhere the eye looked was money. The nose,

meanwhile, hit only sweat: acrid, pugnacious, pervasive.
Most of the boys I knew sucked Butane, smoked,
saved up for whores, waited for their parole in the summer.
Each back to his own country. Come September

the dissatisfied return; misfit mutts, at home every-
and nowhere. A friend compared cosmopolitanism
to being stuck at summer camp, waiting for parents
who never showed up. In the twentieth year of his smile,

the King finally died. His mausoleum is a meringue: wavy,
white, empty. His sons have gone on squabbling, playing
whose is biggest with bricks; one by one, they die in car crashes.
Days of heatstrokes, kif and bloodthirsty Ferraris.

[POETRY]

REZA GHahremanzadeh

Goldilocks

God's love: too big!
A lover's love: too small!
Self-love: just right!

[THE YELLOW NIB]

FRANCIS O'HARE

Two Poems

Meeting the Goddess

These winter mornings, driving through
the darkness down back country roads
I find myself attentive to
the moon, in all her moods and modes.

One minute she is Cleopatra,
solemn in her tragic mask,
the next, a 1920's flapper;
Louise Brooks, dark eyes askance.

And then she disappears from sight
as trees or clouds obscure my vision,
like some Victorian Woman in White,
elusive as an apparition

until I turn a sudden corner
and drive into another world
where everything is monochrome – a
spectral landscape, strange and cold,

uncanny as surrealist paintings
composed of clocks and marble nudes,
or Neolithic stone-engravings
full of indecipherable runes,

where only moon-law operates;
ancient, distant, pitiless...
a realm that both exhilarates
and terrifies; home of the goddess.

FRANCIS O'HARE

Someday...

...you will leave your dank adolescence
in that small grey town full of nothing but rain
on a glorious morning at the start of October,
full of sunlight and birdsong, to step onto a train
glinting out of the distance, gleaming into the future,

where a city awaits like a signed early volume
of Yeats or Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Hart Crane,
or a rare L.P., *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*,
uncertain of everything except your desire
to walk strange streets in search of experience,

that dazzling instant of nuclear renaissance
young Icarus felt in the sun's silent gaze
you dreamed of whilst lost in a Joycean fire.
There will be times, of course, when you stare
at the mildewed walls of your lonely room

but there'll come an epiphany, later that autumn,
over coffee in a second-hand bookshop,
when the world outside is all incandescence
with wonder and magic, leaf-shadowed by gloom,
like the faded front cover of your sacred album,

when you will encounter one whose wild essence,
like autumn sunshine, as she slowly looks up
to answer your question, will suddenly blaze
out of her dark eyes and you will remember,
during rainfall, this moment, on other dank days.

[THE YELLOW NIB]

DAVID HALE

Pike-floats

Lines on the loss of a brother, Grasmere, 1805.

It wasn't just the dreams, or the box of floats
dislodged from a parlour shelf that drew him

out of the grief-darkened house and down
to the water's edge, to recall there the sense

of fraternal silence: days spent moving across
the lake, bamboo in hand – unencumbered

by uncertainty beyond the shape of words –
the knowledge that nothing in a world so

careless of lives, would ever be as simple
as such joyful subsistence – searching for

the shadow of something more substantial
through that cool June – or burn as fiercely

as the stunted hawthorn, by which they set
pike-floats, before returning through the dusk.

VALUR GUNNARSSON

The Surprise

I was surprised to find someone
Without a sense of humour
I thought such a person could only
Exist in my prejudices
Against my own people

I was surprised to find someone
Without any poetry
To her the mountains were
Just mountains
And the elves probably real
Still she bought a lot of books
To give away as presents

And yet she liked the stars
Not as windows of the angels
Or a view of eternity
But rather because they gave light
To better see me

Who needs humour or poetry
When someone likes you
For you?

[THE YELLOW NIB]

RICHARD LAMBERT

Three Poems

Her Hands

Everything is finished in the pristine house
and nothing matters any more but this –

the scrubbed bath, the bowl
filled with bleach, bare silence and

all the windows open for the wind's speech.

RICHARD LAMBERT

The Outskirts

At some point the city gives up and goes away
though you couldn't say precisely where or why.
Perhaps it's all the bridge over the motorway
though it's not really, it's more in the mood
of buildings half-hidden behind trees, disused,
and sheets of newspaper cartwheeling to mishap
in the long grass by second-hand dealerships
at this border where people are only moving through
never from or to. Unless they live here, of course,
which in a way we do, although there isn't a human
soul in sight, only, in this field a piebald horse,
tied by a wet rope to the heart of dawn and
all the way through to night and night's damp,
illuminated faintly, last time you looked, by a streetlamp.

[THE YELLOW NIB]

RICHARD LAMBERT

Summer Moon

The moon lives at the end of the fields,
curled in a hollow, covered with leaves
and swollen from summer. Careful, or she'll startle
awake. I swear I hear her breathe.

[POETRY]

CHRIS PREDDLE

Two Poems

And had come Jacqueline

And had come Jacqueline to Rake Lane
for violets. Viola Proserpina,
come down to us, they called, as we repine
for all that's other. We've still that formal ache, who've lain
in leafmould. Sweet colleen
come inland, such anxious aspirant humours
in the leafbed inhume us.
Viola, avail us. More than you are, to us incline.

And had come Jacqueline to Rake Lane
for cowslips. We do not sleep. We duck our calix-
heads in saps and dugouts, not the likes
of who may lean
Elysian on their elbow. Tuber and root and corm
we are. Who led us here, mislaid us.
Cowslip lady ours,
let us become what you to us became.

To Ed Reiss, June 2012

Detached as you are, your sort, from trafficke,
come down from the leaky reservoir on Kiln Bent Road
where J N Bentley
constructs an overflow with a constant flow of trucks,

come down the bent or hill
to Netherley Clough and its fluent beck. On the bank we'll discuss
the discursive discourse, debouch and cursus and excursus
of late Geoffrey Hill.

Everything flows. I cry, Such havocke!
But Heraclitus in tears, you tell me, would never revoke
a molecule. As the becks go seaward

Hill at the top of his bent makes form
from formless. Now then, let us on a bentgrass bench or form
make an ever ever-itself from confluent words.

[POETRY]

KATRINA NAOMI

Two Poems

The Romantic

After my father left, I grew
a battery of hearts,
felt each of them beat,
like doves in a casket

before their release. You might imagine
the sheen of the good heart.
I rarely picture the razor wire heart,
its zest and sting.

If I say my hearts have never been
broken, or fissured, or ruptured,
that's not entirely true.
Still, I want to keep my faults intact.

And the barbs of the heart that loved my father jut
as if from a pike's lower lip,
the war of rust leaking;
a child's heart,
no larger than a grenade.

[THE YELLOW NIB]

KATRINA NAOMI

What Nan Said

On my first trip home from college:
You've got ideas above your station.

As if I should've stayed below stairs,
never ventured out of our sitcom.

I'd probably been showing off –
talking politics in French.

Nan didn't get to study:
Some of us had to work for a living.

I can translate all of this
now I've travelled above ground.

If Nan were here, I'd try to tell her
I'm still the same girl, la même.

[POETRY]

JOHN SEWELL

Six Poems

Tongues Beck

When she saw me – after I saw her –
even from that distance I registered the shock,
the fear she felt. She was coming down
as I was going up, and she changed course slightly
to put more width between us.
I wanted to call out as we passed:
You must have been up early. But I didn't,
just smiled. She too said nothing,
just glanced and hurried on.

That romantic notion of meeting 'the one'
in a place like this: two strangers
on a mountain, finding themselves
alone and together,
and not daring to believe it.
How ludicrous that seemed, when *this*
was the reality. It would be rape
not love she thought about, not my hand
in hers, but violent abuse.

And no good saying to her:
I'm only here to love the mountain.
Would that sound anything but crazy?
Man's motivation is to conquer not create –
is what she'd think, and all the rest
is self-delusion – on my part or on hers.
And yet she's here, searching out if not
the same thing, something similar
which nowhere else can offer.

I turned round once but she was quickly gone,
and if she also turned to look
it was only my indifferent back she saw,
with some relief perhaps, since it was so early,
so exposed, with no one else in sight,
and no one there when the summit was reached
and I, like her, stood there alone
with no one to say the words to,
when finally the words burst free.

JOHN SEWELL

Intimacy

I can't do this, you said, gripping the sides
of the bath. Then suddenly: Oh, it's coming!
First drops and flickers, a sprinkling warmth
whose touch stirs and thickens me. More flow,
more reach, an affusion now
anointing belly, chest almost the cup
of my neck, before falling shy again.

I can't believe I've done that, you said.
Nor the delight it gave, the unexpected
sense of giving and admitting of the other.
All we go on to be from here – is here,
was how you kissed me afterwards, how I
kissed you: two thirstlings at the font
of springs and rivers, soaked and newly blessed.

JOHN SEWELL

Molly

Now she's blind and mews more urgently
for food, or the back door to be opened
(to huddle in catmint at the wall-foot),
or just to know my whereabouts and if I'll sit
on the couch awhile, set her purring on my knee,

I look forward as mums do with newborns,
to her four hours of solid sleep, bear the same resignation
when, disoriented, thinking I've shifted from its usual place
her litter tray, she pocks a spot on the bathroom floor –
its varnished cork closest to the cupboard's painted screed –

to leave a shaming smell and two thin stools,
small and light as a baby's wrist
in the loo roll I flush them with, the surface
Detolled, wet-wiped clean enough to kiss
were it a baby's talcumed bottom

to nuzzle with a fervour that still three decades on,
feels all-consuming, unfulfilled.

[POETRY]

JOHN SEWELL

Ballerina Warbler

Identified by its effortless
upward spring, the way it tiptoes air
over the open cistern
in the corner of the field
taking invisible flies.

Its pirouetting done, another
flits in from the wings, same
centre-stage routine, then more – a corps
of matching talents – five or six at least
without my glasses,

without my field guide
unforgettable.

JOHN SEWELL

A Provocation to Venerly by Water Cum Jolly

Down-siftings of May where water crowfoot
sheets the leafy, slowworm river, and ramsons'
starry linen overspreads the wood.

It's gone beyond our choosing love or friendship,
our kisses, those long purples in the grass, see to that.
Is it lunch on the spread cloth on the ground
or something more? Either course has its regrets.
But all there is, is what your eyes are saying.

The Wye's blue shimmer tattoo
on the cliff's white shoulder; white
ribboning dark water under a wind-ruffled swan;
all the multitudinous shiftings of the world
come to rest on our skins' white stillness and pause.
Kiss again. Again, again.

JOHN SEWELL

Bluebirds at Thanksgiving

When Billy Collins asked where birds go to die in Arizona,
it deserved a better answer than he gave:
they don't die at dusk on the mesa
under a flock of wheeling stars; you could say
they don't die at all.

They don't die in the same way they don't get sick or depressed,
but are always their same, flighty selves,
always and ever alive,
ever the world's aliveness.
Such that if they died we'd feel it too,

The way our lives diminish each autumn when,
parenting over, the summer influx flown, they fall silent.
Like the swallows, who – if you recall –
were thought to plunge into river muds
to sleep out the winter.

In other words, they never left the river they belonged to.
How else to account for their instant return
to the blue gusts of April?
Today, having unpicked that mystery, we say:
the river they belonged to never leaves them.

Which is only the same thing a different way round.
And what I mean about not dying.
Yesterday, I saw my first pair of bluebirds –
Western Bluebirds, the field guide assured me –
on grazing at the edge of town.

For a full fifteen minutes I mimicked a gate post
to watch them assuming the cloudless blue sky
as darkened in water, then darkened again,
for the back of their head, nape and tail.
Watched that lasery light at-hover on grass stems.

Flitting from fencepost and willow (its stems
adding rouge to the flush of their breasts,
as seeding chimesa ermines their flanks),
doing little, saying less,
but vibrant in their neat gavotte, their roundelay.

What they made of the world came with me
when my fifteen static minutes came alive.
Such that later, when the day was over,
it wasn't all impending darkness in a tide,
but a blue-green iridescence

lodged between the cottonwoods, that wouldn't budge
or lose its sheen when night pressed in,
but stayed on through sleep to the light beyond:
a single feather planted in the ground
coming blue again by morning.

Poets on Anthologies

We asked a number of poets to write about the anthologies that first caught their imagination or influenced them at a later stage.

