

Celtic Mists online essays

Derek Mahon

Wind and Limb: Patrick MacDonogh

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Patrick MacDonogh (1902-1961), a contemporary of MacNeice and Kavanagh but, unlike them, out of print for a generation, published five collections of poems between 1927 and 1958 and was highly regarded during his lifetime, with a modest international reputation based on a handful of recurrent anthology choices. Not an immensely prolific output and, despite what amounts to a cult following, he has recently seemed in danger of slipping through the cracks of literary history, which is one of the reasons he needs to be reissued. He is also a very fine poet indeed, which is its own argument. The five collections were: *Flirtation* (G. F. Healy, Dublin, 1927), *A Leaf in the Wind* (Quota Press, Belfast, 1929), *The Vestal Fire* (Orwell Press, Dublin, 1941), *Over the Water* (Orwell Press, 1943) and *One Landscape Still and Other Poems* (Secker & Warburg, London, 1958) — a distinguished though not extensive body of work, one rendered even more exiguous by a self-critical severity which led him to discard, select and refine from volume to volume until, with the Secker collection, he arrived at an almost final text.

The contents of the present volume (*Poems*, Gallery, 2001) are based on that collection, while dropping eleven and adding eight, including six 'new' poems from MacDonogh's brief final period, 1957-61. The Secker book, though relatively slim, was in effect a collected poems, 'all that he wished to preserve' arranged according to his own idea of his work, an order (not necessarily chronological) followed here. Eight poems are collected here for the first time. 'Afterpeace', 'The Dream' and 'Marriage Song' first appeared in *The Dublin Magazine*, 'The Rust is on the Lilac Bloom' and 'Far from Ben Bulben' in *The Irish Times*; while the other three are reproduced from his own typescripts. He dedicated the Secker volume to his wife, Ellen May ('Maisie') Connell MacDonogh; in the same spirit, this reissue of his work is dedicated to his two daughters, Caroline and Boyer. Boyer is an artist and lives in Co Waterford. Caroline, a writer who lives in France and teaches at Caen University, is our principal source of biographical information, and her as yet unpublished doctoral thesis, 'A Study of Patrick MacDonogh's Poetry', has been invaluable in elucidating background and theme. She concedes that *One Landscape Still* was an ambiguous title. MacDonogh was not saying, 'Ireland is the only place for me,' but something more like, 'Here we are, prisoners of our condition'.

That volume, long out of print and now a collector's item, is a decent period piece bound and wrapped in quiet greens, the dustjacket proclaiming it a 'Poetry Book Society Recommendation' and recommending 'other poets from our [Secker's] list' including Theodore Roethke, Burns Singer, D. J. Enright and Jonathan Griffin. The front flyleaf informs us that MacDonogh first made

his appearance on their list in 1944, in the small anthology *Irish Poems of Today* selected by Geoffrey Taylor from contributions to *The Bell*. This, it continues, is 'the first collection of his poems to be published and they reflect the author's passionate love of his native land'. The given price was 12/6d net. But of course it was by no means his first collection to be published, though his first (and last) to be published in England. As for 'passionate love of his native land', the ambiguous title has misled the blurb-writer, for there's rather more to it than that: 'tormented love', not unique to him, would be more like it — though torment is passion too. The book was reviewed in a respectful if subdued fashion by, among others, John Hewitt (*Threshold*) and John Montague (*Studies*). Hewitt provided a brisk summary of MacDonogh's progress from the early poems with their conventional properties of willows, roses, lilacs, Babylon, Nineveh, Troy and, 'touching a forelock to local circumstance', leprechauns. He remarked on a Dowsonian atmosphere and Yeatsian derivation, noted an absence of originality but recognized the 'literary good breeding'. Serious praise he reserved for later work, especially 'Escape to Love' and 'O, Come to the Land', where he found in MacDonogh 'a hard objectivity towards himself and his generation'; and he concluded by recommending him as 'an addition to our imaginative estate'. Montague acknowledged 'the much anthologized lyrics, graceful and plaintive as early Yeats', where 'romantic lyrical pain merges into dialect and folk poems', but noticed the 'brooding, obsessive nature' of the book, and the 'desolate divisions of the spirit' they describe. Both remark on the Yeatsian properties and cadences — though even Yeats, of course, borrowed from Nora Hopper and Frank O'Connor, to name but two; equally both Hewitt and Montague were aware of something new and different. Somewhat belatedly, MacDonogh had established himself as a distinctive voice.

He was born in Dublin, where his father was founder and headmaster of Avoca School, Blackrock, and educated there and at Trinity College, where he read for an arts degree, shone at athletics and subsequently took a PhD with a thesis on Allingham. After graduation he worked as a teacher and commercial artist before joining the staff of Arthur Guinness, Son and Co Ltd, where he later held a senior executive post. The background is important. One of five children, he grew up in an earnest and convivial Protestant middle-class environment of tennis parties and hockey sticks, subsequently playing hockey for Ireland: a privileged environment also characteristic of his active and linear professional career, especially the prime-of-life years when he and his family lived at Cintra, a pleasant Georgian country house near Kinsealy, north Co Dublin. Rod and gun, field and stream, featured at weekends.

During his last years, when ill health obliged him to take early retirement, MacDonogh lived in 'reduced circumstances' at Malahide and Portmarnock. Both he and his wife, a well-known mezzo-soprano, broadcast frequently on Radio Éireann, she specializing in Schubert, he in sporting and literary matters. Hill walker, fly-fisherman, golfer, he knew the country intimately from Wicklow to Mayo, from Antrim to Cork; but the customary landscapes of his poetry are those of north and south Co Dublin, and of Co Meath. After a certain point they are even more specifically those of the Kinsealy woodlands and the Malahide estuary. His friends included Lord Moyne, 'Con' Leventhal and Seamus Kelly ('Quidnunc' of *The Irish Times*); in England, Betjeman and Laurie

Lee, the author of *Cider with Rosie*. He drove fast cars, Sunbeam Talbot and Jaguar, co-founded the Galway Oyster Festival, took a hand in John Huston's Youghal production of *Moby-Dick*, and made frequent appearances in literary pubs like the Pearl Bar and the Red Bank. Brian Fallon, in *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960*, tells us this 'sensitive, much-loved man' was one of the *Dublin Magazine* inner circle. He contributed also, as his acknowledgements indicate, to the books pages of large-circulation newspapers like *The Observer*, and to New York magazines including *Harper's* and *The American Mercury*.

Flirtation was notable less for the poems than for the black-and-white cover drawing (his own) in what Brian Fallon calls 'the then fashionable Harry Clarke style', the style also of Cecil French-Salkeld's decorative murals in Davy Byrne's (Dublin) pub: an art deco 1920s-Arcadian idiom depicting harlequinesque *fêtes galantes*. (Celtic motifs would appear later.) We associate these properties with the whimsical, adolescent nostalgia of Laforgue and *Le Grand Meaulnes*; and indeed there was, and remained, something lostdomainish about MacDonogh's sensibility — an inflection audible even now in the work of William Trevor and Jennifer Johnston. These early poems are juvenilia, Keatsian pastiche; though later developments suggest that 'The Eve of St Agnes' remained a useful and even bracing model. It's not until *A Leaf in the Wind* that he begins to be interesting, with 'Helen' and 'A Drunk Man' (later 'The Drunkard') which made it into the Secker volume. Not included in that volume is the unusual and rather rambling 'A Belfast Shipping Clerk Goes to His Work', where a young MacDonogh figure, sent by Guinness's to the northern capital, with its 'gantries looming through the mist', thinks fondly of summers in Wicklow, 'the quiet crackling of the gorse' and 'the shining altar of the sea'.

The Vestal Fire is a heroic epithalamion in thirteen sections, some long, some short. A devoted lover of 'companionable women', almost a Muse poet in the Gravesian sense, he embraced sexual love as the highest form of human understanding, and these fourteen pages, intensely erotic yet idealistic — even 'Petrarchan', as he says elsewhere — are his first sustained attempt to measure his own experience of this not uncommon revelation. It's a love poem, or series of love poems, in search of absolute sincerity and commitment, almost of self-definition — 'my constant light' — where the winsome, wanly dancing nymph-like figure of the *Flirtation* cover girl is found to be a grown-up woman and treated accordingly. An excited and slightly incoherent work, over-long, overly discursive, overly cerebral, it's also overly anxious to arrive at the right sort of conclusions. But the short passages he retained and which are included here ('Curtain' and 'You, Too, at Midnight Suddenly Awakening') are very fine; and the exercise, noble in itself, allowed him to approach a subject more fully developed later — that of essential solitude. Here already, in this solemnly happy poem with its echoes of Spenser and Donne ('This night is ours'), an austere, quasi-religious disposition makes itself heard, one oddly nostalgic for a spiritual regimen it rejects too violently. The positive, 'lifeloving' aspirations the poem so vigorously espouses co-exist with an exile among 'waking thoughts' under an 'actual cold observant sky'. It's the old mind-body problem, with 'dancing spring' cursed by a need 'to discipline my thought with naked line'.