MICHAEL LONGLEY

b. 1939

First published by Longmans, Green in 1949, *A Pageant of English Verse* was edited by E. W. Parker, M.C., his military honour proudly printed on the title page as though to insist that it is perfectly normal and manly to enjoy poetry. A chunky brick of a book, with strong green boards and red lettering, thick pages that lay open easily, clear print, and a sense of abundance that was in no way suffocating, this was the first anthology that tempted me to explore poetry. It became a part of everyday life: the only poetry book in our household, a bright light among the Mathematics and Science, Latin and Greek and French primers. Crushed in my rucksack with other schoolbooks and muddy rugby gear, the words of the great poets survived being lugged around Inst's scattered playing fields.

In Fourth or Fifth Form a charming teacher from England, Keith Stevens, chatted about James Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. He grew flushed with excitement when he steered his class of eager adolescents away from the curriculum and exposed us to Modern Poetry in the shape of Eliot's 'The Hollow Men', unlikely stowaways in *A Pageant of English Verse*. I for one was exhilarated by the strange sounds and rhythms: 'For thine is / Life is / For thine is'. I deluded myself that I was being tested at the cutting edge of Modernism. I now consider 'The Hollow Men' pretentious tosh. God knows how many dreadful undergraduate imitations it has engendered.

O the vagaries of fashion! By 1946 Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, who are nowadays thought of as great war poets, were still playing second fiddle to Rupert Brooke ('... oh! yet / Stands the Church clock at ten to three? / And is there honey still for tea?'); Isaac Rosenberg and Ivor Gurney are not represented at all. The most up-to-date section of

the anthology is crowded with poets nobody reads any more: Edward Shanks, Martyn Skinner, Victoria Sackville-West, Osbert Sitwell and Alex Comfort, who much later found fame and fortune as the author of *The Joy of Sex*, a well-illustrated international best-seller. Parker gives Comfort three pages, Louis MacNeice only half a page.

But Rupert Brooke's 'The Soldier' is a fine poem – and here it is in the same company as Lawrence's 'Snake', Edward Thomas's 'If I should ever by Chance', Yeats's 'Aedh wishes for the Cloths of Heaven', and unexpected poems by de la Mare and Masefield. (Oddly, neither 'The Listeners' nor 'Cargoes' gets in, two miracle poems). Nowhere else would I have discovered John Drinkwater's lovely 'Moonlit Apples' ('. . . and the moon again / Dapples the apples with deep-sea light'), or the extraordinary closing lines of 'The Goat Paths' by James Stephens ('I would think / Until I found / Something / I can never find, / Something / Lying / On the ground / In the bottom / Of my mind'). Enjoying these poems and learning some of them by heart partly prepared me, as a sixth-former, for *A Pageant's* breathtaking hinterland: the Romantics, the Augustans, the Metaphysicals. And thanks to this tough little anthology I am still making discoveries about the tug of war between sincerity and artifice in 'Lycidas', or the understated brilliance of Wordsworth's blank verse, or Keats's supernatural ear.

FRANK ORMSBY

b. 1947

When I was nine or ten, I collected the green centrefold pages of the magazine *Ireland's Own* to form a compendium of songs and poems, mainly Irish and patriotic. These were the models for some of my earliest poems. However, the first wide-ranging anthology to bring poetry into the house was *The Ambleside Book of Verse*, edited by E. W. Parker, first published in 1949 and used widely in schools.

How even to describe the immediate and lasting influence of that small, 256-page dark red volume with the embossed lamp, lampshade and (I take it) pool of light in the bottom right-hand corner of the cover. On a functional level it introduced me to numerous poets and poems, including nine of Irish extraction – Goldsmith, Yeats and

Charles Wolfe, of course; a number who were in vogue at the time (Padraic Colum, James Stephens), and, more surprisingly, AE, Sir Shane Leslie, Moira O'Neill and Seamus O'Sullivan. On a formal level, *The Ambleside Book* reinforced my sense of the quatrain, the rhyming couplet, various figurative devices and blank verse, though these terms were probably not yet part of my vocabulary. The possibilities of rhythm were excitingly evident in poems such as 'Tarantella' (Belloc), 'The Raven' (Poe) and 'The Destruction of Sennacherib' (Byron).

Then there were the exhilarating images that passed rapidly into what John Hewitt might call my imaginative freehold and have stayed there ever since: 'I saw the new moon yestreen / Wi' the auld moon in her arm' ('Sir Patrick Spens'); 'And his horse in the silence champ't the grasses / Of the forest's ferny floor' ('The Listeners' by Walter de la Mare); 'And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying / And the flung spray and blown spume, and the seagulls crying' ('Sea Fever' by John Masefield); 'each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor' ('The Raven' by Edgar Allen Poe). People who encountered and memorised such lines over fifty years ago will still quote them readily and with pleasure.

This is also true of what might be called the well-made lyric e.g. 'The Oxen' by Thomas Hardy; 'The Donkey' by G.K. Chesterton; 'Daffodils' by William Wordsworth, with the voice of the cuckoo 'Breaking the silence of the seas / Among the farthest Hebrides'. None of these poems had swum into my ken until the advent of *The Ambleside Book of Verse*. Contemporary poets are often praised for their skill with this type of poem (and taken to task for its limitations) and one wonders about the (admittedly unquantifiable) influence of the schools anthologies.

Speaking of influence, let us praise Ernest Walter Parker, whoever he was. In addition to the *Ambleside* volume, he edited about a dozen textbook anthologies, two of which – *A Pageant of English Verse* and *A Galaxy of Poems Old and New* – figure in this symposium. It's no exaggeration to say that his text books helped shape the poetic sensibilities of thousands of schoolchildren in Britain and Northern Ireland throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

CIARAN CARSON

b. 1948

On my desk is *A Galaxy of Poems Old and New*, 'chosen by E. W. Parker, M. C.', third impression, published by Longmans in 1963: not my original, long lost Senior Certificate English anthology, but a copy I bought on the internet a few years ago, wanting to recreate the lasting impression it made on me when I first opened it in September 1964. It's a lovely looking book, the text interspersed with 'decorations by Edward Nolan', little woodcuts and typographical ornaments alternating from page to page in terracotta and olive green. Every time I open this book I feel a twinge of pleasure.

The selection is a generous historical sweep, some three hundred pages ranging from John Lydgate and Thomas Wyatt through to Phoebe Hesketh and Christopher Middleton. All the big names are there: Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Keats, Tennyson, Hardy. Perhaps most memorably for me, this book was an introduction to the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Robert Frost and Dylan Thomas. What great poems these are: 'God's Grandeur', 'As Kingfishers Catch Fire', 'Pied Beauty', 'Spring', 'The Starlight Night'; 'After Apple-Picking', 'The Tuft of Flowers', 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening'; 'And Death Shall Have No Dominion', and 'Fern Hill'. Naming the poems brings back that marvellous experience of entering a new verbal landscape, one echoed by Nolan's woodcuts, which, now that I look at them again, seem influenced by the visionary landscapes of Samuel Palmer, haunting places of memory and imagination.

No doubt I am not alone among my generation in wondering what kind of writer, if any, I might have become without the unconscious prompting of those early readings. I suspect the poems are always there in everything I write, whether I know it or not. Moreover, half a century later, *A Galaxy of Poems Old and New* retains the power to surprise and illuminate. Scanning the pages of its firmament now, I come across poems I have no memory of, which I might well never have read until now, such as Robert Greene's charming 'The Description of Geoffrey Chaucer', which begins, 'His stature was not very tall, / Lean

he was, his legs were small' and ends ten lines later with:

His shoes were cornèd, broad before,
His inkhorn at his side he wore,
And in his hand he bore a book.
Thus did this ancient poet look.

So it behoves me now to sit down and read this present book from cover to cover. As a great, older musician once said to me years ago regarding the 'new wave' of Irish musicians (myself perhaps included), 'What's new to them boys is old to us'. So I need to go back to these old poems again, discovering the new in them. Not for nothing is this anthology called *A Galaxy of Poems Old and New*.

GERALD DAWE
b. 1952

The 1940s hardback copy of my grandmother's *The Albatross Book of Living Verse: English and American Poetry from the Thirteenth Century to the Present Day*, edited by Louis Untermeyer, which I have here, she has signed E. Chartres. Somewhat more formally, several years after her death in 1960, it is signed by me and dated November 1968, followed, later again, in September 1972 by my mother's neat, handwritten *N. Dawe*. A little mini family history is inscribed in this book. The anthology was used by my grandmother as a teaching 'text' for her voice production and elocution students who arrived into her Belfast home on Monday evenings and Wednesday afternoons. Judging from the diary I have for 1951, they came from all arts and parts of the city and further afield. It was quite a popular activity back then. As a young boy I would hear the students reciting poems under her instruction and memorising lines as recitation, as well as singing lyrics and songs to her piano accompaniment. That's when I discovered poetry first without really knowing it was *poetry*. Similarly, when I went to school, literally around the corner, our Miss Grey had us sing 'Rabbie' Burns songs and on occasion 'act out' the lines in melodramatic gestures. That was in the late 1950s and early '60s.

Ethel Chartres had died in 1960 and another of her anthologies that I

have to hand – taken possession of years later – is signed again in her name, dated 6th February 1950 and undersigned by me as an almost 10 year-old on 7th March 1962. This anthology was edited by Harold Downs; it had a foreword by (and portrait of) Sybil Thorndike, OBE and an introduction by the wonderfully named Eric Cundell, Hon, R.A.M., F.G.S.M., Principal. The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, in a ‘Theatre and Stage Series’, is clearly designed for what Thorndike calls ‘specialised study in order to gain facility and felicity in the use of the spoken word on stage, from platform, during professional activities, or in social circles’; which probably meant to eradicate any regional accent in the interest of Received English and the social mobility of post WW2 Britain.

So poetry from the beginning was about the spoken word, something practiced and performed: something to qualify ‘in’ but also to entertain. When I started to read these books and discovered Wordsworth’s ‘The Solitary Reaper’ and ‘To a Skylark’, Shelley’s ‘To Night’ and ‘Ozymandias’, Rosetti’s ‘Remember’ (all of which bore tell-tale crosses and dashes representing stresses in my grandmother’s hand for recital), along with early ballads like ‘Fair Margaret and Sweet William’ – the poetry became silent though I could still hear it being spoken.

That’s how my interest in the written word was sparked, leafing through my grandmother’s anthologies that had been taken from her front room and stashed, along with sheet music, photographs, programmes of concerts, newspaper cuttings, ration books and the like, in a corner of the bedroom at the top of the house in Skegoneil Avenue in north Belfast where we lived in the 1950s and early 1960s.

JEAN BLEAKNEY

b. 1956

The densely packed *Albatross Book of Verse* (ed. Louis Untermeyer) was my ‘O’ Level text. Of the prescribed poets, I engaged most with Hopkins partly because he was a favourite poet of my older sister. She’d picked up *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* from a book

stall on a Glasgow street. A special relationship was cemented when he came up on the exam paper. The opening lines of ‘Pied Beauty’ and ‘Spring’ have never left me. Ditto ‘Ozymandias’, and bits of Tennyson and Yeats. Least favourite was Edith Sitwell, the only woman we studied.

I also have fond memories of an American school anthology *Off To Arcady: Adventures in Poetry* (ed. Max J Herzberg) with its Victory Book Campaign stamp: a Gift from the People of the United States subsequently gifted to my mother’s house (along with apple butter and peanut butter) by G.I.s billeted at Ashbrooke pre-D-Day. Sections entitled ‘The Sound of Dirges’ and ‘The Play of Humor and Fancy with a Garland of Epigrams’ were most visited. Committed to memory are ‘You beat your pate, and fancy wit will come: / Knock as you please, there’s nobody at home’ (Pope), plus ‘The Antiseptic Baby and the Prophylactic Pup’ (opening line of Arthur Guiterman’s ‘Strictly Germ-Proof’). I did attempt a school-based parody of Gray’s ‘Elegy’, but never finished it.

MOYRA DONALDSON
b. 1956

I still have my copy of *The Albatross Book of Verse*, slightly battered from having been shoved in and out of school bags over the years, my name inscribed inside in copperplate writing. It has the look and feel of a personal bible or a hymnal, the right size to carry comfortably in the hand, the textured cover with gold lettering and the pages, thin as parchment. I enjoyed poetry, the sound and feel of words on the tongue, but when we were given *The Albatross Book of Verse* for O Level English, I discovered a greater treasure trove than I had previously known existed.

English and American Poetry From the Thirteenth Century to the Present Day, Edited by Louis Untermeyer: the 1960 edition. In the Preface, Mr Untermeyer quotes Robert Frost, ‘The right reader of a good poem can tell the moment it strikes him that he has taken an immortal wound – that he will never get over it’.

He also admits that the collection is not for advanced scholars, that

it is ‘... primarily for those who lack intimacy with the great body of English and American poetry...’. Through this book of verse I learned that this was an intimacy I craved, as time after time I found myself struck and wounded by good poems. I discovered the comforts, challenges and pleasures of poetry in a way that suited my angsty teenage spirit. I discovered John Donne, Andrew Marvell, Edith Sitwell, Emily Dickinson, T. S. Eliot, Walt Whitman and a host of others. Some I learned by heart, some I copied painstakingly into a notebook, making my own first editorial decisions, though of course I didn’t think of it like that at the time. They were just poems that I especially loved. This was also the time when I knew for sure that I too wanted to be a writer.

PETER McDONALD
b.1962

The poetry anthology that made most difference to me is something of an out-of-the-way volume, I suppose: in full, it is *The Faber Book of Modern Verse edited by Michael Roberts: Third Edition Revised, and with a new supplement of poems chosen by Donald Hall* (1965). Out of the way, but now (I’m relieved to report) safely back on my desk, having wandered somewhere far behind one of many rows of books. Thinking I could lay my hands on it easily, I had to conduct a long search in the end, one that became increasingly anxious the more the book failed to turn up. A superstitious anxiety, for it’s one of those books which I feel I need to have around in order to keep doing what I do.

It has to be this third edition. The original book was published in 1936, and that is preserved (with some alterations) within the later book. Although Michael Roberts (an interesting and very intelligent writer whose early death probably stunted his reputation) did a good job with the first edition, the material there was already familiar enough to me when I first got hold of the book: it begins with Hopkins and Yeats, and proceeds with good selections from modernists and others, ending with the 1930s generation. None of this was news to me, though, when

I was given the book in 1977 or so (by my school – and I wonder might it still be school property? At any rate, there on the first page is my miniscule ‘D.P. McDonald L6 LitA’ in timid, blue biro). For me the real news was Donald Hall’s 120-odd pages of ‘Supplement’ to the original.

Of course, this kind of thing shouldn’t work at all, and conventional wisdom says that you can’t just bolt on an extra section to bring a good anthology somehow up to date. And yet, here, it does work; at least, it worked for me. Hall’s short selections from W.C. Williams, Edwin Muir, Robert Lowell, Thom Gunn, Keith Douglas, James Wright and others hit me like a whirlwind. And there are individual poems, too, which I met here first and still keep as touchstones of what modern poetry is or can be: MacDiarmid’s ‘The Watergaw’, W.S. Graham’s ‘Listen. Put on morning’, and – most of all maybe – James Dickey’s ‘The Heaven of Animals’. There was plenty to dismay as well as amaze; and after a while, I wasn’t at all sure I could tell the dismay and the amazement apart. That’s how things should be, I think. Some poems, too, went deeper with me eventually, once I was writing poetry of my own, than I had any way of knowing at the time: the pitch and precision of Geoffrey Hill’s ‘Of Commerce and Society’ sequence or, at the other end of the spectrum, the breathtaking clarity of plain speech in F.T. Prince’s ‘The Wind in the tree’ (‘She has decided she no longer loves me. / There is nothing to be done’). For good or ill – for good *and* ill, most likely – I was set on my way.

MARTIN MOONEY

b. 1964

There it is: Larkin’s ‘Toads’, illuminated by my blue Staedtler ballpoint commentary, in my old copy of Michael and Peter Benton’s *Touchstones 5*. Opinionated little squirt – ‘he moves from self-parody to self-knowledge’ indeed!

Looking over the anthology’s contents now, I’m impressed with its provocative scope: this was before *The Rattle Bag*, but it has something of Heaney’s and Hughes’s omnivorous greed and bounteous

generosity. And I do remember finding models for all kinds of teenage experimentation and mimicry here, from glum Larkin to laconic Holub and a bunch of mid-century poets whose names – MacLeish, Kirkup, Ross, Stallworthy – are maybe less well remembered than they might be.

Introducing an updated *Touchstones Now*, the editors insist that we shouldn't 'allow the boundaries of poetry in school to be set solely by that which is officially examined'. But just as influential as the inclusiveness of *Touchstones* was the canon-proving and curriculum-defining ambitions of RP Hewett's *A Choice of Poets*, an 'anthology of poets from Wordsworth to the present day' which, back then, brought us to R.S. Thomas. Hewett warns us that 'some of these poems [may] set you off on writing your own verse', and that if this happens, we are not to be 'afraid of imitations or echoes: they are, after all, the way in which you first learned to speak'. I rolled up my sleeves and got to work imitating Lawrence, Hopkins and Eliot – but not Keats, or Tennyson, or Graves, who all still leave me cold.

What *A Choice of Poets* did with its sturdy blocks of well-made poems was to recast the making of verse into an activity shaped by and adding to something bigger than the individual instance of poetry. (I still have an ancient copy of *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, picked up in my mid-teens, which told me much the same thing). I don't know how healthy that insight was, but it still seems inescapably true.

DAVID WHEATLEY
b. 1970

If I have always thought of myself as a French poet trapped in the body of an English-speaker, the book I have to thank for this is Anthony Hartley's *Penguin Book of French Verse: The Twentieth Century*. Rimbaud, Baudelaire and Mallarmé I knew about already, as a teenager, but here in one fetchingly purple and pocket-sized volume were Apollinaire, Aragon, Bonnefoy, Breton, Cadou, Char, Claudel, Desnos, Du Bouchet, Dupin, and Éluard. And that's just the first five

letters of the alphabet. And such generous helpings too: thirty-five pages of Saint-John Perse, including all seventeen of his *Éloges*. I never got much further than France and Italy as an inter-railer, but this was the Alexander the Great model of poetic globe-trotting: ‘Now leave me, I am going alone: (...) I have a union with the blue-veined stones: and you leave me likewise, seated, in the friendship of my knees’. There is hardly a writer in this book who has not been a poetic lust-object: Henri Michaux with his savage, druggy *dérèglement de tous les sens*; those flinty twin peaks of mystical Catholic France, Charles Péguy and Paul Claudel; Paul Valéry and the sun-drenched splendours of *Le cimetière marin*; Francis Ponge, mystic materialist and philosopher-poet laureate of everyday life; René Char and his hypnotic Hellenism via Friedrich Hölderlin; Paul Éluard and his full-on Gallic sexy gusto; Raymond Queneau, Oulipian and casual knocker-off of *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (*A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*); Pierre Reverdy, Ashbery before he was Ashbery, and beloved of Frank O’Hara too (‘my heart is in my / pocket, it is *Poems* by Pierre Reverdy’). I could go on.

A. E. Stallings has written of ‘a sort of Dunning-Kruger effect’ among translators, ‘such that the less they know about the original, the less concerned they are about not knowing it’. When I look at my row of Penguin European anthologies from this time, alongside my no less valuable Penguin Modern Poets three-in-one jobs, I see a radical alternative to the contemporary model in which foreign poetry qualifies for translation in so far as it can be hitched to the name of a famous Anglophone (and non-original-language-speaking) writer. These books were an exemplary public service, lovingly assembled by editor-translators who wished to serve the original texts, on their own terms and for their own sake. Hartley’s anthology was first published in 1959, and contains one still-living writer, Yves Bonnefoy, which is wonderful to think of. I mention its date by way of context for the book’s darker side: it contains one solitary woman, Catherine Pozzi (‘an economy of sensual passion rare in women poets’). Wonderful though it is, perhaps it should inspire us – like Rimbaud’s *Génie* – to love it and leave it. Here though was a book that offered then, and still offers (in Saint-John Perse’s words) ‘*Autorité sur tous les signes de la terre*’, ‘Authority over all the omens of the earth’.

SINÉAD MORRISSEY

b. 1972

When I was fourteen, I started visiting a small independent bookshop on Rosemary Street. I'd sneak in to look at the black and white poster of Sylvia Plath and every poetry title in the shop. I'd no idea what I was looking for, which was part of the surreptitious joy of it. Because I got more poetry for my pocket money, and because I still had everything to discover, I was drawn to anthologies. In 1988, for Christmas, I bought myself Donald Hall's *Contemporary American Poets* which, unlike most of my purchases from those years, is still on my shelves.

It's not the best book I can remember reading as a teenager. There was a bigger, softer, bolder, fatter American anthology which I read to pieces and then lost. But it's still a book I spent hours over – the sense of a new continent's work, radically different from the poetry I was reading in school, enticingly before me. Looking through it now, the poems that made the biggest impact on my teenage self are highly predictable. Hospitals, suicide, and poems about poetry, or other poets, featured heavily: Etheridge Knight's 'Hard Rock Returns to Prison from the Hospital for the Criminal Insane'; Anne Sexton's 'Wanting to Die'; Frank O'Hara's 'Why I am not a Painter'; Allen Ginsberg's 'A Supermarket in California'. I thought the Plath selection paltry (*three poems?*) but at least they were three good ones (all of them are about death), unlike the eccentric *Contemporary Poetry* in the yellow cover on my father's bookshelves which ignored everything in *Ariel* and posited 'Frog Autumn' and 'Metaphors' instead as somehow representative.

Inevitably, I missed a lot. The chronic underrepresentation of women; the pompous introduction (I never read introductions to anything). I also missed a lot of brilliant, quieter work (I was studying Frost for 'O' level English and remained singularly unimpressed). Now I would read the same anthology for quite different writers – Anthony Hecht, James Merrill. And while Donald Hall ignores Elizabeth Bishop and Marianne Moore completely, he unforgivably includes Donald Hall, though at the time, I don't think I even noticed.

LEONTIA FLYNN

b. 1974

Work. Death. Love. Childhood. Religious Experience. Town and Country. Family. Satire. War. Animals. Philip Larkin and John Donne. Elizabeth Dickinson. Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney.

All edited by Michael and Peter Benton, the various *Touchstones* anthologies, my poetry textbook for English Literature from first to fifth year, have got mixed up in my mind. Which contained Hughes's 'Full Moon and Little Freda', whose brief, up-close images and audible sound-effects, seemed like a kind of magic? Which contained 'The Refugee' by R.S. Thomas? The anthologies were thematic but cast a wide historical net, and I thought the poetic order they represented was fixed and inevitable. Our energetic English teacher worked us back from Heaney's 'Mid-Term Break' to Donne's 'Death be Not Proud', and showed us how the latter was vital and accessible. The only woman I remember besides Dickinson ('Because I could not Stop for Death') is Maya Angelou.

I buy them all again on Amazon. They are so familiar that when I open them I half expect to find my name and class at the front. *Touchstones Five* provokes the strongest jolts of recognition and surprise though. I'm surprised at what I have forgotten (Liz Lochhead, Fleur Adcock, Fiona Pitt-Kethley, and three poems by Elizabeth Jennings), as well as what I remember. Re-reading 'The Picnic' by John Logan or 'Death on a Live Wire' by Michael Baldwin for the first time in 23 years, I find myself anticipating certain images four or five lines before I come to them. Both poets have slipped into obscurity, or the obscurity of my mind at least, along with other male figures here. I have not consciously thought of these poems once in two decades, and yet I *know* them.

In other ways, the intervening years have rendered *Touchstones* oddly innocent, almost alien. As a 'final word' in number 4's introduction, the editors advise 'poems cannot be written on demand and we would emphasise that in using the Creative Writing sections teachers should encourage discussion of our suggestions and not present them to the

class as “exercises” which must be completed’. As part of this gentle, less programmatic agenda, in notes for the ever-reliable ‘People’ section of the book, they suggest the following class discussion: ‘[two poems] are written from the point of view of a son? What do you really feel and think about your parents?’. What would I have done without this? Without the poems I read, loved, and actually remembered? Sometimes, when I imagine Eng Lit becoming optional or transformed to a springboard for the reverse engineering work of creative writing, I wonder how far fewer fifteen year olds, casually reading a poem, will suddenly, amazingly, find it telling them things they didn’t know they knew – and which stay with them, consciously or unconsciously, for the rest of their lives?

MIRIAM GAMBLE

b. 1980

I’m not a huge fan of anthologies, partly because I don’t tend to get much from reading a bio note and a handful of poems which, as often as not, won’t and can’t hope to distil a writer’s essence, and partly because the felt obligation to sample everything in this piecemeal fashion kills my desire to even start (I avoid newspapers for similar reasons; I’m no good at choosing from a spectrum of options, and I don’t want to read hundreds of snippets of this and that. These are both personal failings). The exception might be introductory volumes of new poets: I have *Voice Recognition* to thank for my first encounter with the poems of Ailbhe Darcy, for example. But, generally, it doesn’t suit me to jump about between differing aesthetics, barely getting a handle on any of them.