Over the Water, published only two years later, is the culmination of his early work and remains a remarkable achievement by

any standards. Here, collected for the first time, are the classic anthology pieces, the popular lyrics and several intriguing, much more 'modern' poems like 'Dodona's Oaks were Still' and the title piece itself. He is no longer writing tentative poems; nearly all will survive later inspection, and most are included here. How to explain this sudden burst of creative confidence and exactitude? An emotional settling, perhaps, with wife and family, and a new political awareness after long silence during the 1930s — an awareness not quite explicit in the manner of Auden and MacNeice, but implicit in the situations of his 'characters', released from tedium and galvanized into fruitful tension and flow by the wartime atmosphere both in Ireland and England. Brian Inglis, the author of *West Briton* (1962), records that, on the outbreak of the second world war, he and his Malahide set joined the British armed forces as a matter of course — though he resolved in his own mind that he would resign his RAF commission should Britain re-invade 'Éire'. MacDonogh, older but from a not dissimilar social group, must have had similarly complex feelings about the whole business, especially in the light of his friendship with the English poet Phoebe Hesketh, the 'war widow' in the poem of that title. But the wartime mood affected him in another way too, confirming a cultural identification with the Gael and issuing in the 'folk' poems for which he became chiefly known, 'She Walked Unaware' and 'The Widow of Drynam'.

He writes elsewhere of the Irish poetic genius as 'at once spiritual and sensuous', qualities we associate with, say, Clarke's 'The Straying Student' or Padraic Fallon's 'Mary Hynes', and which he too combines here. These dramatic monologues, rural in setting, their speakers respectively a lovelorn youth and a proud old woman, are beautifully crafted and in some ways characteristic utterances, artifacts even, from the much maligned Yeats and De Valera era of traditional sanctity and comeliness which produced so much of the finest Irish art and literature. A centuries-old tradition of *aisling* and *cailleach* lives on in both, together with an unregenerate eroticism and radical defiance. Here are Synge's 'wild words', the garrulous narration, dramatic self-awareness and aristocratic peasant pride, the wandering lines and 'planted' off-rhymes, the concrete imagery and emotional realism of Ó Rathaille and Eibhlín Dhubh Ní Chonaill. If 'Be Still as You are Beautiful' seems to recommend, shamelessly, that the recipient 'look good and say nothing', the heroic and vital note in 'The Widow of Drynam', as so often in Gaelic poetry, is struck by a woman, in the voice of an Ireland most of us have forgotten or never knew: for one not really familiar with what Jennifer Johnston calls 'my own unspoken language', his recreation, in a modern setting, of the intonations of the Gaelic 18th century is the more remarkable.

Amorous, introspective, philosophical and contemporary-history poems merge into one another with their wonderful titles: 'Soon with the Lilac Fades Another Spring', 'This Morning I Wakened Among Loud Cries of Seagulls'. A love poem will present itself in folk guise, a 'war' poem will contain a love story; everything discursive carries a specific gravity of intense emotional experience, mixing memory and desire. A generalized piece like 'The Bone-Bright Tree', for instance, a codger's lament for 'courteous acumen', 'astringency' and 'strict articulation', invoking the stoical suicide of Petronius, *arbiter elegantiarum*, records one of a series of psychological crises relating, in part, to a vaguely guilt-ridden detachment

he seems to have considered endemic to the Protestant situation. This anxiety is present even in the much-quoted Swiftian epigram 'No Mean City', a bleak glimpse of Dublin social life in the not so distant past. Dogged by a morbid sense of isolation, despite job and family, he tried to escape this, in life, through manic activity of various kinds — and, in the work, by embodying the rupture between subject and object, perceiver and perceived, text and context, in highly wrought formal structures. As if this isolation were not enough, Caroline, in her thesis, alludes to that Meredithian theme, 'the deep and prolonged struggle between man and wife', quotes Coleridge on 'the unfathomable hell within', and finds here, as in his crisp abstractions, the true strength and modernity of the work.

One of the last in whom a 'Revival' texture and aesthetic are evident, he risked inclusion among the 'twilighters' and 'antiquarians' to whom his friend Beckett gave such a hard time in the 1934 essay 'Recent Irish Poetry'. The adopted personalities and archaic coloration of the folk poems might seem to incriminate him, together with F. R. Higgins and early Clarke, in 'the flight from self-awareness' and even a yearning for 'the wan bliss on the rim'; but the pathos of these poems springs from a very personal romanticism. The son in 'Drynam' has gone to 'the war', perhaps an older war; but with 'Over the Water' and 'War Widow' we are definitely in the 1940s. These belong to a whole genre of wartime love-and-separation poetry, fiction and film, a genre to which MacNeice and Elizabeth Bowen were only two of the most vivid contributors. 'War Widow' is addressed to Phoebe Hesketh, with whom MacDonogh conducted a fruitful friendship then and later; while the magnificent 'Over the Water', one of his finest achievements, inscribes their relationship in another of his dramatic monologues, though dramatic in a more complex fashion than hitherto. As in 'Drynam', an adopted personality speaks. A soldier, in London during the Blitz, thinks of his lover in Ireland and wishes her beside him: a displacement of the poet, in Ireland, thinking of his lover in England and wishing himself there. A frequent visitor, he knew the London atmosphere, and picks up on the 'Apocalyptic' mood of the time: for example, despite obvious differences, he greatly admired the work of Dylan Thomas. There is a comparable exhilaration here, though the subtext is one of loss, failure, unfulfilment: his final theme, if one redeemed by his gift for clarity of design and aphoristic closure.

Conceived as a birthright, the theme is symbolized in the 'bonebright tree' (compare and contrast Joyce's 'heaventree of stars'); as a moonlit hieroglyphic landscape void of human agency but alive with creatures, owl and pigeon, mouse and fox, like Leopardi's night-time glade of dancing hares. What is figured is a crisis of sensibility, an examination not of conscience but of consciousness. A morbid unspontaneity — the 'original sin', so to speak, in the Protestant soul — is scrutinized with self-conscious unspontaneity. He doesn't seek, much less achieve, the perhaps rather forced emotional triumphalism of 'A Prayer for My Daughter' and 'Among School Children'. His theme is implenitude; his wistful love of organic growth and generative archetype goes unrequited. The waves break regardless; the trees are mute. This is what happens in 'Dunleary Harbour' and 'Dodona's Oaks were Still'. The first of these, another of his strongest pieces, asks the old question, 'Was it spirit or flesh first committed, first suffered the wrong?' — and

adapts a Bowen phrase to commemorate a vitality, his own and that of his social group, now evidently a thing of the past: 'the death of the innocent heart, the end of surprise'. The suburban trees of Dunleary (*sic*) take on, characteristically, a mythic and mystical significance in 'Dodona's Oaks'. According to Graves, the oracular oaks of Dodona in Epirus were the object of a Diana moon cult, involving mistletoe, therefore sacred to the Muse; but, in the eremitic solitude imagined by the narrator — a St Kevin-at-Glendalough scene — the druidic boughs prove unforthcoming, are silent in wind and limb.

Silent too is the sleeping house in that fine dejection ode, 'Escape to Love', as he wakes to dawn consciousness — 'felicitous space', in Bachelard's phrase, where, taking the fun out of birdsong and sunny window, the mental sky darkens and a premonition of death stirs 'like a mouse in the gut'. (The book about bones and mice in 20th century poetry has yet to be written.) This is a short story, a sketch for a novel, a spiritual autobiography and diagnosis. On 'the first bright Sunday in March' he walks abroad through 'poisoned lands' and 'sun-dazed' fields, remembering with pain his inhibited mother, her 'frosty duty', 'chilly nurture' and 'acrimonious care': 'Mother of Rimbaud, weep for what you have done!' He contemplates with 'rueful self-knowledge' a limited literary achievement, his spiritual apostasy in 'a long indolent act of sacrilege' and — 'political orphan too' — his suspension between two kinds of sectarianism and estrangement from society generally; then, in a strange and violent conclusion, sacrifices himself to save a hunted hare. (The book about hares in Irish poetry is also long overdue.) There is something both Orphic and Christian about this gratuitous gesture; though its failure, in narrative terms, is of a piece with the existential failure the poem documents. At least we are not dealing here with a flight from self-awareness: *au contraire*, 'Escape' is MacDonogh's most serious and resourceful effort to establish personal and cultural authenticity. The fairy-tale enchanted castle of earlier work diminishes finally, in 'Far from Ben Bulbin' and 'Make Believe', to bone structure, the skull beneath the skin: to his 'proper dark', a bungalow at Portmarnock. Nothing wrong with that, many might envy him; but Caroline finds 'resignation' in the last poems — which she also describes, more positively, as 'succinct' and 'testamentary'. Though sound in wind and limb and evincing, she says, 'a kind of romantic and austere dignity', MacDonogh fell prey to psychiatric problems and spent increasing periods in mental hospitals. One of these coincided with the arrival of the Secker proofs, which he had no opportunity to correct; so that volume, his life's work, is full of misprints. Handwritten corrections appear, fortunately, in copies of the published book and are, of course, incorporated here. Besides the three previously unpublished typescripts, an old Guinness ledger survives where, carefully inscribed in fountain-pen blue ink, he sketches a perfunctory fragment of autobiography dwindling to diary entries and disconsolate reflections on the Cold War: 'If this misery was caused by the pressure of these or similar enormous anxieties it would at least have some dignity and honour about it . . . but as it really springs instead from an incorrigible ignorance of the value of money and from the impotent creative desire of one more emasculated soul I find it merely mean and despicable.' If, with the re-invasion of Ireland and other vulnerable societies by 'global capital', and the resulting devastation, the work of the Revival has to be done again, MacDonogh and others may yet

come into their own.