Thus the only anthology the spine of which I’ve ever wrecked is Paul Muldoon’s *Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, which I read as an undergraduate and which introduced me to several poets who have mattered greatly to me since. Muldoon’s book is infamous for its exclusivity – ten poets, only one of whom is female and only three of whom are from the South; no introduction (instead, the MacNeice / Higgins ‘Prologue’), and thus no justification for the narrow beam. If

he'd called it *Ten (Mostly Northern) Irish (Mostly Male) Poets, Writing in English*, it might have gone down better, and perhaps he should have. I'm not here to applaud him for being exclusive – at least, not on elitist or linguistic or regional or gender-based grounds. But had this book contained the work of forty poets, would I have got anything out of it at that stage in my life (when I knew little of Irish poetry)? Probably not; probably I would have bought it and shelved it, like I do most other anthologies. I wouldn't have understood where any of the work was coming from, or even been able to determine who, out of the dinning crowd, I might have sympathy with and want to hark to further. Muldoon gave me 'The Great Hunger' in its entirety – almost thirty pages handed over to one poem. If he'd operated along more standard lines, I might have got one section of it, decontextualized and scattered amongst five or six lyrics.

And for that reason I applaud him, with the caveat that giving the book a different name would have been more genteel. His anthology doesn't represent a field, but it is properly representative of individual writers; reading it, the beginner starts to see their worlds unfold. A writer's writing, for me, was then and still is its own best context – not its only context, but its best one. Not many poets got a look-in in *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, but those who did, and first time readers of them, were better served thereby.

ANDREW JAMISON
b. 1986

The beauty of *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* is that it allows us see where poetry has come from, where it's going and how it got here. It offers us a chance to constantly re-evaluate the importance and originality of certain poets. More importantly, however, it gives us the chance to rediscover poets who we may only have encountered because we had to write an essay about them as a first year undergraduate. For many, the book, in itself, is a souvenir of their first encounter with poetry and those heady first readings of poets like John Donne, William Blake, Derek Mahon, T.S. Eliot, Langston

Hughes or W.H. Auden. Some may even find its pages still peppered with their pencilled annotations.

There are certain poets in this anthology who light it up, or, in their own way, come to define it. Their voices seem so distinctive and alive that it seems as if the whole anthology has been founded on their inclusion. To read the date of their work can shock. The originality of their writing makes those who follow appear outdated, and makes those who come before appear as simply lacking any real gift. In an anthology as scholarly, seminal and wide-ranging as *The Norton*, Wallace Stevens is one such poet.

Finding his poems in a contemporary poetry journal today, we would revel in his ingenuity, the freshness of his diction and wonder at the strangeness of his syntax and his lavish lyricism. Reading his poems in the anthology, it's a surprise to see he was, in fact, writing during the 1950s, born five years after Robert Frost and seven years before Siegfried Sassoon. He is one poet *The Norton* makes us reconsider, in terms of their contribution to the development of the lyric.

The Norton calls itself 'the classroom standard for the study of poetry' and the danger of such an anthology is that it relegates poets who have not made the list to oblivion. Which poets should we be studying at school or in university? Who is to say? Anthologising poetry is an almost impossible task and these questions will always pose problems for any anthologist, but *The Norton* keeps such a conversation alive. In fact, the dilemma has been summarised by nobody better than Stevens himself when he wrote in 'The Idea of Order at Key West':

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
Words of fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
Words of ourselves and of our origins...

Encryptions

Stephen Enniss, *After the Titanic: A Life of Derek Mahon*,
Gill & Macmillan, £26.99

In his essay ‘Yeats and the Lights of Dublin’ Derek Mahon writes: ‘The mask compels reductive curiosity: what was Yeats “really” like? Who was the bundle of incoherence that sat down to breakfast?’ Stephen Enniss’s *Life of Derek Mahon* has been accused (not least by Mahon himself) of being reductively concerned with incoherence. Yet no biographer of a living person can give free rein to ‘curiosity’, let alone pluck out the heart of mysteries. It’s a plus that most of their subject’s lovers, friends and acquaintances are likely to be still around; but not all will agree to an interview (key names are absent from Enniss’s Acknowledgments); not all interviewees will know or tell all; fear of libel actions hovers over the whole enterprise. As for biographies of writers: the literary folk interviewed or quoted compound the perceptual jigsaw, being apt to have a covert investment in their own image and posterity. For instance, ‘Belfast vs. Dublin’, Eavan Boland’s poem dedicated to Mahon, seems more a clichéd exercise than a revelation of their ‘oppositional relationship’ (Enniss) – or, indeed, of anything. Enniss can be naïve both in taking witness-statements and in taking Mahon at his word. The cherishable quotations from Mahon’s letters remind us that wit is a crucial component of his poetic masks. Returning from Canada in 1967, he wrote: ‘you can expect me ... on the 25th approx, grinning like a fool, a little bit disoriented by crossing the time-zones, scarcely a day older in wisdom, and very slightly drunk ... And if it’s raining when I get to Belfast, so much the better. I’ll go out and suck it off the streets’.

‘Very slightly drunk’: controversy over *After the Titanic* centres on Enniss’s dogged chronicling of Mahon’s alcoholism (he has been sober for twenty years). Having formerly co-operated on ‘our Book’ – as the book itself bears witness – Mahon withdrew his approval as publication loomed. He said that he had expected a critical study, not a biography. Enniss’s ‘Afterword’ contradicts this claim, and interprets it as latterday ‘anxiety’ about self-exposure. This would fit with Mahon’s tendency to revise (vandalise) his poems, as if their original

forms somehow betray him – here he does read himself literally. In the same spirit, Mahon apparently urged Enniss to mention X ‘if at all, as an abstract Muse who just happens to bear her name’. Enniss defends himself by making Mahon’s repudiation part of the story; that is, by linking it with his behaviour during the ‘crises’ to which he ascribes the poet’s inspiration: ‘the origin of Mahon’s art lies in suffering’. Yet, whatever the misunderstanding between biographer and biographee, some reviewers of *After the Titanic* have also found it intrusive. There’s a parallel with the row about Sandrine Brisset’s *Brendan Kennelly: Behind the Smile* (2013). Like Mahon, Kennelly had originally co-operated with an admiring biographer/critic, and this pattern raises broader questions about any artist’s relation to audience: its embrace at once desired and rebuffed, perhaps feared as loss of control:

I built my house
in a forest far
from the venal roar.

Somebody please
beat a path
to my door. (‘Please’)

Who is ‘I’? More than other writers, poets appear to invite intrusion, because the fictive and dramatic character of the lyric ‘I’ is never quite grasped either by confessional scribblers or by theorists who attack a supposed author(ity). That’s why identity politics have been more of a critical disaster for poetry than for fiction. Louis MacNeice says of lyric psychodrama: ‘As far as I can make out, I have many different selves, but I am often, as they say, not myself at all. Maybe it’s just when I am not myself – when I am thrown out of gear by circumstance or emotion – that I feel like writing poetry’. X does indeed turn into ‘an abstract Muse’ amid Mahon’s other dramatis personae; while ‘suffering’, as explored in his poetry, belongs to a multi-faceted soul-landscape. Contrariwise, one alcoholic is much like another. The origin of Mahon’s art lies in art. Or perhaps the origin of his suffering lies in art. Certainly all art is ‘conditioned’, the verb MacNeice prefers to ‘determined’, by experience and history. Yet

if Mahon is ‘Ireland’s laureate of loss’ (Enniss), if his poems frequent (though not exclusively) the desolate, the extreme, the terminal and the apocalyptic, that is partly a function of aesthetic intensity. This high-control, high-maintenance poet never really abandons the 1890s ground where ‘perfection of the work’ remains perpetually bruised by the imperfections of life. *The Yellow Book* (1997) did not come out of the blue.

The anti-globalisation rhetoric in Mahon’s later poetry has a subtler source in his original neo-Symbolist rejection of exteriority. ‘Epitaph for Robert Flaherty’, from *Night-Crossing* (1968), traces a quintessential quest for quintessence:

The relief to be out of the sun –
 To have travelled north once more
 To my islands of dark ore,
 Where winter is so long
 Only a little light
 Gets through, and that perfect.

Now that poets have become so squeaky-clean with creative writing degrees, career-plans and professorships, certain aspects of Mahon’s life may seem more of a ‘curiosity’. Can we accommodate that disturbing Bohemia, less a milieu or decadent decade than a psychology, to which an element of all real poets may secretly belong? ‘Oft in the stilly night I remember our wasted youth’. As *After the Titanic* shows, Mahon has necessarily made his converse accommodations with ‘the venal roar’. But something in their difficulty may illuminate the ‘dark ore’ of poetry.

It’s also easy to over-determine what art owes to culture rather than culture to art. Critics (*mea culpa* too) often allow ‘Ireland’ or ‘Northern Ireland’ to get in the way of poetry. Enniss’s title, taken from Mahon’s poem about Bruce Ismay, dubiously attaches Mahon’s life and work to one powerful doom-laden narrative, while his Preface attaches it to another: ‘Derek Mahon received author’s copies of his first collection of poems, *Night-Crossing*, in September 1968 ... When he returned home to Belfast [after reading at the Cheltenham Festival], he returned to

a community suddenly in crisis'. Ennis then says that his biography's 'starting-point' is 'the correspondence between the personal and the historical' and proposes that Mahon 'does not use personal experience as a metaphor for the present state of Ireland', but the reverse. 'Crisis' is a word less easily transferred between public and private meanings than Ennis thinks. If some poetry from Northern Ireland can be termed 'civil-war poetry', it's a given for every poet that 'the personal and the historical' interpenetrate (rather than 'correspond'). And the nature of this interpenetration depends on artistic disposition as well as on individual and cultural conditioning. The whole intricate zone is remarkable for diverse approaches to 'history', and, as Gail McConnell establishes in her pioneering *Northern Irish Poetry and Theology* (2014), for metaphysical complexity. Notions of 'the Ulster Protestant poet' also tend to be more over-determined than notions of 'the Ulster Catholic poet'. A Protestant ideal-type (rather than mixed cultural and spiritual economy) is still often presumed to exist, and to write poetry as some kind of apostasy from the dour and doomed tribe. While Mahon's self-imagery can admittedly feed this stereotype ('A strange child with a taste for verse'), and explains his totemic adoption by a vaguely nationalist literary constituency, most poets were probably once strange children. The photo of Mahon as Church of Ireland choirboy radiates back into the long association between Anglicanism and the English (and Anglo-Irish) lyric as well as out into the Belfast of his youth. For Ennis, 'guilt', by which he appears rather punitively fascinated, is the term that most centrally connects personal and public crisis in Mahon's work. But guilt, like liturgy, assumes multiple poetic guises, including the metaphysical overlap between Mahon and Beckett. This may indeed have something to do with 'Protestantism', but in no merely local sense.

Criticism of 'Northern Irish poetry' has usually been happier with individual talents than with the traditions constituted or reconstituted by the whole field. Here interpenetration becomes an aesthetic cat's cradle of reciprocity and mutually defined difference. Ennis does not broach this tangle, any more than he emulates Hugh Haughton's close readings in *The Poetry of Derek Mahon* (2007). He outlines Mahon's friendships with the poets of his generation, but does not offer much analysis here either. Nor does he engage with

the various repercussions of Seamus Heaney's global appeal. There is, surely, some inverse (in verse) relation between that and Mahon's interior forest-sanctuary: his refusal to allow his collections to be sent for review. When asked whether he 'felt he was writing in the shadow of Heaney', Paul Muldoon replied: 'No, but some people may be reading in the shadow of Heaney'.

A literary-historical merit of Enniss's book is that it destroys the origin-myth of the Belfast Group – although this may well remain a case of the lie that goes round the world before the truth has got its boots on. As he always tells 'people reading in the shadow of Heaney': Mahon attended the Group just once, and disliked it. Michael Longley attended it often, but was always at artistic odds with Philip Hobsbaum (check out Hobsbaum's own poems to see why). Ennis registers, but again fails to analyse, the 'true' apprenticeships served by Mahon and Longley at Trinity College Dublin, where they overlapped from 1960 to 1963. Their literary milieu pivoted on the magazine *Icarus*; and Alec Reid, the academic who was the magazine's presiding genius, deserves some of the credit monopolised by Hobsbaum. Yet, here and elsewhere, what this biography lacks – perhaps more seriously than discretion – is 'thick description', a deeper hinterland. For instance, Ennis's banal account of Reid as having 'a round face, a warm and friendly demeanour, and an unruly shock of white hair that betrayed something of an undomesticated nature' is neither aware that Reid was albino (with certain tragic consequences), nor alert to the Dublin Bohemia he inhabited and fostered. An anatomy of *Icarus* itself would have been useful too. Similarly, even if rightly demoted, the Belfast Group requires the kind of context that Ennis might have culled from two retrospective symposia in the *Honest Ulsterman*: the late Arthur Terry, his death much mourned in Spain, warrants more than to be glossed 'a Professor of Spanish at Queen's'. Other names drop in and out with little back-story and some errors: e.g., Derek Bailey is a Northern Irish arts film-maker and producer, not the 'jazz-guitarist' presumably got from Google. Ennis's failure to evaluate as well as situate 'who speaks' upsets the book's psychic proportions, its overall sense of its subject. Thus an utterly appalling poem about Mahon's alcoholism, written by Andrew Waterman, is merely called 'a harsh portrait'.

Perhaps ‘thick description’ – also of institutions such as Mahon’s school (RBAI) or the Church of Ireland or Trinity College – awaits the *post mortem* biography hopefully many years ahead. At that point too thick characterisation (God help us all) may also supersede the rather pallid sketches here. Meanwhile competing versions of ‘the Ulster Renaissance’, whether by protagonists or commentators, will run and run. Yet there seems little doubt that *After the Titanic* is a labour of love – for Mahon’s poetry. And perhaps Enniss never set out to do more than use the poetry archive, which he so valuably built up at Emory, to provide a time-line, place-line and other contexts for Mahon’s works. His book will certainly be read for chronology and bibliography, for the drafts of wonderful poems. But archives, with their dependence on what happens to get recorded, are a further over-determinant of literary lives. Mahon ends ‘Remembering the ’90s’ in *The Yellow Book* by envisioning a future where the mask wins out, if as a pyrrhic victory:

The *real* books like vintage wines survive
among the antiquities, each yellowing page
known only to astrologer and mage
where blind librarians study as on a keyboard
gnomic encryptions, secrets of the word,
a lost knowledge ...

EDNA LONGLEY

Revelling In Language

Alan Gillis, *Scapegoat*, Gallery Press, £10.00
Tom French, *Midnightstown*, Gallery Press, £10.00

Alan Gillis's fourth collection, *Scapegoat* begins with a Jeremiad of a poem, 'Zeitgiest', which starts in the liminal squalor of a modern town, in the territory of shops, litter, detritus that will be one of the poles of this amazing collection. The speaker searches for God, perhaps, among "pipes, cartons, slugged condoms" but significantly finds there still a brook and is "Drawn / to its burble and splurge" but the brook simply gushes on, beginning a refrain, "with no smile, no frown, / I call you down, I call you down".

The poems delineate a modern wilderness of the urban where people work, "hemmed in, meshed and lost" in a kind of communal isolation and in which contact with others becomes only, "a vague itch of harassment" and in which the question constantly is "who are you again?" ('The Return').

Over and over, Gillis creates images of a life that is somehow unreal, inauthentic. In 'Instgrammatic' the poet looks at a picture that seems to have changed reality rather than simply recorded it:

the living moment ... caged, held off-stage?

In the wonderful poem 'No. 8', named for the "big post box" bus that is its subject, it seems that, "Everyone looks like / they're in an art installation / where the central concept is / they're completely normal".

Work in these poems sits on the subject's back like Larkin's toad. People move in shoals; women in suburban houses talk dirty to men for money between conversations with their Nan, "Aye, a quickie. Still it's silver in the hand". Men and women fuck in supermarket toilets, "because they've had it up to here", but still there is the thinking individual attempting to record it all. And still there are Spring days when office workers go to lie "buck naked" under trees, when looking at the

sky is like a drug, “just like those old tubed / kaleidoscope toys you put / to your eye and turned”.

The other pole of the book then is nature – still there amidst all the degradation – and memory, and they come together in the astonishing elegy that is ‘The Hourglass’ in which a childhood fishing trip is remembered in language that is as luminous and alive as the bog it describes:

Up before dawn so we can have lines in
the river for sunrise, the blanket
bog’s surface glistens like fish skin
breathing in the moonlight.

In this poem there is the kind of dexterity and wit we expect of Gillis in the sibilant description of a “sudden sheep” like an old woman as it “niddle-noddles its straggly / backside up the hillside”, and the moon too becomes a black-shawled woman at the poem’s end, “Now time has spilled its darkness over you”.

The book’s rhythm is a movement back and forth from the people who must “walk ...back to work through the rot / and the rust and the ashes and the dust” to childhood and memories of Belfast. The title poem is an extraordinary story of a hapless hood or terrorist who becomes a kind of Sweeney, astray in the head, eating what he hopes is water-cress as he hides out on Scrabo Hill. Sweeney is evoked too in ‘Aubade’ – the poet voice flying “for a nearby wood of yews”.

The poet I least expected to hear in these poems is Donne and yet I think he is there in ‘Aubade’; in the audacious blazons of ‘Instagrammatic’; in the scrutiny of new invention that has changed the world; in people islanded from each other and yet somehow “all in this together” and, especially, in the soul that appears repeatedly and unexpectedly. Gillis is concerned with a new metaphysics in a world where God is much less certain than in Donne’s. The book’s final poem, ‘The Sweeping’, is a free flow of language and words – a veritable water-slide of accomplishment in imagining a kind of apocalyptic baptism of rain.

Tom French's *Midnightstown* shares with Gillis's collection a revelling in language. Both are rich in neologisms and coinages but also vernacular and regional words that are new and fizzing. But if there is a sense in Gillis of the life now being lived in anonymity and distance, there is a sense in French of a life very firmly tied in by a myriad of guy ropes to people and place. Most of the Gillis poems do not name the people they describe – French's book is full of names.

I knew Tom French's work through magazines; I had not read his first two collections but I will now. Coming to this book is to arrive into a fully-realised world, busy with particulars, in William Carlos Williams's prescription. There is a sense here of a voice that knows its place in the world – albeit a world that is changing and complicating in different ways. In the beautiful title poem, for example, the poet voice describes setting out across fields to give a bootleg copy of Jewish Songs to a neighbour in exchange for a cherry tree and the spare poem of separated couplets ends:

April 4th, our cherry looks to be in full bloom;
I hear 'The Kaddish' issue faintly from their sun room.

The book begins in birth, the poet in 'The Delivery Room' with James Henry French on the long night of his birth in November 2003, while his mother is taken to theatre. The child is 'a spaceman' in his incubator, 'taking it all in', his father the one to describe the night to him in all its wonder:

We will never be in a room as full or as empty.

French is a poet awake to the interests and ironies that come with the mix of ancient and modern in contemporary Ireland: the reaching for a relic that doesn't work and brings "only peace"; the strange shifts of language in modern medicine – a nurse brings "jugs of contrast" and party bags of X-rays "just the soft tissue gleaming"; the two people in 'Local History' who Google their parish Ordinance Survey map and "head down a road they know the potholes in".

The set of poems on cancer record with simplicity and quiet the peculiar and particular experience of being with someone undergoing treatment: the boredom; the distractions out the window of the hospital; the bargains of faith that are struck with God – or in this case a man in a digger – and the achingly beautiful ending:

On a morphine pump nestled
Between pillows, bearing beads
Of moisture on its breath –

This is how kindness leaves the earth.

The book is full of death; death in war, death in history and, most devastatingly, family death. In 'Reading to my Father' the poet speaks of reading "every word / of my brother's diary, his suicide note". And the image is of a final closeness united in the intimacy of a car for the last time while reading to his father for the first time.

Much recent commentary has sought to set up oppositions in contemporary Irish poetry between a traditional rural lyric verse and a harder-edged urban poetic. These beautiful Gallery books challenge such simplistic readings demonstrating as they do the ability of lyric poetry to accommodate the complexities of modernity while also preserving and reinvigorating language itself.

MAUREEN BOYLE

Divided By A Common Childhood

Miriam Gamble, *Pirate Music*, Bloodaxe, £9. 95

Kerry Hardie, *The Zebra Stood in the Night*, Bloodaxe, £9. 95

Colette Bryce, *The Whole and Rain-Domed Universe*, Picador, £9.99

These three poets, all raised in Northern Ireland, might be said to be divided by a common childhood, so diverse are their approaches. Birth-dates may be significant: Hardie's was in 1951, Bryce's, 1970, and Gamble's, 1980. Chronologically, Hardie belongs to the Paul Muldoon generation, but her poetic affiliations lie clearly elsewhere. Bryce, Derry-born-and-bred, long-relocated in England, and Gamble, Belfast-bred, now in Scotland, share a rebellion against culturally-imposed silence, yet write so differently from each other that even the relatively small, 10-year 'generation gap' resists bridging. Perhaps it's not only their differing contexts and chronologies but their sense of readership that have produced such distinct poetics.

Miriam Gamble's *Pirate Music*, is a second collection that suffers not at all from so-called second-collection syndrome. It's a considerable advance on her debut, *The Squirrels are Dead*, developing some of its major concerns but abandoning any tendency to ornamental wordiness. Gamble has mastered the art of telling it straight and slant at the same time. Her poems always surprise and subvert the lyric genre, often from the first line. Here's a sample of her curtain-raisers: "On the ferry to Larne, someone shouts 'that cunt of a curtain!'" ('Personification'); "The plug on the Hoover is greasy" ('Reflexology'); "He lost words like another child loses a ball" ('Dido's Lament'); "Macken is fucking terrifying" ('Macken's Van'). The cursing sounds at ease with itself and native to the vocal tone – the opposite of Philip Larkin's high-stepping, self-conscious forays into the Anglo-Saxon. "Give me your tongue, Scotland" commands the speaker in 'Maighdean Mara', "I'd meet you eye to eye / like a big eel gawping / in the gutter or the sink pipe, startled, all covered in sand". Gamble has perhaps found something in the Scottish tongue which deepens her connection to her own. But she uses form interestingly, too. Sometimes, Black Mountain-style, it's an extension of content. While she paints in broad sweeps rather than minute detail, her animal poems (horses, whales, an extinct fox) live

through rare combinations of realism and moral force. She is never sentimental, and only anthropomorphic in the interests of parable, as when brute commercialism and artistic idealism are juxtaposed via the Octavio Paz-inspired fantasy of fashion-design for fleas ('Dressing Fleas'). Uncompromising, unselfconscious and original, *Pirate Music* reveals a talent steered by a brave intelligence, and built to last.

Long-term residence produces its own distinct poetic colouration: Hardie lives in Kilkenny and her new collection is rooted in a rural, communal environment. She lays no obvious traps made of poetic devices or super-charged diction. Her poems fail or flourish by virtue of their simplicity, their honesty of report. 'Report' is in fact the title of one of the most satisfying poems in the collection. The long lines suit her anecdotal style, allowing a slow unfolding of the scenery instead of the sharp perceptive flash she sometimes aims for and doesn't quite bring off. It ends:

I was walking the dogs by the river.
A short, bitter flurry of snow came blowing up over the water,
But in among the snow there were swallows and swifts.
I was telling this to a man in a bar one night. He asked what I felt
And I said I cried and he looked at me but he didn't say anything,
And I was glad I hadn't pretended or acted cool.

"...in among the snow there were swallows and swifts" is marvellously casual, poignant in all that it doesn't say. While the then-confessional turn of the narrative might disappoint some readers, the poem keeps its balance: all along, after all, it has been studded with personal reactions, proper names, human figures, the speaker included, looming in the slowly expanding landscape. So much of Hardie's work is about "not pretending or acting cool" that, when her speaker makes that point, it's disarming because it feels authentic.

Hardie writes about her brother's death in a Part Two dedicated to his widow and their children. The 5-page letter, 'Aftermath', begins with a vivid anecdote: a plunge into a bog-hole which contains a drowned, rotting sheep results in an obsession with the pervasive "death-smell". But, as the parable evolves into advice-giving, the force drains

from the diction. Well-meant but under-crafted, ‘Aftermath’ rates the message over the poetry, and makes the reader feel crass for regretting that. The collection would be stronger without it.

The question of readership is pertinent to Colette Bryce’s new work. Her popularity in the UK, Ireland and beyond is considerable. The poems are eminently reader-friendly; lively and intimate, it is as if she is eager to tell the uninitiated what it was like to grow up in Derry in the late 70s and early 80s. With their added touches of magic realism, they fit almost flush to the popular genre, the poem as childhood memoir. A bright, wartime jauntiness adds to the appeal. But, in a fourth collection, such poems unavoidably suggest a retrospective and raise questions: why the excavation of historic-personal material now? How, in fact, does it relate to ‘now?’