This edition retains his order of contents. The rationale may seem inscrutable, but it's his own mature configuration, his own 'bone-bright tree': he placed the lines in a certain sequence, and the poems too — perhaps on the principle of 'radial time'. We are not trying to construct a contemporary, but granting a dead man the 'ineluctable modality' of his historical moment. Nor is this mere antiquarianism; for the poems live. Their knotty cerebrations and serious striving, the half-dozen masterpieces conceived, as it were, in thunderstorms, together with other 'glories infrequent, authentic, vouchsafed though unsought', constitute his own version of 'failing better'. 'To be an artist is to fail as no other dare fail,' says Beckett in the *Dialogues*: 'that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping.' The idea of failure, much underrated, thrives between freedom and necessity, between gravity and grace, in an 'endless quarrel between earth and sky'. The lonely impulse of delight negotiates with bone structure:

One landscape still! —

Memorial acres, old demented trees

About a crumbling house, a stony hill,

A solitary lake — forever these

Restrict the image and impose their will.

Occupying, says Brian Fallon, 'a middle ground between traditionalism and modernism, as also between the consciously "Irish" note of Higgins and the more cosmopolitan tone of MacNeice, MacDonogh produced a compact and resilient body of work with a distinctive character'. Obsessed with youth and novelty, we sometimes patronize previous generations, imagining them to have been more naive than they were; for everything has been done or thought before in one form or another, though our historical provincialism tends to ignore the fact. We patronize, too, their difficult achievements — limited, like ours, but available to us if we're interested. They too thought themselves too smart for their own good; they too thought themselves cursed by wised-up meta-consciousness: indeed, it was one of their favourite themes. MacDonogh needs to be looked at again. Retrieval can resolve much, even in an age of humoristic deconstruction, and the ecstasy and frustration of an occluded talent can have the power of shaming a fluent posterity accustomed to much greater exposure. A good part of his example, paradoxically, will lie in his built-in 'obsolescence'; also in the amateurish, extra-curricular, unfinished air which, innocent of calculation and bright with idiosyncrasies (prosodic slippages, late jokes best overlooked, an addiction to 'w' sounds), confirms the authenticity of the enterprise. But *caveat emptor*: too often, revisiting the past with sophisticated hindsight and superior technical means, we lose the original aura, the poignant sense of imperfect, lost reality; we cease to 'walk unaware'. So much the worse for us if we can no longer praise without irony, as MacDonogh does in a prose piece, 'Out of the Night' (*The Dublin Magazine*, 1958), those things, real or imagined, to whose dispersal his own work stands as such courageous testimony: 'religious faith, love between man and woman, nobility of conduct, unexplained gaiety of heart, order and beauty in the natural world'.

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Gabriel Rosenstock

The Irish Language and its Literature: a Brief Overview

Greek and Latin aside, Irish is the oldest written literary language in Europe, considerably older than the dominant language in Ireland which is, of course, English. Irish is a Celtic language. Outside influences began with the arrival of Christianity and Latin in the fourth/fifth century. Prior to the Latin alphabet, the only evidence we have of Primitive Irish is markings on so-called Ogham stones. The sixth to the tenth century is the period of Old Irish or Early Irish. Our early literature is famous for its nature lyrics and poems of piety.

One could argue that the oldest play written in Ireland was not in English or in Irish but in Old Irish. It has been translated by Eleanor Hull as *The Colloquoy between Fintan and the Hawk of Achill*, a druidic verse play:

I am the grey hawk of Time,
Alone in the middle of Achill.

Since Fintan and his totemic hawk are over six thousand yearsold, if you believe in druidic time (as I do!), this could be the oldest play on earth.

After the 10th century Old Irish becomes Middle Irish, a language which produced early satirical, fabulist works such as *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* (Mac Conglinne's Vision). The great sagas and myths were finally written down in a language spoken not only in Ireland but also in the Scottish highlands and islands and on the Isle of Man. Later, Scots Gaelic developed its own distinct language and literature. (It is easier for contemporary speakers of Irish to understand Scots Gaelic than it is to understand Old Irish). Irish myths may not be as widely known as Greek myths, but they deserve to be.

Over the centuries, Irish would absorb influence from the Vikings, the Normans and the English. Latin had given us many words previously, *póg* (a kiss) is from *pax* (peace – Christians offered each other a sign of peace with a kiss) and *báisteach* (rain) comes from *baptizare* (the water of baptism) a word which also gave us *baithis* (the crown of the head on which the waters of baptism are poured).

The *Leabhar Laighneach* (*Book of Leinster*), a manuscript from the 12th century, lists hundreds of Irish sagas and the *ollamh* or chief poet was expected to be an authority on these and to absorb them in ways that influenced the matter and style of his own work.

The sagas and myths had qualities which would make them eminently suitable for an epic film: cattle raids, courtships, seductions, battles, slaughters, feasts, journeys, voyages external and internal. A pagan world of literally mythic proportions. The delightful frisson between the pagan and the Christian would be a characteristic of much Irish writing up until our own day. The Ulster Cycle (*An Rúraíocht*) gives us a heady mixture of high romance, war chariots, bravery and treachery whilst the Ossianic Cycle carries us away to the wooded hills for feasting, story-telling, romance, hunting, feats of bravery, enchanting tales and verse surrounding the enduring myths of other realities, *Tír na nÓg*, the Land of Youth. Place naming and love of place shine through much of the early literature, reminding us of aeons past when Ireland herself was a tripartite goddess, Éire/Banba/Fódla. Sacred ground! My bilingual poem sequence *Bliain an Bhandé/Year of the Goddess* (first published by Dedalus and later by Original Writing for Kindle) honours this tradition.

The word for a poet in Irish *file* means a seer and it was the poet who inherited some of the ancient functions of the druid. We have descriptions of Gaelic poets in Ireland and Scotland which are associated with magical or even yogic practises, such as composing in the dark with a heavy stone placed on the chest, or emptying the mind (presumably) behind a waterfall. One should note an *ghlámh dhígeann*, poetic satire causing the victim to be covered in blisters, a remnant of druidic voodoo magic in all probability and Shakespeare was familiar with the Irish bard's ability to rhyme rats to death!

The early Irish monks preserved pagan literature and lore by transcribing it, in Irish, whereas in most other parts of Europe native pagan lore was being systematically wiped out by Latin. Ancient Irish literature is, therefore, a key to unlocking not only our own past but also much of the past of pre-Christian Europe, a hint at how men and women thought and behaved in times beyond our ken.

Sometime between the 13th and the 15th century came *Buile Shuibhne/ The Madness of Sweeney*, a unique tale with poems in which a mad king is away with the birds:

Like cold snow of a single night
was the aspect of thy body ever;
blue-hued was thine eye, like crystal,
like smooth, beautiful ice...

Early Modern Irish starts around the thirteenth century and is a period famous for its schools of poetry. Over three hundred metres evolved in this sophisticated milieu. Notable poets from that period were Donnchadh Mór Ó Dálaigh (1175-1244), Muireadhach Albanach Ó Dálaigh (1180-1250), Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh (1320-87), Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn (1550-91), Eochaidh Ó hEodhusa (1567-1617), Aodh Mac Aingil (1571-1626), Fear Flatha Ó Gnímh (1602-1640).

Below is my translation of a poem from that period.

Days of the Week

We know little about the poet, Aonghus Fionn Ó Dálaigh, known as Aonghus na Diagachta ('Aonghus of the Divinity'). He flourished in the late sixteenth century. Over fifty poems survive, mostly of a deeply religious nature. He had a school of poetry in Duhallow, Co. Cork, at a time – from 1530 onwards – when ordinances were being issued to destroy the native literary classes ('Yrlyshe minstrels, rymours, shannaghes & bardes').

O Christ, protect me!
How can I know your power?
Your peace I need now
 Branch of fairest flower!

O child of Bethlehem
Please do not be hard!
Ruler of all
 On Sunday be my guard.

On Monday, when you judge me
Save me from all harm,
Though angered by your wounds
 Stretch out your arm.

On Tuesday, lovely Son
Who never shirked pain
Let the world's kings stand aside
 Be my gain!

On Thursday, God the Father,
Do not deny your face,
Your pain stirs love within me
 Seal your grace.

O Trinity, stand by me
Without you we are dust,
On Friday, hold back your anger,
 Help us, you must.

On Saturday, save me!
My deeds leave me in danger,
Do not tax me too much,
 I am no stranger.

Son of the Father, help me,
Only Son most high,
Pardon us, in spite of all,
 I cry.

This, too, was the period in which Anglo-Norman influence coloured native love poetry with the sensibility of *amour courtois*. (See some superb examples of this genre in *A Treasury of Irish Love* which I compiled for Hippocrene Books, New York). But Cromwellian terror was on the horizon and those poets who did not perish by the sword would be left homeless and bereft.