In an interview with Alex Pryce in *Poetry London*, where Bryce was Poetry Editor for four years, she recalled “My mother used to say, ‘Put nothing in writing’, which seems quite funny now in terms of my inheritance as a writer. There’s a cultural sense that writing is evidence that might be held against you; also the notion of privacy – what people might think, the neighbours”. Yet Bryce’s poetic personae seem less beleaguered by verbal repression than Miriam Gamble’s lippy rebels. A poem called ‘Don’t speak to the Brits, just pretend that they don’t exist’ seems gradually to detach itself from the arresting title. “Two rubber bullets stand on the shelf, / from Bloody Sunday, mounted in silver, // space rockets docked and ready to go off / like the Sky Ray Lolly that crimsones your lips // when the orange Quencher your brother gets / attracts a wasp that stings him on the tongue”. This rather slack chain of qualifiers and comparatives makes dubious connections (like the association of blood and the food-dye in a red ice-lolly). After the tongue-stinging (a sort of hinge?) it evolves into a more nuanced account of linguistic anomalies, filtered through a self-mocking adolescent perspective when “...a boy from Dublin / talks his tongue right into your mouth, // holds you closely in the dark and calls it / French kissing (he says this in English)”.

Bryce’s speaker often addresses the younger self she’s recalling as “you” and, coupled with the use of the present tense, this creates nar-

rative immediacy and the absorption of the adult's perspective into that of the child. The poems work best at those moments when the child behaves as if unobserved and unmediated: "You play with the stilts / when you get the chance, / silver poles like metal / crutches, footholds / you can raise / or drop. They lift / your view of things / by about one foot / and you advance / stiffly, synchronising / arms and steps" ('A horse appears').

The poems vary in style, from the finely polished, edgily searching penmanship of the sequence, 'A simple modern hand', to the rough-hewn "black comedy" of the MacNeicean *bildungsroman*, 'Derry': "I was born between the Creggan and the Bogside / to the sounds of crowds and smashing glass, / by the River Foyle with its suicides and riptides. / I thought that city was nothing less // than the whole and rain-domed universe". The attractive faux-naïveté of that last phrase signals Bryce's dilemma. While "the whole and rain-domed universe" of lost time is affectionately recovered, it remains bubble-wrapped, and leaves maturer perspectives unexplored.

CAROL RUMENS

Exploring Marginalised Lives

Caoilinn Hughes, *Gathering Evidence*, Carcanet Press, £9.95

Rory Waterman, *Tonight the Summer's Over*, Carcanet Press, £9.95

The opening poem of Caoilinn Hughes's first collection, *Gathering Evidence*, establishes its pervasive concern with the perception and reporting of phenomena. 'Avalanche' enacts this unprocessable influx of data with a blend of reserve and trauma: "My cries could not contend with this parade / of physics [...] Our lungs made fists. I thought of lips freezing shut / once and for all". Like much of the book, the poem's first impulse is inclusivity, its long but rhythmically taut lines bearing an unusual amount of freight. In this, Hughes's work resembles similar lyrical strategies employed by Sinéad Morrissey (noting too the fish-out-of-water globetrotters in 'Altitude' and the communist aunt of 'Catechism'). Hughes shares with Morrissey too a deft touch with narrative poems and a fine eye for illuminating minutiae. 'Avalanche' also brings to light one of the book's touchstones: hay and its elusive needles appear a few times early on, pointing towards the book's quest for clear signals amongst noise.

The scientists in *Gathering Evidence* suffer through their acts of discovery: Enrico Fermi's team "had not considered cancer sullyng their lungs like slugs", Marie Curie's "cycling apparel, wedding dress / are stored in lead-lined boxes". The repetition of these ideas suggests unresolved questions: was the illegal use of Henrietta Lacks's tissue in stem cell research justified, what of the "hostile culture' that dehumanised her in so many other ways? They share with the poet compromised or complicated senses of belonging: Fermi is an "émigré Italian controlling / the energy of the atom". No personal accomplishment can overcome a basic refusal to accept the personhood of those perceived as "outsiders".

Many of Hughes's most successful pieces create this kind of space for exploring marginalised lives, and these thought structures are applied to her own family life: 'Dublin Can Be Heaven' is an attempt

to articulate a kind of empathy with her mother, “who cut off her plait at the nape of the neck like a rope [...] and wouldn’t forgive us for doing the same”; ‘On the Content of Brackets’ creates a dignified space for her grandmother, using a pun on the Irish colloquial word for windowsill to make the “periphery” inclusive and far-reaching. Both pieces acknowledge a largely unspoken undervaluation of the subjects’ lives, and the poet’s redress is powerful in its restraint.

At times, however, the poems’ ambitions fall a little short, when the long line isn’t fortified with narrative tension (‘Every Body Continues In Its State Of Rest’) or when the poem has to overstretch to tie its thematic concerns to its conceit (‘Harmony Of The Spheres’). While the travelogues tap into the book’s broader concerns about home, and do fine work in highlighting economic violence caused by the footloose global rich (“*He imagines how we would make his wife cower; / draw the rare iron out of her like the violent magnets of industry*”), they are often loose, lacking the dramatic sharpness elsewhere in the book. These are exceptions to the rule, though, and symptomatic at least of the impulse to push the lyric to its limits.

In ‘Atmospheric Physicist vs Poetic Atmosphericist’, Hughes lays her aesthetic cards on the table. Comparing the respective strategies of the eponymous observers, she asserts: “Deciphering the data and gathering / inference is how you stay alive [...] Gathering the data and deciphering / inference is how I stay alive’. The collection repeatedly blurs lines between observation of scientific and poetic truths; if the poet’s work is bolstered by clinical accuracy and often an emotional restraint, poems about Curie et al posit just as firmly their fallibility and thwarted personal lives. *Gathering Evidence’s* insistence on clear-sightedness and the elimination of inscrutable poetic mysticism creates space for much of the book’s panoramic imaginative work.

Rory Waterman’s PBS-Recommended debut *Tonight the Summer’s Over* has an altogether narrower focus and an almost determinedly pessimistic outlook. At the heart of the collection is a series concerning his childhood, his relationship with his father, the poet Andrew Waterman, and his parents’ divorce. In one of the few poems in persona, the experience becomes a question of:

who deserves you most? Who's the best
at cuddling you and saying never mind
each time you piss the bed? It's like a test
and you're the prize, my sweet.

A Larkin-ish cynicism drives the poem: the bitter lack of assurance in that “my sweet” or the earlier “poppet”, and the blunt, hurt anger in the closing lines, “And now – my word! – you’re twenty-five years older, / pulling affidavits from a folder”. It’s here that Waterman establishes the book’s poetic self, its recurrent longing for the exotic Irish world of the father (however surprising to a Northern Irish reader to see Coleraine rendered as the Ideal West) from the humdrum Lincolnshire of “squat stone houses, leafy streets”.

Taken individually, many of the poems in *Tonight the Summer's Over* are suggestively poised and finely observed, such as the book's opening poems ‘Navigating’ (“We were happy – weren’t we? – because each bend was blind. / We must pursue, and not expect to find”) and ‘Family Business’:

She glances at this ordinary man
then shuts her eyes: she's damp and tired and bored.
He drives more gently. Neither says a word.

The sheer number of pieces mourning something lost to the world for good, however, has the cumulative effect of dulling their impact. In addition, the scaling up of meaninglessness in ‘From a Birmingham Council Flat’, casual, sexualised violence in ‘The Lake’ or the bizarre appearance of the John Wayne Gacy house in ‘West Summerdale Ave’ sit awkwardly in a book that more convincingly discusses domestic disturbance in subtler terms.

At its best, *Tonight the Summer's Over* finds something empowering in its nostalgic impulses, as at the close of ‘The Outings’. Here, a trip to the supermarket converts “the dozens and dozens of roasting chickens [...] cartwheeling endlessly / in what seems like bliss” into a barely expressed reverie, “the feathery car-park trees, still more

green than yellow”. The poem imbues “dad’s big shop” with a kind of qualified redemptive power, the ability to slow time for a second, to keep the leaves green a moment longer.

DAVID COATES

New Beings To Stitch Our Lives Together

Fiona Benson, *Bright Travellers*, Jonathan Cape, £10

Liz Berry, *Black Country*, Chatto & Windus, £10

Fiona Benson leads her readers into, and back out of, lost landscapes, views of Van Gogh's paintings, and meditations on romantic love, parenthood and myth. Each of the five sections of *Bright Travellers* is prefaced by a separate poem, and the structure of the book models the hesitations that guide the poems, impulses given into but also questioned. *Bright Travellers* begins *in medias res* of one of these hesitations, with the poem 'Caveat' (itself a limitation), but also an interruption: "But consider the cactus: ...". Since, of course, we hadn't been, what remains in a reader's mind afterwards is not the cactus, actually, but rather the jump into a lyric voice that leaves one pleasantly frustrated and interrupted, uncertain as to where to return. The cactus, we find, is a figure of regeneration, hope: "And, once a lifetime, / when the slant rains fall / there is this halo of flowers". Where this pastoral image correlates to the birth of a child ("our *first / live-born* child" in 'Council Offices'), Benson's metaphors become coordinates for an art that embodies Robert Frost's 'stays against confusion'.

The first two sections of *Bright Travellers* gather poems of landscape and ekphrasis. Most of them are short and have great lines: "the waterlogged forest – / its shoals of acorn / and drifts of leas, / the shut up cist of an egg" ('Submerged Forest'); "We'll talk or fuck, / or sit and flip cards" ('Yellow Room at Arles), or "besides, wouldn't you rather be a woman" ('Still Life with Red Herring', both from her 'Love-Letters to Vincent' section). However, when I come back to *Bright Travellers*, it's the longer poems that create the space necessary for the poetic turns which I find to be the strongest elements in Benson's work. In 'Demeter', Benson makes leaps of association like the child who reappears behind a series of hay bales in descent. "My daughter is compelled [...] and I cannot draw her home", the speaker tells us, continuing:

When I see her again she's halfway down the field

emerging from behind another bale
as if they were portals or wormholes to pass her
through this sun-bleached meadow[.]

Another longer poem is ‘Small Mercies’, one easy to praise for its ordinariness and the way the poem exemplifies what Anne Carson has called “a movement of yourself through a thought”. Benson writes of a cricket that:

it looked a little stunned and wheeled round and round
like the misguided needle
of a drunken compass.
It was brown as the earth.

But then it is “the good sound of James / sweeping up the leaves” that takes the poem over, until only “the occasional cricket / calling, calling / to love in another garden, / the marvellous elsewhere” remains. There are many wonderful lines in *Bright Travellers*, but it’s that “good sound” that slays the cynic in me when read it. I could repeat its moral declaration of the “good” endlessly and I don’t think the beauty would wear off: “the good sound of James / sweeping up the leaves” – and there’s the iambic trimeter, that full assonance lovely in the mouth.

However, it will be more than their formal attributes that will bring me back to Benson’s poems. The voice of the poet speaking to herself, assigning value to things and commanding importance in the face of disappointment, makes this whole book ring out with sounds of generous, human thoughtfulness and compassion. And even when *Bright Travellers* moves abroad, the book’s routes home renew both joy and grief, and fresh visions of family relationships in particular. For Fiona Benson these meditations centre on the arrival of a child, an event that is always one of redemption and renewal, if not revelation, at “the quick of the thing – / all my heart’s stitches / for this new, bright being” (‘Rosebay Willowherb’).

There are moments in Liz Berry’s *Black Country* (2014) where I am surprised or troubled, and love the poems even more for that. The speakers of these poems are full of memory and change, and Berry

employs folklorish metamorphoses to remember childhood, youth and disappointment within the emerging anxieties of adulthood. *Black Country* looks back on the home place through spectacles (in both senses) of language and myth-making to give voice and movement to the attempt “to stitch our lives together” (“The Night You Were Born”). Berry’s speakers map out ways to “goo straight to the sweet cabbage heart of ‘local’” (“Tipton-On-Cut”). Here, Berry calls, “Come wi’ me, bab, wum to Tipton-On-Cut” and the monologue lists a landscape of “call centres and factories”, “a lad [...] whipping off ’is trackie top in the randan [‘fight’]”. Here “the crumbling altar of the BDF Steelworks” merges irony with romantic appreciation, or rather, depicts a speaker enacting an utter acceptance of the material reality of a native place.