Gaelic Ireland began to decline with the collapse of the native aristocracy at the beginning of the seventeenth century and the literature reflected this cataclysmic upheaval. Micheál Ó Cléirigh (1575-1645) and his team of scribes gave us the florid *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann* (The Annals of Ireland), and more pseudo-history from the Counter-Reformationist Geoffrey Keating/Seathrún Céitinn came in the form of *Forus Feasa ar Éirinn* and was widely circulated in manuscript. Pseudo-history may be the wrong term entirely. Céitinn was trained in France and his aim was to write a history that countered the story of Ireland as seen through the eyes of the conqueror.

Many poets had lost their patrons. Black and bitter was the ink which often ran from the pens of such highly accomplished poets as Piaras Feiritéar, (1600–1653), Pádraigín Haicéad (1600-54), Dáibhí Ó Bruadair (1625-98) and Aogán Ó Rathaille (1670-1728). This was the beginning of the *aisling* genre, the visionary poem in which Ireland appears to the poet as a muse or goddess offering one last glimmer of hope.

By the 16th century Catholics were forbidden to publish in Ireland and so we find that the first publishing house for Irish-language texts was not in Ireland at all but in the Franciscan college, St. Anthony's, in Louvain; it was in Antwerp that the first Irish-language catechism was published. But the first book in Irish was in 1564 and was the work of Protestants, an Irish translation of John Knox's *Liturgy* by the Bishop of the Hebrides.

Colonial English law in Ireland was not sympathetic to native ways but other calamities were to cause even further damage to the fabric of the Gaelic world resulting in a major language shift in Ireland. In the mid 1840s the potato famine struck, millions died and millions more emigrated.

Even great Catholic leaders such as Daniel O'Connell, whose aunt is said to have composed the great Gaelic lament, *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* (The Lament for Art O'Leary), even he, a native speaker, addressed the 'monster meetings' in English. The Church, in the main, saw Irish, too, as a badge of poverty and English was now the language of opportunity as the British Empire grew, taking over huge sections of the globe.

Among the poets born in the eighteenth century or earlier are Cathal Buí Mac Giolla Ghunna (c.1680-1756), Séamas Dall Mac Cuarta (c.1647 -1753), Peadar Ó Doirnín (1704-68), Aindrias Mac Craith (1708-95), Donnchadh Ruadh Mac Con Mara (1715-1810), Art Mac Cumhaigh (1738-1773), Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin (1748-84), Eibhlín Dhubh Ní Chonaill (1748- c.1800), Brian Merriman (1747-1805), Antaine Raiftearaí (1784-1835). Many of their songs and hundreds of anonymous songs from that period survive and are sung to this day. A prose work from the seventeenth century, *Parlaimint Clainne Tomás* (Clann Tomás's Parliament), was a very popular parody of Irish story telling and exists in several manuscripts.

Irish looked like it was facing inevitable decline and possible extinction by the end of the nineteenth century; indeed, the number of native speakers – over four million in pre-Famine times – had shrunk terribly. Children were punished if they were heard speaking Irish. A combination of oppression and the concomitant self-loathing which accompanies colonisation saw a transition to English, often facilitated by a new type of clergy heavily influenced by Jansenism, a form of puritanism which sought to bury Gaelic ways as remnants of pagan superstition and 'decadence'.

It was then that various groups, composed of nationalists as well as scholars, writers, romantics and antiquarians saw that something unique and ancient was on its last legs, and the revival movement came into its own. It came into being when the British Empire was at its height but noises of dissent were beginning to be heard, a clamour for political and cultural freedom. And thus it was that after centuries of being second-class citizens in their own land, the Irish engaged in a struggle for freedom and when it was won, at last, those who had played a part in the Irish-language revival were often, but not exclusively by any means, those who had also fought for political freedom. The language was therefore sanctified and perceived to be a key to the process of nation building and today the language enjoys the status of being the first of the two official languages of Ireland.

But what is the reality of the situation? The reality is that too much was expected of the educational system. It was hoped that the education system alone could produce active bilinguals but it did not. Active language planning would require the creation of large areas of the real world in which the language could be used. Is there any point in teaching someone how to order a bag of chips – *mála sceallóg le do thoil* – if the man in the chip van doesn't know what language you are speaking? Today, few children, unless educated by Irish-medium schools, or reared by Irish-speaking parents, whether in Irish-speaking areas or elsewhere, can use or are willing to use the language in everyday circumstances. (Polish is more widespread than Irish in Ireland).

The fact of the matter is that English is the dominant instrument of commerce, culture and entertainment. Less than 2% of the staff of the Department of Education is fluent in the language. That says something, I'm afraid. The various reports, commissions and action plans for the language were not acted upon. We now have a recent 20 year plan for the language. Will it work?

And yet, it is fair to say that Irish-language culture punches far beyond its weight and in a cocoon of its own can even be said to thrive. But it is a cocoon nonetheless. There are a number of language organisations and the main one, Foras na Gaeilge, is a North-South body, something unimaginable before the recent Belfast Good Friday Agreement which saw closer cooperation between the two jurisdictions. There is a Language Commissioner since 2003 whose task is to see that people who wish to have government services in Irish can have these services provided for them. Since 2007, Irish has been an official working language of the EU. (What took us so long?)

There are a number of Irish-language festivals such as Oireachtas na Gaeilge and IMRAM is a literary festival with an eclectic multi-media approach which is outward- and inward-looking at the same time. It seeks out venues and creates events not normally associated with the language and by so doing allows the language and its literature to breathe freely outside of the cocoon. IMRAM has also acted in an advisory capacity for English-language festivals and for events which sought an Irish-language component or which were advised that they needed one! IMRAM's bilingual website has links to language and literature sites and the archives from 2004 until 2012 give us a glimpse of the vibrancy of the current literary scene. Vibrant, yes, but fragile too ...

For centuries, many of our English-language writers had gone abroad, since the time of Goldsmith, and later Shaw, Wilde, Beckett, Stoker, Joyce. One of these great writers, George Moore, suggested that his short stories be translated into Irish as a model for a new generation of Irish-language writers. Somebody must have thought the idea had some merit because a publishing house established by the state, An Gúm, where I worked for over a quarter of a century, began to churn out literature in translation at a fairly impressive rate. Most of this was already available in English, however – Dickens, Conan Doyle, Conrad and so on. But it did provide some funds for writers and translators in the three major dialects. Of course, nothing like *Madame Bovary* would have been translated as the Church kept a keen eye on publications, as it did on everything else.

The translation scheme petered out. Had it served its purpose? Had too many works of little merit been translated? Whatever the reason, the end of the scheme meant that a 'translation culture' would never re-occur in a planned, systematic manner and this has been something that individual literary translators bemoan today and with very good cause.

Ireland Literature Exchange/ Idirmhalartán Litríocht Éireann which promotes the two literatures of Ireland in translation and recently celebrated its 1,500 title in translation, does not support translation from Irish to English or English to Irish. The body which promotes publishing in Irish, Foras na Gaeilge, does not support translations from English to Irish either. But where are we going to get Irish translators with a knowledge of Estonian or Macedonian or Kurdish? They are few and far between. What is wrong with translating Kurdish literature into Irish via the medium of English? A talented, sensitive translator will be able to accomplish this. Must we wait until we find that desirable but elusive person who is perfectly fluent in Kurdish and Irish?

We have a translation into Irish (albeit truncated) of *Don Quijote* which came to us via English. Indeed, it was this translator, a priest, who arguably started the modern literary movement in Irish. An tAthair Peadar (Father Peter), as he was generally referred to, published a Faustian tale in 1907, *Séadna*, itself a reworking of folklore, and established the ordinary (though often extraordinary) speech of the common folk as the literary standard (as opposed to a style based on that of the 17th century historian Keating, mentioned above). Here it should be noted that the quality of Irish folk tales often has a literary aura about it, a richness of style, characters galore, moving or witty dialogue. It is fair to say that, apart from perhaps Estonia and Latvia, there is no greater collection of folklore today in the West than that which has been collected by the Irish Folklore Commission.

The new respect shown to folklore resulted in a literary volcano describing ways of life which were soon to be things of the past and the autobiographical writings from the Blasket Islands, off the South West coast, are folk classics of real stature. Ó Criomhthain's *An tOileánach* (The Islandman) and other works, and Ó Súilleabháin's *Fiche Blian ag Fás* (Twenty Years A-Growing) are captivating accounts of a vanishing island civilisation, famously caricatured by the great Myles in *An Béal Bocht*.

One of these Kerry classics by the eponymous *Peig* (Peig Sayers) was a school text for people of my generation, a text that failed to properly represent the liveliness and wit which Peig undoubtedly possessed. It appeared to modern students to be something of a long whine (possibly sowing the seeds for later miserable Irish memoirs) and did not contribute to an enthusiasm for Irish in schools.

There's a sadness, a sentimentality and a wistfulness in some of the poetry and prose of 1916 leader Patrick Pearse, another writer familiar to school children; nevertheless, he has a high place as one of the first of our modern stylists. An tAthair Peadar and Pearse are relatively easy to read; two writers from Connemara would prove to be much more challenging, Pádraic Ó Conaire and Máirtín Ó Cadhain, novelists and short story writers who were familiar with Continental literature. And it showed. Ó Cadhain in particular is linguistically challenging and became famous for a novel *Cré na Cille* situated in a graveyard, all the characters speaking from the bowels of the earth. It was recently made into an award-winning film and it records a richness of language that is no longer the norm in Connemara.