Metamorphosis is a thematic promise *Black Country* is faithful to from its opening “When I became a bird, Lord, nothing could not stop me” (“Bird”). Many poems (“When I Was a Boy”, “The First Path”, “Sow”, “Owl”, and others) transform the speaker into various animals, but these are not merely point of view poems (one hears the teacher ask her students to write a poem from the point of view of a pig or a dog, etc.). Rather, the changes are metaphorical and the poems are voices often speaking to or about the other changes of love, puberty and disappointment. The poem ‘Dog’, in particular, highlights how Berry’s animal figures are as easily objects as subjects: “You came back for me as a dog. Waited at my door... But as your muzzle tipped my belly to the stars, / dogs goo-wooded in the alleys around us [...] yelped at you to run”. In the absence of the lost love, there remains “nothing left of you, my love, but your scent / on my skin, my clothes, my hair”.

One surprise of *Black Country* is realising that it is a love poem, that the book moves through its transfigurations in order to figure the acceptance of human need and our capability to love – not only the more palatable love of things within poems (landscapes, towns, characters), but unidealised romantic love. The final poem draws the book’s themes of language and transformation together in a bed scene, where the speaker, while pregnant, imagines her lover’s own birth: “It was a month before me”, and pictures “the fog beams of your dad’s van // as it sped to the hospital”. The plain style here, and the seemingly

flat statements, echo a trust that the speaker strains toward, “I think about that night when I doze, heavy / with our son”. The kind of love this book closes with centres around a family about to begin, a sort of relational revision, or potential redemption even, to the half-macabre folktale poems earlier in the collection. This liminal experience of reflecting on her lover’s life and her own while pregnant appears commonplace, yet Berry is consistent in praising the commonality of things without straining to lift them too high or invest into them a misplaced divinity. As she thinks she remembers her lover’s “howling” at birth, she unites the themes which inform *Black Country*: “Oh love, / I can almost hear it now: that first cry – // a raw thread of sound spooling through winter / to stitch our lives together”.

ANDREW EATON

But These Farewells

Louise Glück, *Faithful and Virtuous Night*, Carcanet Press, £9.95

You can be sure Louise Glück won't give you a pile of words that are too lush or musical. Her poems won't be lovely in the ways that poems often are. But even a poet so angular and plain, withholding even, is interested in beauty. I would argue that the music of the unsaid is Glück's song. The beauty of ideas is what Glück trusts most in all her books, but especially this one.

To enter the rich world of *Faithful and Virtuous Night*, I suggest you use the first poem as a manual. Titled 'Parable', this single poem works to inform, as parables do, by allusion, comparison and other indirect means. Glück's parable, however, can only be called a thin version of the form – it's a debate between St. Francis-quoting pilgrims about whither or where to travel and other issues important to pilgrims. Eventually, the debate makes them rigid, "like soldiers in a useless war". The seasons pass as they discuss how to be a pilgrim, and even cataclysmic weather leaves them exactly where they began, stuck in disagreement, but they feel differently about it:

...we had changed although
we never moved, and, one said, ah, behold how we have
aged, travelling
from day to night only, neither forward nor sideward,
and this seemed
in a strange way miraculous. And those who believed we
should have a purpose
believed this was the purpose, and those who felt we
must remain free
in order to encounter truth felt it had been revealed.

'Parable' is a road map, one whose basic means of measurement is not distance but the movement of day to night. The topography is hazy; there are islands built from memory, but they drift and are peopled by the long dead. The roads themselves are all circular – time passes, we

move about, but we always end up where we started. The odd moral of this parable is that, after the passage of much time and debate, the debating itself (rather than, let's say, action) yielded what each pilgrim originally wanted. It's a world where the struggle with ideas is a worthy practice.

Of the 24 poems in the book, about half of them are, or could be, from the point of view of a painter, a man from England who was orphaned very young. He's suffering from poverty and a paralysis that's physical, artistic, and emotional. He is often thinking of his youth – the title comes from a book his older brother reads – “you boys are spent, my aunt said, / as though our whole childhood had about it / an exhausted quality” (*Midnight*). As a boy he is made mute for a time by the understanding that people are divided into “those who wish to keep moving, and those who want to be stopped in their tracks / as by the blazing sword” (*Faithful and Virtuous Night*). While not all the poems are his, the painter's story grounds this various book. What's odd is that the voice, diction and line of the painter's poems shows up in all the other poems – the more autobiographical ones, the longer, sectioned poems, and the prose poems. It's a kind of blur that first produces instability, slipperiness, doubt. Whose poem is this? Did all these things happen to the painter? Then, the blur produces a web of connections, echoes across poems that intensify our experiences of each.

Faithful and Virtuous Night also has an odd relationship to time. While the story of the painter moves forward from childhood to adulthood to a trip to Montana, I experience *Faithful and Virtuous Night* as surprisingly still. The narrative of the painter would suggest chronology and time but this book feels almost static. For example, in ‘Approach to the Horizon’, the painter falls ill. A doctor is called and he is confined to his bed. The painter wryly assesses his illness: “I will be brief. This concludes / as the stewardess says, our short flight”. He refers to his medical paralysis in this way: “[f]eeling has departed – it occurs to me / this would make a fine headstone”. While much of this poem sets up events and an order to the events, the poem resists much connection to cause and effect. Also, many of these poems arise from the long stillnesses in a life – the stillness of a sleepless night, of

a confinement, a flight, a conversation on a park bench at twilight. We get much narrative information but time itself is often suspended or stilled. Glück presents a tension between the narrative and the stasis of thought physically and formally.

A koan, in Zen practice, is a puzzle-like, unresolvable story meant to provoke the “great doubt”. This doubt is a great battle between the mind and the heart, it is said. ‘The Story of a Day’ demonstrates how great doubt functions in these poems. Coming towards the end of the book, its five sections depict a speaker who could be the painter, but it’s uncertain. Waking to sun coming through the blinds, he muses about the light in an ungenerous fashion, “how thwarted it must be, like a mind / dulled by too many drugs”. In the next few sections, the speaker sits at a table in a nondescript room and experiences a crisis, but it’s an odd one. He is terrified that *nothingness* is impossible. “[I]f the essence of time is change / how can anything become nothing?” As the sun rises again, the speaker says, “I closed my eyes. / I was torn between a structure of oppositions / and a narrative structure –”. The poem finishes with a description of his room, which is the same room he’s been in all along. Nothing has been changed by his suffering or by his understanding. On the one hand, Glück argues, we see and feel oppositions everywhere and deeply. The even bigger need, perhaps, is for a narrative to make sense of it all.

This tug of war is enacted by the poems of *Faithful and Virtuous Night*, between the heart and the mind, the ambiguities of the lyric against the cause and effect of narrative. Reviewers have mentioned that the poems in this book coincide with the passing of Glück’s mother, who was one hundred and one when she died. An orphan like her painter, albeit in her seventies, Glück’s grief has socked her hard. The painter lives in and out of the past, as one does when mourning, and he does not recognize himself in this state. This might be the great doubt as well. Anyhow, it’s a book complex enough to yield new treasures each time I read it.

CONNIE VOISINE

Intimate Jazz Anger

Tom Paulin, *New Selected Poems*, Faber and Faber, £14. 99

Ten years ago, when he was never off the telly, Tom Paulin may have been impossible to avoid by the buyer of poetry books. If, like me, he has been dipping in and out of your literary blind-spots over the last ten years, this book serves as a solid introduction to his work – and his work is a lot of fun. For me, reading this book was a bit like uncovering a rook's nest in my own chimney; I remembered all those odd sounds that had been echoing at my periphery, I understood the gaps in my own house, and had an intimate encounter with a tender and unsettling dark bird.

As a *Selected* should, the book presents a rich narrative of the poet's development through the years. From the intense sobriety and sensual banality of Paulin's first two books, through the fabulous wit of *Liberty Tree* and *Fivemiletown*, we move from the seriousness of the angry young poet (death, sex and concrete!) to the playful middle years, where he starts to incorporate a conversational 'Norn Irish' slang and upbeat jazzy wordplay with an anarchic charm more commonly found on the other side of the Atlantic. Paulin is open to wide optimistic horizons while simultaneously undermining their grandeur. He offers:

not a silk tapestry
of fierce folk
warring on the tundra
or making exquisite love
on a starry counterpane,
but an in-the-beginning,
[...] a wintry light
and *juniperus*.

Here in the excerpt from 'The Book of Juniper' we get the freer crystal visions of a poet shedding his nerves, daring his own symbolism as he offers an alternative to the mythic patterns of his forbearers. If we must surpass war and sex, get back to some primordial forests – the

symbol that he offers us is the tree that flavours gin.

Paulin also dares clarity and direct political statements – but this is mixed in with a scandalous conversational tone and balanced with a lack of shame in his learning. ‘I am Nature’, for example, captures all of this energy: moving from funky vulvas and black thighs to Hurricane Higgins, critters and Cruthin in a freewheeling tribute to Jackson Pollock, you feel as though you might be anywhere between Queens, Brooklyn and Queen’s University Belfast. This sense of play – quick-stepping, crass, wide-read – fills in a number of connections in Northern Irish poetry – a kind of literary grouting between the tiles of post-Joycean play, American swagger, British sincerity and Northern Irish bitterness. Amid the stately gravity of Heaney and Longley, and even the playful music of Carson and Muldoon, or the sensual psychedelia of McGuckian, you may have a gap on your shelf. No-one played naked jazz in the library the way Paulin did. These were experiments that needed to happen; they are rollicking and irreverent, and continually intellectually engaged.

There was an earlier *Selected* – at the start of his telly years – and it stops in 1990. This *New Selected Poems* has the benefit of twenty-five more years of development, through an additional five collections. Reading on through his later books, we get to see how far he pushed these experiments, such as the mad conversational multireferential ‘Wind Dog’ – blending voices and memories and tipping his hat to Muldoon, Virgil, Twain, Kipling and myriad other authors:

hardly a mile to go
 through the deep deep snow
 as I follow another poet’s
 long shivering shadow
 over the crumping snow
 – not the journey out of Essex
 nor the journey – yet –
 out of Egypt
 in chisel chipping stone
 this is us walking snow

We are intimate here with a madman and a child – as bookish and scatological as the many figures in the poems; the voice shuttles between ranging energy and sudden intimacy.

There is a certain change of pace in the later poems – not a slackening of wit, but a preparedness to relax the showmanship, to show vulnerability and speak plainly to the reader. In one such poem, he talks of Rembrandt's self-portrait, not without awareness of his own reflection lurking in the corner:

like the portrait of the artist
his pouchy tragic vigilant
and softened face waiting for the fist

Whatever self-mocking there is here in the quick mirror play there is also an acknowledgement of underlying vehemence. Right at the moment of softening, the face beckons the punch; irony is there, but also the keen edge of anger that constantly threatens the surface dexterity of the poems.

There was a controversy a while back, surrounding Paulin's anti-Zionist poem 'Killed in Crossfire', and subsequent misrepresented and/or ugly comments made in an Egyptian newspaper. Well, the poem is not reproduced here. The poems that are here, however, do engage with political culpability; this anger, however, is almost always directed inwards. More than anything else, Paulin attacks the various inheritances – British, Northern Irish, Unionist, male – which might be laid at his own door. For example, in 'Boca di Inferno', he discusses Hitler's wedding present to the Duchess of Windsor, directly confronting a very British hypocrisy; in 'An Ulster Unionist Walks the Streets of London', he troubles the notions of national identity with a delicious mournful isolation. There is anger – as there should be; this world is pretty bad. But the victim of Paulin's anger is himself and his inheritances: his outrage begins at home.

This sense of moral culpability runs throughout all his playfulness: it is as often intimate as it is political, such as in the harsh sex of the Northern Irish, or in the lament for his romantic earth-wandering

uncle in the poem, 'Arthur'. Such a romanticized figure may be lamented at many a wedding or funeral – but Paulin is prepared to look beneath the gloss:

I know that if you turned up on my doorstep,
An old sea dog with a worn leather belt
And a face I'd seen somewhere before,
You'd get no welcome.
I'd want you away.

Forthright, argumentative, shrewdly critical: Paulin pulls at the dark subtexts of his own symbology and encourages us to do the same to our own.

I enjoyed the book a lot. There is a lot of eroticism that bears mentioning – often crude or wry, but sometimes refreshingly unsentimental. There is a tendency to the conversational double take – reinstating his meaning with a quick repetition. A lot of the showmanship makes me think these poems would be great on stage. Is it worth hanging on and waiting for his *Collected*? Well, it depends on how many of his collections you own already – and who knows how long that might take? If, like me, you have until now managed to avoid buying many of Paulin's other collections, this is a great pick-up; he brings a sense of learned play and energy that rarely lands for long this side of the Atlantic.