Donegal, too, had writers of note, Seosamh Mac Grianna and his brother Seamas Ó Grianna. (They disagreed about a number of things, including what their surname was!) Both writers have a loyal following to this day. Another Donegal writer Micí Mac Gabhann was to write about his adventures during the Klondyke gold rush.

Drama has been a hit and miss affair. For centuries it didn't exist, at least not in the sense that we understand drama today. Drama requires a theatre, sponsorship to cover costs and overheads; drama requires audiences, actors, even a touring policy. What theatres existed in Ireland mainly served the colonial or the Anglo-Irish classes of the Pale. An Taibhdhearc in Galway and An Damer in Dublin had their short-lived glory days but the National Theatre (The Abbey and The Peacock) has done precious little in recent years to foster and develop Irish-language theatre. Radio drama is also in decline. TV drama has seen some success in Irish with the establishment of TG4, the Irish-language television station, but whether much of it belongs to a discussion on literature or not is a moot point.

Poetry and prose are thriving in spite of the odds and there are at least a dozen writers in each category that belong to world literature. Of course, book production is limited to fairly obvious genres and to list the amount of subjects which find sparse treatment in Irish would take us all day. There is little in the area of Arts and Cinema, Business, Do It Yourself, Gardening, Philosophy, Politics (whether national or international), Mind, Body Spirit (in spite of the fact that books on Celtic Spirituality sell in their tens of thousands throughout the world) and so on and so forth.

Some critics bemoan the gradual spread of a thinned-out language, a pidgin Irish which even 40 years ago would baffle a native speaker. Writing in *Fáinne an Lae* (1.10.1898) the aforementioned Father Peter (An tAthair Peadar Ó Laoghaire) stated: 'If all, or nearly all of our speakers can be made readers of the language it is essentially saved.' He would have to qualify that statement today if he allowed his ears to be assaulted by what's called 'Gaelscoilis', Irish-medium school's argot, a language that sounds like Irish but is often polluted by English syntax and vocabulary and frequently dished out in distorted pronunciation and even in an American accent.

The so-called INNTI generation of the 60s and 70s were mainly poets writing, for the most part, in an acquired language, i.e. Irish was our second language; but we made sure to go back to the living springs of the language in the Gaeltacht before attempting to modernise it or bring it, playfully kicking, into new urban and international contexts.

What frequently arises is the question: should Irish-language literature be compared to Irish literature in English, or indeed to any other literature, or must different criteria be applied since the languages and the literatures evolved along different lines? We'll leave that question aside for some other day. But it does give rise to a number of important questions.

After the Second World War, with the establishment of the monthly magazine *Comhar* and the publishing house Sairséal & Dill, new writers came to the fore, in poetry and prose and there are now more books in print than ever before. Long isolated from the rest of the world and with an unacceptable degree of poverty and emigration, Ireland opened up in the 1960s and a youth culture began to assert itself. This was also an era of civil rights in many places around the world and that movement would be echoed in Ireland, North and South, eventually spilling over into linguistic and cultural rights for Irish speakers who by now were very much a small minority of the total population of the island.

Meanwhile, there was the challenge of establishing an official written standard, one that could be employed by journalists and communicators, as well as educators, and the task of creating new terminology to meet modern needs. This was accomplished, more or less, and every so often we hear of plans to simplify the grammar. There are many websites available which offer sophisticated services to the writer and translator, Irish spellcheckers, downloadable dictionaries, word banks, a thesaurus, a gazeteer of place names and so on. There are rich archives of texts and sounds available for those who are on a quest.

Today, Irish is a core school subject. To matriculate, you need to pass Irish in the Leaving Certificate. This important status is frequently debated however and the situation could easily change in the future. The battle might have to be fought all over again. If Irish were to lose its status as a core subject in schools and if the Gaeltacht areas were to decline any further, the situation would become increasingly artificial and the chances of having a real, vibrant, evolving literature in the future, with a readership to sustain it, would grow dim. But if we can be optimistic for a moment, we have survived well enough thus far in spite of historical vicissitudes.

It seems to me that an opportunity was lost by not developing an Irish-language subtitle culture in the field of films. Perhaps it's not too late to attempt to set this up. Film is the most popular art-form today. Subtitling would have contributed to a reading culture and would have helped to lessen the barriers between the three major dialects and, indeed, made standard forms more acceptable. As things stand, there is still a marked preference for reading material in one's chosen dialect.

What is the average print run of a book of prose and poetry today? Probably 500, though recent fiction with a populist detective slant could easily risk a print run of 2,000. The quality of Irish-language writing is generally high and it's unquestionable that there are a handful of geniuses, no less, whose work should be known around the world. But who is going to invite these writers to festivals abroad when there is such a dearth of translation – even a dearth of information! In this internet age there is no excuse whatsoever for a dearth of information.

Culture Ireland/ Cultúr Éireann was set up to assist Irish artists to promote their work abroad and is open to artists whatever their language or medium. It has helped the staging of

high-profile events abroad. Of course, Irish-language writers don't have literary agents to arrange international readings, tours, lectures, interviews and signings for them. An agent depends on a percentage for his or her promotional and contractual work on behalf of the client and Irish-language writers don't earn enough to warrant the use of an agent. Most of them operate on a loss! But should there not be an agency, nonetheless, to cater, say, for European writers in minority languages? I don't see why not. Writers create a national literature, translators create world literature, as José Saramago once said.

Take a great Albanian novelist such as Ismail Kadare. His work has appeared in over 30 languages. His novels appear in English, as far as I understand, as secondary translations, that is to say they are translated from the French. An agency such as the one I propose could commission translations from Irish into English and the English can then serve as the text to be further translated into French, Albanian and so on. There is nothing wrong with this process. Why wait until we have someone who is perfectly fluent, let us say, in Irish and Albanian?

There are a number of Irish-language publishing houses, notably Cló Iar-Chonnacht which recently took over two other older imprints and their back lists, namely Sairséal Ó Marcaigh with a strong literary list and An Clóchomhar, best known for academic research. Coiscéim seems to be able to produce a book a week! Other publishers such as An Gúm and O'Brien Press specialise in educational material and leisure reading for the young. Futa Fata, Cló Mhaigh Eo, An tSnathaid Mhór and Móinín have produced attractive books for young people, including graphic novels. CDs often accompany picture books for children. And there are books for adult learners as well, with restricted vocabulary and simplified style. The very able publisher Cois Life maintains a website which features pen-pictures of their own writers and an array of others. (This bilingual website should be consulted to find out more information on dozens of contemporary Irish-language writers: <http://coislife.ie>)

Speaking of websites: the Internet age means easy access to everything by everybody. Has this changed what publishers expect from writers, what readers expect from writers, what writers expect from themselves? One writer who refuses to compromise is Pádraig Ó Cíobháin. He is fond of quoting this section from an essay by Calvino:

Overambitious projects may be objectionable in many fields, but not in literature. Literature remains alive only if we set ourselves immeasurable goals, far beyond all hope of achievement. Only if poets and writers set themselves tasks that no one else dares imagine will literature continue to have a function ...

That certainly gives us something to think about. There's lots to think about if we bother to think at all. There is the problem of reviewing, for instance. First of all, everybody knows everybody else in the Irish-speaking world and this means that rapiers are seldom drawn. My essay *An Nuafhilíocht ar Strae*, published in *Gaelscéal*, caused a furore. But it was necessary to shake us out of critical complacency. Secondly, only a tiny proportion of Irish-language books ever get a mention in mainstream English-language media and even Irish-language radio and television have over the years been loathe to deal with books. They are driven by market forces and a public service remit doesn't extend as far as covering new titles in Irish. And now is hardly the time to suggest some kind of sponsorship as the Republic now owes her body and soul to the International Monetary Fund.

The business of literary translation is a very hit and miss affair. It often boils down to the whim or fancy of an individual translator or his or her personal contacts. Rarely are translations actually commissioned as is the norm among dozens and dozens of European

publishing houses. Until such time as we have a handful of literary translators whose full time job is to translate into and out of Irish, the situation is unlikely to improve.

An online Irish-language bookseller www.litriocht.com has remarked that most of its orders are for books of a local nature rather than works of literature – and certainly not international works of literature in translation. Surely this must reflect badly on the way languages and their literatures are taught in our schools and third-level institutions? Does it suggest that students are cramming so much that the thought of a book causes their stomach to churn? What a tragedy!

The cult of the local has also meant that until recently it would have been something of an anomaly to see an Irish-language title dealing with global issues.

The distribution of Irish-language books is an area that has suffered from lack of funding, lack of vision and lack of staff for decades. The state-sponsored distributor, ÁIS, has been in serious decline for decades.

I would like to see more book clubs springing up around the country. One of the difficulties with this idea, and one that immediately comes to mind, is that in all likelihood people who might be interested in a book club, getting together in each other's homes or in libraries, might conceivably have different levels of Irish or different dialectical preferences. (This would not be the case in most Gaeltacht areas). Do we need more bilingual books with parallel text to solve this problem so that a reader unsure of a phrase or a word could easily glance at the opposite page?