EOGHAN WALLS

The Torch Across The Duach

Michael Longley, *The Stairwell*, Jonathan Cape, £10

In ‘Lunch’, from Michael Longley’s most recent collection *The Stairwell*, the poet imagines his father during World War I, rattling his “mess-tin / And bellyaching / About the bully beef” in the middle of “Field-kitchen smells, / Memories of home / Between explosions”. This is a 20th century iteration of an ageless scene, a woodcutter stopping for lunch against the backdrop of a battle in the *Iliad*. The Greeks and Trojans share “mutual wounds”, and “mutual” here takes us back to *mutare*, what changes, but also to the Latin *mutuus*, what is borrowed (or shared). The poem ends with the poet making an offering to his father – “Here is an apple / Wrapped in tranquillity” – that echoes the end of Longley’s earlier ‘Peace (after Tibullus)’, which looks ahead towards the end of a war: “As for me, I want a woman / To come and fondle my ears of wheat and let apples / Overflow between her breasts. I shall call her Peace”.

The giving of a peaceful or tranquil gift or memory from “home” (to a beloved ghost) characterises *The Stairwell* as a whole. This is a collection of elegies and war-poems which is also, emphatically, a book of ‘love’ and ‘home’. As the title poem suggests, the Great War “number” ‘Keep the Home Fires Burning’ works as a refrain for the book as a whole, not least when sympathetically repeated in the evocation of the war in ‘Mud Turf’: “He remembered at Passchendaele / Where men and horses drowned in mud, / His bog apprenticeship ... Mud turf kept the home fires burning”. And the book is presided over by a comforting “God of Love”, like the one who appears in a translation of a poem by Gwen John, embedded in ‘The Stray’. This poem comes in the second half of the collection, which is dedicated in its entirety to Longley’s late twin brother, Peter; in it, the “God” ensures Peter’s strayed cat makes it “home” on the day of his funeral.

“Home” itself is not a simple notion, though, and throughout the book “home” is coloured by the familiar presence of death. Longley’s well-established “home-from-homeland”, Carrigskeewaun, is repeatedly revisited as a place not just of comfort, but also of haunting. But

these are welcome ghosts: in ‘Ashes’ the poet is “listening with Joe O’ Toole’s ghost / To the breakers’ roar for weather news” while in ‘The Birthday’, marking the first birthday without Peter, he imagines his twin inhabiting the landscape. This poem ends on another gentle act of reaching out, of communion, as the poet (apparently) leads Peter away not just from Carrigskeewaun, but also from this life: “Don’t twist your ankle in a rabbit hole. / I’ll carry the torch across the duach”.

Such poems are love elegies not in the sense of the “Latin love-elegies” the poet struggled over in the autobiographical ‘Michaelmas, 1958’, but elegies that express and enact – above all else – loving gestures, of which there are many in the book. In ‘Insomnia’, for example, Helen Thomas (the widow of Edward) takes ‘Ivor Gurney’s hand’ – Gurney by then “in the asylum” – and “on Edward’s county map / Guided his lonely finger down the lanes”. Longley’s poetry, especially his poetry of nature, has always been a bodily as much as a spiritual poetry: such physical acts as that described in ‘Insomnia’ are “touching”, not in the sense of easy sentiment, but in the deliberate, difficult but essential sense of sharing the pains of this life with other human beings, and in so doing acknowledging loneliness and keeping it at bay.

This is one important function of elegy. Elegy balances absence and presence, the loneliness of the (bereft) speaker and the re-creation of what has been lost. It also is at once the most private and the most public of genres; personal grief is made available for public consumption, and the individual death points towards everyone’s own inescapable mortality. Longley is a master at combining these private and public impulses, and of managing the risks involved. The end of ‘Marigolds, 1960’, for example – “Och, / Daddy, look in your driving mirror” – could, in anyone else’s hands, have failed to hit precisely the right pitch of loss. Elsewhere, scenes from World War I (and especially Longley’s father’s participation in that war) are merged with reworkings of passages from the *Iliad*, and with elegies for his brother. This is not lightly or complacently done: through decades of careful attention Longley has accrued the right to make use of both conflicts in his own poetry, but he does not do so here simply from a position of authority, but – once more – of affectionate sharing. He attempts to redress the distance between himself and Peter – the fact that while his twin

had become a marine engineer, Longley had “dallied with Nausicaa and Calypso / And set sail without [him] for Ithaca” – by identifying them (as children) with various pairings from the *Iliad*. They become Achilles and Patroclus, Euralyus and Epeius, Ajax and Odysseus, and finally the twins Kteatos and Eurytos (by tradition – though not in Homer – Siamese twins); these poems attempt belatedly to include Peter in the *Iliad* that has been so important to the poet throughout his life. Ultimately, though, this act of sharing must fail: unlike in ‘The Twins’, the balance of the ‘Two souls, one well-balanced charioteer / Taking the trophy and this epitaph’, has already been irrevocably upset.

With so much attention to the death of someone “so like himself, a double, a twin” (‘The Apparition’), it is no surprise that *The Stairwell* is also insistently proleptic, looking ahead to the poet’s own absence from his life, his “home”: “I have been thinking about the music for my own funeral” (‘The Stairwell’), “I imagine my deathbed like my friends’ love-bed” (‘Deathbed’), “Always I think it is the last summer” (‘Ashes’). This is not morbid, however; instead, throughout the book death is understood as redeemed, in some way, by natural cycles, by other births. Thoughts of one’s ‘Deathbed’ are offset not just by a “love-bed”, but by a “Birth-bed”, and a birth which inflames the world with springlight: “the March light from Avernish / kindles in leafless self-seeded saplings / Water sparks ... even the wattle byre’s / Rusty corrugated-iron roof’s ablaze”. As elsewhere in Longley’s poetry, the endurance of the natural world is also redemptive and this persistence is figured through the listing of plant names in ‘Wood Anemones’ or ‘Fragrant Orchid’: “Ragged-robin, saxifrage, bog cotton, / Bog asphodel and speedwell speedwell”, and the “One fragrant orchid” left unpicked for the dead to be able to “kneel and sniff”. Death in *The Stairwell* is not to be avoided, in other words, and is not the end: there will always be fragrant orchids, or more whooper “swans / over the ridge”; there will always – as long as writing of such tender generosity exists – be a torch lighting the way across the duach.

PETER MACKAY

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

JEAN BLEAKNEY's most recent collection of poems is *ions* (Lagan Press, 2011).

MAUREEN BOYLE was runner-up in the Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Prize in 2004. In 2007 she was awarded the Ireland Chair of Poetry Prize and the Strokestown International Poetry Prize and was the recipient of an Artist's Career Enhancement Award from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in 2011. In 2013 she won the Fish Short Memoir Prize, was shortlisted for the Fish Poetry Prize and was a finalist in the Mslexia single poem competition. Her poems have been published in *The Honest Ulsterman*, *From the Fishhouse*, *Fortnight*, *The Yellow Nib*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Mslexia* and *Incertus*.

CIARAN CARSON has published some two dozen books of poetry, prose and translation, most recently *From Elsewhere*, translations from the work of the French poet Jean Follain, paired with poems inspired by the translations (Gallery Press 2014). His work has won many prizes including the T. S. Eliot Award and the Forward Prize. He is a member of Aosdána, the affiliation of Irish artists, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

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(2010), which won a Somerset Maugham Award in 2011, and *Pirate Music* (2014).

REZA GHAHREMANZADEH developed a deep love for the written word at a very early age. She particularly gravitated towards poetry, inspired by *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou. Poetry, in her view, is such a beautiful form of creativity and self-expression, extremely cathartic and therapeutic during times of stress and hardship.

VALUR GUNNARSSON grew up between Leeds, Oslo and Reykjavik. He gained a Masters degree in Creative Writing from Queen's University Belfast. Valur was the first editor of *Reykjavik Grapevine Magazine*. His first novel, *King of the North* came out in Iceland in 2007, followed his second novel, *The Last Lover*, in 2013. Valur was a correspondent for *The Guardian* and Associated Press during the Economic Collapse of 2008-10.

DAVID HALE was born in Scotland and now lives and works in Gloucestershire. He has released two pamphlets of poetry: *The Last Walking Stick Factory*, published by Happenstance Press in 2011 and *In Bedlam's Wood*, which was published in 2014 and won the 2014 Templar Pamphlet Competition. David's first full collection is due out with Templar next year.

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MICHAEL LONGLEY's tenth collection, *The Stairwell* (2014), was a Poetry Book Society Choice and shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize.

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VALERIO MAGRELLI (b. Rome 1957) is the author of six poetry collections which have been awarded numerous prizes, among them the Premio Librex Montale, the Premio Feltrinelli and the Viareggio. He has translated extensively and written criticism on Dadaism, Joubert, Valery and Baudelaire. He is also the author of several prose works, including the *Geologia di un padre*, which won, among other awards, the Premio Opera Italiano and the Premio Bagutta.

JAMIE MCKENDRICK (b. Liverpool, 1955) has published six books of poetry, most recently *Out There*, which won the Hawthornden Prize. He edited *The Faber Book of Twentieth Century Italian Poems* and has translated, among others, a selection of Valerio Magrelli's poems, *The Embrace*, and of Antonella Annedà's poems, *Archipelago*.

PETER MCDONALD's Collected Poems appeared in 2012. Two new books, *The Homeric Hymns* (translations) and *Herne the Hunter* (new poems) will be published by Carcanet in February 2016.

SINÉAD MORRISSEY has published five poetry collections to date and teaches creative writing at the Seamus Heaney Centre. Her most recent collection, *Parallax*, won the T. S. Eliot Prize and the Irish Times Poetry Now Prize.

ANDRÉ NAFFIS-SAHELY's poetry was recently featured in *The Best British Poetry 2014* and is forthcoming in *New Poetries VI* (Carcanet, 2015). His translations from the French and the Italian include Balzac's *The Physiology of the Employee* (Wakefield Press, 2014) and Émile Zola's *Money* (Alma Classics, 2016). His translation of Abdellatif Laâbi's *Selected Poems* has just received a Writers in Translation award from English PEN.

KATRINA NAOMI's poetry has appeared in *The TLS*, *The Spectator* and *The Poetry Review*, and has been broadcast on Radio 4. Her latest publication, *Hooligans*, (Rack Press), is a pamphlet of poetry inspired by the Suffragettes. Her second collection, *The Way the Crocodile Taught Me*, will be published by Seren in 2016. Katrina has a PhD in creative writing from Goldsmiths, is a Hawthornden Fellow, and has received awards from the Royal Literary Fund

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FRANCIS O'HARE was born in Newry, Co. Down, in 1970. Educated at Queen's University, Belfast, and University of Ulster, Coleraine, he now works as a teacher. Francis co-authored *Outside the Walls* (An Clochan Press) with Frank Sewell in 1997. He has published three collections of poetry with Lagan Press: *Falling into an O* [2007]; *Alphaville* [2009] and *Somewhere Else* [2011]. Francis published his *Selected Poems* in America in 2011 [*Home & Other Elsewheres*, Evening Street Press, Ohio] and his new collection, *My Bohemian Fantasy*, is a book-length adventure-in-sonnets. His work is widely published in magazines in Britain and Ireland.

FRANK ORMSBY's *Goat's Milk: New and Selected Poems* was published by Bloodaxe Books in 2015.

CHRIS PREDDLE has retired from libraries to a green valley below the Pennines. His second collection is *Cattle Console Him* (Waywiser, 2010); his first was *Bonobos* (Biscuit, 2001). Recently, he has published work in *Irish Pages* and *Scintilla*. He is translating Sappho's songs and fragments.

LIZ ROSENBERG is a poet, novelist and children's books author whose latest works are *The Moonlight Palace*, a novel, and *House of Dreams*, a forthcoming biography of the author L. M. Montgomery. She was a 2014 Fulbright Fellow at Queen's University, Belfast.

CAROL RUMENS is a Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Wales, Bangor. Her new collection of poems, provisionally entitled *Animal People* is due to be published by Seren in 2016.

JOHN SEWELL has had poems printed in various magazines and anthologies. His two previous collections (the last, *Bursting The Clouds*, published by Cape) are out of print. He lives in Bakewell, Derbyshire.

CONNIE VOISINE's most recent book, *Calle Florista*, will be published in Fall 2015. She and her family will be moving back to Belfast during that time. She is Associate Professor of English at New Mexico State University.

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ALEX WYLIE has poems forthcoming in *Stand* and *PN Review*, and has articles on Basil Bunting and Geoffrey Hill about to appear in *Essays in Criticism* and *Literary Imagination* respectively.