So-called minority literatures should not face their challenges alone. The raising of universal consciousness on the issue of writing in smaller languages must be a strategy shared, worked out and executed among all the relevant players. Just as biodiversity is vital for the future of the living environment and ourselves, so too the health of minority literatures affects us all.

Any good news? Recently, inspired by the Booker antics across the water and Ireland's IMPAC awards, there is now an Irish-language Book of the Year event and shortlisted books receive more publicity than usual, but the follow up to the optics is weak.

A number of writers, mostly poets it must be said, such as Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Gearóid Mac Lochlainn, Cathal Ó Searcaigh and myself have been given the opportunity of reading on the international circuit. Poets who meet up at such festivals as Struga in Macedonia, Vilenica in Slovenia or Kritya in India often strike up a working relationship with other poets which can result in translating each other's work. If English is the common denominator well and good. I have translated Kristiina Ehin into Irish without knowing Estonian, I have translated Nikola Madzirov into Irish without knowing Macedonian and K. Satchidanandan without knowing Malayalam but I can stand by my versions and I hope, in a very small way, that they add some little colour to the Irish-language literary scene. Only pathological purists fear cross-fertilization. I know many Irish-language writers who have never been invited to a literary festival abroad. We need to set things in motion!

An important scheme to help up and coming writers is a tutoring programme called *Scéim na nOidí*. What this means is that an aspiring writer can apprentice himself/herself to an established writer for a year. A year is more than enough as one wouldn't want a young voice to be muffled or over-influenced by a senior or more experienced writer but the advantages of the scheme are obvious. The senior writer acts, in a way, like an editor, suggesting ways in which a manuscript might be improved or urging the apprentice to experiment with different approaches. It is a situation that must be handled delicately. Success is not automatically ensured. But it's something. There is also the long-running Writers in Schools scheme administered by Poetry Ireland/ Éigse Éireann which is open to writers in both languages.

Books in Irish are rarely seen in bookshop windows. Window space is frequently bought by London-based publishers and other big players and I don't think we are going to stage or win any battles with them. We must rely on one or two small specialist bookshops and on electronic shopping from now on.

If this paper is short on facts, figures and statistics there is a reason: sales figures and market analysis are difficult if not impossible to obtain. I hope we're not hiding anything too unpleasant to know.

To look no further than the literatures of the Celtic nations, clearly no discussion can be had on literature or literature in translation without taking a sober look at the state of the languages which is as follows according to Unesco's *Atlas of World Languages in Danger* (December 2010):

Cymraeg/Welsh: Vulnerable (611,000)

Gaeilge/Irish: Definitely endangered (80,000 speakers)

Gàidhlig/Scottish: Definitely endangered (58,652 speakers)

Brezhoneg/Breton: Severely endangered (200,000 speakers)

Gaelg/Manx: Critically endangered (revitalised) (1,689 speakers)

Kernewek/Cornish: Critically endangered (revitalised) (2000 speakers)

Anne Marie Connolly

The Poetry Pamphlet in Scotland

Poetry is the uisge beatha of words-intoxicating, a stimulant, addictive, something to savour and collect and occasionally heading straight for the gutter. No such fate for poetry in Scotland where the flourishing of both the written and the spoken word is evident. With the raw immediacy of poteen a pamphlet has historically caught the passing mood, political nuance, fervent cause. The current world of word-processing facilitates this but many small independent presses with their own flavour and identity are closer to a fine single malt – enduring and distinctive, displaying the maturity of thought which reflects the abiding truths and concerns of us all.

The Gaelic expression for an author becoming publicly known is *tháinig cló air*-print came upon him. Seamus Heaney has admitted that ‘for many of the best poets now writing it was not only the first means of distribution but the first ratification of their art.’(1) Print first came upon him in a self-stapled pamphlet of eleven poems distributed during the early years of the Belfast International Festival which began at Queen’s University in 1963.

At Queen’s Hugh MacDiarmid gave a reading of his poems in Scots enthralling a very receptive audience, many of whom were attuned to the strong Scottish influence in their own local accent and idiom. MacDiarmid at seventy was a renowned, controversial and highly influential poet among a thriving ‘renaissance’ group of Scottish writers all of whom benefitted from the dedicated work of discerning and democratic publishers like Duncan Glen (1933-2008) the founder of Akros magazine. Under the Akros imprint in 1966 he produced the first of many pamphlets in his prolific career. It was with delight that I lucky-dipped into the first of the green boxes which contain the special archive of pamphlets in the Scottish Poetry Library and found Duncan Glen’s own “This is not a can of beans-a prospect from the window of a small-press publisher” (1999) in which he castigates the mentality of profit, turn-over and lack of risk-taking which underpins the large established firms.

Callum Macdonald MBE was another of those dedicated, independent publishers. He had taken over the production of Lines Review magazine a decade previously and so began a long and distinguished career as a printer-publisher who contributed to an invaluable legacy of Scottish culture. He had already been working with many of the same talented men (a notable exclusiveness) as both poets and editors-Hugh MacDiarmid, Sidney Goodsir Smith, Norman MacCaig, Iain Crichton Smith and Sorley MacLean. Many forged life-long friendships and he, through Macdonald Publishers and Printers, ensured that their writing was widely available to all.

Scotland had a well-established tradition of pamphlet publishing but it was through the foresight, imagination and tireless efforts of Tessa Ransford OBE that the Scottish Poetry Library was opened in 1984. She had felt somewhat isolated in her own writing practice and realised that other poets also needed an opportunity to meet regularly to share, discuss and support one another in their work so in 1981 she inaugurated the School of Poets. A dozen like-minded men and women began this stimulating and effective group which still flourishes at the SPL, giving both new and experienced poets the opportunity to gather in a welcoming place and explore their work in a supportive, honest, non-competitive atmosphere. No one teaches and everybody learns. For many it has been the launching pad towards publication.

Soon after its instigation Tessa Ransford disseminated her ideas regarding a poetry library. Serious interest was aroused and a dedicated Scottish Poetry Library Association of enthusiasts and committed workers was formed. This eventually led to the opening of the SPL in the former packing-room of Oliver and Boyd, a respected Edinburgh publishers since

the eighteenth century. It was toasted in by 300 people who braved the blizzard of a January night in 1984.

Prior to the establishment of the library there was no specialised place which, as she explained, was 'central and accessible to everyone; a comprehensive collection of Scots, Gaelic and English verse available both for borrowing, including borrowing by post, and a meeting place for those who write and read poetry...a shop window and order point for the purchase of books and especially to promote small press poetry publications.'(2) This would include the most recent contemporary work.

As part of the library's on-going and wide-ranging remit the most definitive collection of pamphlets in all the languages of Scotland was undertaken and it is currently the fastest growing collection in the whole of the library. The pamphlets are stored in open-access boxes arranged in the same sequence as the books and many copies are also available for borrowing. The library has a unique cataloguing system, INSPIRE (INternational and Scottish Poetry Information REsource)(6). It is an on-line public access catalogue and subject indexing system developed from 1987 onwards which, since 1991, identifies a specific subject in any of the collected works and makes them available for study, memory-jogging, sheer pleasure.

Tessa Ransford had married Callum Macdonald three years after the death in 1986 of his first wife, Winnie. Sadly he died in 1999 just before the opening of the custom-designed, award-winning building that now houses the library. She decided to do something fitting to honour her husband's memory so an award for publishers of poetry pamphlets was established 'to recognise publishing skill and effort; to validate the practice of poetry publication in pamphlet form and to encourage the preservation of printed material of this kind in the national collection.'(3) Friends and colleagues offered support and invaluable advice and Lady Marks gave generous funding through the Michael Marks Charitable Trust. Entries for the first Callum Macdonald Memorial award were invited for pamphlets produced during 2001. The silver Callum Macdonald Quaich and £500:00 would be awarded annually in May, the month of his birth.

The award, administered by the National Library of Scotland, generated an excellent response with thirty entries in the first year. One of those shortlisted was Hazel Buchan Cameron who subsequently won the award jointly with Duncan Glen in 2008 for 'The Currying Shop' (Imago Media) and 'Edinburgh Poems' (Akros) respectively. She had realised that her poetry was not going to reach a wide range of readers through a mainstream publisher so, as she had the technical ability and confidence, she published it herself. The CMMA is open to self-published work and attracts many such entrants, among them Pauline Prior-Pitt who was the winner in 2006 for her aesthetic and editorial achievements as well as for her poetry.

Hazel Buchan Cameron has worked alongside Tessa Ransford since meeting her through the inaugural award and has been indefatigable in her work via the website www.scottish-pamphlet-poetry.com. Through it Scottish poets and small publishers are promoted and their work sold. She has also been indispensable in helping to run the successful poetry pamphlet fairs which began at Christmas 2002 in the National Library of Scotland. Alan Gay and Graeme Hawley also played a large part in organising these events. Alan Gay's deeply moving pamphlet 'The boy who came ashore' was produced by Dreadful Night Press, a small publisher which is no longer active. Graeme Hawley is an award-winning performance poet and librarian who brings a touch of ruthless Slam-like timing to the readings at these events! Pamphlet fairs were also held for several years at the StAnza poetry festival in St. Andrews and at the Edinburgh International Book festival until 2010.

The beauty of the CMMA is that it has encouraged small-press publishers to submit alongside some of the longer established names. Mariscat Press was founded in 1982 in

Glasgow by Hamish Whyte and Kevin McCarra to publish Glaswegian versions of Catullus by David Neilson. Over fifty books and pamphlets have been produced in the intervening period. James McGonigal's long poem in English, Scots and Irish Gaelic entitled *Passage/An Pasáiste* (Mariscat 2004) is a marvellous example of the rich linguistic diversity in Scotland. Hamish Whyte continued a pamphlet-only enterprise after Kevin McCarra left in 1997. Having been the runner-up on two previous occasions he received the Callum Macdonald Quaich and a cheque for £750 in 2011 for his pamphlet 'Figure in a landscape' by Anna Crowe.

At the award ceremony in the Scottish National Library she received a generous new prize supported by the sponsors, the Michael Marks Charitable Trust. She spent two weeks in July 2011 as the Michael Marks Poet in Residence at Harvard University's summer school in Greece alongside the winner of a similar award for the whole of the UK, set up by Lady Marks in 2009. By administering this new award The Wordsworth Trust and the British Library in association with the Times Literary Supplement have raised the profile of poetry pamphlets throughout the rest of the UK and were no doubt inspired by the success of the Callum Macdonald Memorial Award in Scotland which Lady Marks has so generously supported since 2001. Indeed it was a cheque for £60,000 from the Michael Marks Charitable Trust in 1998 which helped to ensure the completion of the new SPL the following year.

Helena Nelson of Happenstance Press is another influential pamphlet publisher. She won the Michael Marks Publishers' Award in 2010. Ali Smith, who chaired the panel of judges, said that pamphlets are 'a place where spontaneity, imagination and design come together to produce something completely fresh and lasting.'⁽⁴⁾ This has been a hallmark of the press since it started in 2005. 'Sphinx' is the reviewing side of Happenstance. Originally in pamphlet form it is now down-loadable on line. Recently there have been three different reviewers for each chap-book and they vary considerably in their comments. It is a neat and honest way to compare and contrast the prolific output which enlivens the current poetry scene and demonstrates the subjectivity which is inevitable in the appreciation of any art form.

James Robertson started Kettillonia in 1999. He had written a sequence of poems about Alfred Hitchcock and had been waiting for some time to have it published so, in order to coincide with the imminent centenary of Hitchcock's birth, he decided to publish it himself. This is of course one of the main advantages of small press and self publication-the lower cost, the time-scale, the editorial freedom. The press lives up to its avowed aim of publishing 'original, adventurous, neglected and rare writing.' A poem in 'Hem and Heid' speaks of the heron who has 'his yella ee on somethin/That nae ither craitur sees' – a wonderful metaphor for the poet.

Colin Will, poet and publisher, was a member of the board of the Scottish Poetry Library for ten years, chairing it for four. His publishing house, Calder Wood Press, was joint runner-up for the CMMA in 2009 with 'Sky blue notebook from the Pyrenees' by Jayne Wilding. David Purdie's 'The Gododhin-A version in Scots of Aneirin's Y Gododdin' was originally transcribed in the Old Welsh tongue and is a fine example of scholarship and love of Scots combining to produce a major translation in a compact, readily accessible form published by a small, unsubsidised press.

The 2009 winner, Hugh McMillan's beautifully crafted and illustrated 'Postcards from the Hedge,' was published by Hugh Bryden of Roncadora press. Founded in 2005 Hugh Bryden, poet and artist, excels in very distinctive linocut and dry-print. Perjinx press, shortlisted twice, is run by Dorothy Lawrenson and specializes in unusual handmade paper and hand-sewn bindings. New Voices Press is the lively publishing arm of The Federation of Writers (Scotland) and 'A Natural Curiosity' set in Glasgow University's Anatomy Museum is by A.C. Clarke, a former Makar of the Federation. It was shortlisted for this year's award. Red

Squirrel Press was on the short-list in 2010 with 'Skirlags' by Nalini Paul . The joint winners that year were Hansel Co-operative Press (Christine de Luca) with 'Arc'O Mons,' a Shetlandic translation of Lorca by Christie Williamson and Leonard McDermid's 'And for that Minute' from Stichill Marigold Press, a hand-set letterpress pamphlet.

Many more talented people involved in the Scottish pamphlet poetry world have not been mentioned here. Their work continues to be included in the leaf-green(7) boxes at the Scottish Poetry Library – an inspired treasure-trove of imagination, skill, creativity and sheer determination waiting to be seen and heard.

My thanks to Tessa Ransford for her invaluable and generous assistance.

All presses mentioned above have their own websites.

www.scottish-pamphlet-poetry.com is a comprehensive site for accessing information regarding poets and presses.

(1) Publicity leaflet for Michael Marks Awards for Poetry Pamphlets 2012

(2) & (3) Scottish Pamphlet Poetry website.

(4) www.bl.uk/poetrypamphlets/award 2010 archive

(5) "Hem and Heid" by James Robertson – ISBN 978-1-902944-26-5

(6) Catalogue and Index-Periodical of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Cataloguing and Indexing Group

Issue 156 pages 13-17 inc. by Julie Johnstone, Librarian SPL

(7) The SPL motto is "By leaves we live" Patrick Geddes, town-planner, ecologist, educator.

Wendy Holborow

Tegwen Lewis: Neglected Celtic Poet (1915 – 1988)

When I was co-editor of *Poetry Greece* in the early years of this century, a regular feature of the magazine was 'Poets from the Past,' invariably a deceased Greek poet, one we did not want forgotten as time passed.

Now back in my homeland, I return to the poetry of Tegwen Lewis, which I first read shortly after her death in 1988, and in this essay would like to share the wonderful language and images of this neglected poet, a woman who won twenty nine bardic chairs and three crowns in *Eisteddfodau* across Wales.

Born on a hill farm overlooking Llanharan, Lewis spent all her life in this area of Wales where she was well-loved and respected for her poetry and Celtic values, so much so that a clock and plaque have been erected in her memory. Although she was fluent in Welsh, she always composed in English which prevented her from competing in the National *Eisteddfodau*, and in an interview in 1958 she said, 'Nobody will want to read about me, I've not done anything interesting.' Yet she was regarded at the time as Wales' most promising poet, lauded by the likes of A G Prys-Jones, Wil Ifan and Huw Menai and was mentored by the writer and anarchist, Ethel Mannin.

She was the first woman in seventy three years to win the chair at the Lampeter *Eisteddfod* and when her nom-de-plume was called, she rose to her feet but was told to sit down by the people around her, not expecting that a woman would win. She was writing at a time when there was little scope for women poets to be published; few magazines and competitions apart from the *Eisteddfodau*. With notable exceptions, it was not easy for women to find publishers at that time of male elitism in the genre. But things were changing; where literary tradition had seen women as passive objects – the subject matter of poetry, now women were becoming active participants and in 1955 Lewis had her first poetry book published, *A Singing Mountain Farm*. A G Prys-Jones said of her first collection: 'These collected poems bring us to the unhurried rhythms of nature's seasonal rise and fall, the sounds, sights and movement in brushwood, meadowland and bracken, and the warm, homely atmosphere of the farmhouse.' There was, unfortunately, a long gap between her first and last collection, *Across the Seasons* (1986) and it was said that Lewis was very careless with her poems; giving them to friends, leaving them in forgotten places, and writing them on scraps of paper which have become lost over time. There is no record of which poems won any of the competitions she entered. I have collated 115 of her poems thus far, 68 from the two collections, others that had been published in the *Western Mail* in the 1950s the rest from a book written after her death by David Francis and Terry Witts.

It was said of her that she could find poetry in a lump of coal and her imagery is often striking in its lively unexpectedness as in her poem 'Ritual'.

The shredded crumbs
Frosted white along the wall
Brought forth the birds.....

And all things waited
For the long blue silence of falling snow.

She is most often a songstress of the countryside, reflecting her deep love of Welsh farmhouse life, evoking her happy childhood memories. Her work is full of minutiae and

even when her theme is private 'of the hearth' she brings to it a hushed reverence, as in 'Poverty 2', a long poem written for a competition, using derangement to great effect with 'The wireless purrs along the hearth/And my cat sleeps, / Relaxed in a fire of sleep.' And further in the poem 'There is no one at the door. /Expectancy dwindled long ago...But my cat blinks a golden smile/And the anchor is secure again.'

To read these poems is to enter a world of rich language with themes we can all identify with. Lewis does not overtly show emotion but subtly evokes it in the reader. Her nature vignettes are full of delicate feeling, the nascence of the seasons where we find the coalescence of the natural world in all its clarity and thought provoking essence, for instance in 'Cameo' we are with Lewis in that farmyard where 'I will fill my script/With the day's unfolding. /The scratching hens / Within the yard, /Their jiggling combs/ Filled scarlet in the silver light.' Also in 'Looking Forward' when 'Snug in sunshine/ We probed the heritage/ Of winter's brusque intent, / Turning the sacred soil.' Her vision is broader than this, though, with hints and glimpses of larger things going on behind the scenes as she has a social overview and writes of the dangerous and miserable lives of the old miner-veterans of the valley seared with 'night-blue scars' who come out 'like solitary bees on unexpected noons'. Her poems ranged from a sick child, the local surgery, the Llandow air disaster of 1950, the visit of a fair and a gypsy caravan: 'And the Yellow caravan/Is one pale star/Asleep upon the mountain there.'

Lewis wrote a lot about the fauna of her world; the rams, bulls and lambs of the farm and the birds of the wild; the robin, 'alien seagulls', partridge and blackbirds and when savouring the scent of a jugged hair she laments 'But the woods are listening/And the warm October shadows wait in vain/For the flicker of awareness/And the swift leap of wild, unhampered grace.' Dogs appear, past and present, not separated by time, but braided seamlessly without pretentiousness or preciousness as in 'January Noon' when 'Curved in idleness,/ The old dog lay - /A rounded cushion of inertia/Along the hearth's glow.' And in 'Bob' where she says

If there be those who mock
Love for a dear and wordless friend,
They are the poorer for two watching amber eyes
And the riotous upheaval of a safe returning home.

Many of her poems end with a returning home, especially those she wrote about going into nearby towns, travelling on steam trains and sometimes visiting places further afield, yet these poems do not do her as much justice as her 'home and hearth' poems and the poems of the natural world. They seem awkward and jagged, 'Impersonal, cold, /Disarranging hair, / Irritation in the bleak discomfort' in 'A Day in Town'. However, the fluency returns at the end of the poems where she is returning home, 'The old routine waiting for us there/ Of hearth and home.' This gives a strong indication of how important home and her Celtic roots were to Tegwen Lewis.

Omar Sabbagh

The Headiness, The Heaviness Of Womanhood

Zoë Brigley, *Conquest* (Bloodaxe Books, 2012)

*'I train to the trellis what once was wrecked,
and await the springtime of candling plants.'*
'Walls Have Ears'

This superb collection opens on a heady, dizzying note, which is at the same time atoned by the formal choices made. Out of the shifting and sly juxtaposition of subjects and pronouns in 'My Last Rochester' – 'She, her, you, him –' we are faced with experience in medias res, what Sir Frank Kermode called a 'middleness,' and what one of the founders of modernism, Ford Madox Ford, called an 'affair.' The (disenchanted) last line of this opening poem reads 'It was never you that she wanted,' thereby suggesting what this poem, as a whole, effects, namely a corrective to an hackneyed and male portrayal of femininity. As opposed to the idea of some kind of 'empty signifier', where a woman is what whatever bad infinity is desired of her, we have in this last sentence a tonic; not to mention the assertiveness of lines in the blunt indicative like, 'She's writing after so long, sensible or not. / She's not asking for anything, not ever.' Another rewriting of masculine, skewed views of femininity, is offered by the formal pattern, which is by turns synchronic/contrapuntal and diachronic, of the first and third verses, and the second and fourth verses, corresponding – leading to the pursuant development of the last two verses. When Brigley writes, 'you both made your way to the hotel in silence...' what is evoked is not only intimacy, but also her ability to stand outside of herself, to *not be* a victim of her experience, but its shaper, both within and without the poetic space.

After this heady opening, the dramatization of texture, the lit contrariety and drama of womanhood, is immediately laid before us. In 'Behind the Looking Glass,' Brigley begins with, 'She tries not to remember the things he did to her,' and then half way through the poem, like a kind of Proustian *memoire involontaire*, she double-crosses herself with:

'... Certain things do come back to her.
How on the way home from the pub, her legs
collapsed beneath her. How she was so light
that he carried her home, not for love's sake,
but to turn her over and over in his hands.'

Or on the next page, in 'The Bell Confessing,' a victory, a 'conquest' which *is not* quite a victory or conquest (as opposed to that masculine repression subverted in the second part of the collection), is adverted to. As against, the 'nest of pigeons / ...murmuring never-told secrets:'

'I recall my own riddles: the unspoken truth
of you and I, our silent closeness that is for me
a sweet, blank victory...'

Being a riddle to herself, using, perhaps, the outer world as a peripatetic foil for the tension of her with her-self, is lived out in the last two lines of the last poem of the opening section of the collection ('The Adventuress'): 'Beneath my dress is a ladder of desire, / that I climb tonight and each night after that.' It's a bit like prayer, say: in that any serious theologian

will tell you that, the relation being incommensurate, the only sensible way to understand prayer is to say that God prays ‘through’ you, or that contrition and forgiveness are mutually immanent, two sides of the same coin. Brigley’s persona frames her desire as a tension of self with it-self, and the (vertiginous) layers of the latter’s symbolization.

Much later in the collection, echoing Nabokov’s famous opening couplet to *Pale Fire* (‘I was the shadow of the waxwing slain / By the false azure in the windowpane...’) Brigley bodies forth the drama of womanhood as follows: ‘Dressed in finch’s gold, I look to the window / but it reflects back only the darkening garden: / the honey of all my appetites wrecked.’ Indeed this juxtaposition of ‘wreck’ and ‘garden’ (what we *might* view as subjective and objective views on same person or state) is, as earlier with ‘sea’ and ‘journey’ and ‘nunn-ish’ images, another formal choice of Brigley’s. Iconic images such as these are made to dovetail, from one poem to the next, strategically, suggesting the unity of executive authority throughout the collection, as opposed to some skewed view of femininity as distention or dispersal. (Indeed, there are continuous and overt references to the Brontë’s in this opening section – which is to say, icons of female *auctoritas*.) A couple of examples of this ‘dovetailing’, this simultaneous continuity and discontinuity, will put into relief another thematic and formal motif.

At the end of ‘Passage,’ Brigley’s persona compares herself, someone who’s visibly gained by risk and experience, to a nun, ‘those women who are never to sail out of harbor.’ On the next page, the (sub)title rings out: ‘*The Nun in the Pear Tree Bower*.’ Or, later, from the end of ‘Pennsylvania Winter,’ to the opening of ‘All of which are American dreams,’

‘Something is growing, blossoming with frost in every cell:
the snow drifts up to the window now and is still fattening.’

‘American dreams are ill-fitting shoes that fatten
your heel to a blister...’

Again, the paradox and double-coded-ness of snow ‘fattening’ and the self-lacerating ‘dreams’ which fatten ‘your heel to a blister.’ Again, that is, disenchantment. But, as in the epigraph quote to this review, that first citation above highlights a formal story being told by such reflexive positioning of images. Could the ‘snow’ which ‘fattens’, that fertile chill, be a metaphor for the way poetry transfigures sense experience into ‘meta-physical’ insight? At the end of ‘The Mandrake Baby,’ at the *death* of the poem, Brigley writes: ‘My baby still waxes onscreen, lunar and golden, / a tiny moon in my womb too barren to be born.’ One is tempted to think of Donne’s ‘Death, thou shalt die!’ Which is to say the formal election of beginnings and endings thematize the poetic act of story-telling or configuration in general: or, to invoke Kermode again, the ‘sense of an ending.’ Indeed, a lover and cohort of the Anaïs Nin whose quoted words open the collection, Henry Miller, begins his groundbreaking work, *The Tropic of Cancer* by rhapsodizing over the *death* of a sickly-genteel culture. To begin something, something must have ended.

The ineffability of creation, whether of life or of poetry, is lived out in the penultimate and ultimate stanzas of the poem, ‘Daughter.’ Suggestions of the furtiveness and uncanniness of creativity, as in Ted Hughes’s ‘The Thought-Fox,’ are stirred when we read:

‘Something black is crossing the hillside now:
a dark orb on the white wing of a butterfly,
a beaded owl eye nesting in creamy feathers,
a black beetle hunting on the face of the clock.’

This silent litany, or litany of silence, is mirrored in the dying fall: ‘She’s inside me somewhere / in a place I can’t reach, like seabeds where no sound has been.’ This is the

motto of a poet as well as a potential mother. And suggestive too of what Lacan dubbed ‘feminine *jouissance*’ as opposed to ‘phallic *jouissance*.’ The former relates to the latter as larynx to empirical word, as *condition* of all presence without *being* any extant presence itself. So, to the ‘sea’ (ancient motif of the feminine), the unseen depths compound (‘bed’); un-reachable, ‘no sound’ is thus the echolalia beyond and beyond her (here) re-sounding-ness and resonance. Daughter is more woman than woman and Mother. *And that very abyssal relation* or connective intimates the vertigo, whether happy or sad, of the feminine to her-self – thankfully in her own eyes.

The second section of the collection, eponymously titled, ‘Conquest,’ aims in different ways to ironise and subvert the gung-ho and acquisitive/aggressive masculine. The last four lines of both (same-length) stanzas of the piece ‘Atlas-eating,’ run as follows:

‘... The maps of harbours,
with their sea snakes and turtles, are nothing
compared to creatures gathered onshore:
the squat, warted toad of the colony.’

‘Out of the alchemy of colony cells,
white and tubercular grow the New World men.
Parasitic, they swell from soil to burst:
And shriek like mandrakes torn out of the earth.’

Another dualism is suggested here. Much like the (modernist) argument of Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, we have a critique here of repression: the outwards repression, ‘conquest’ of native lands is both mirror and product of the (puritanical/ rootless) repression of the ‘nature’ or ‘natural’ (matrix) side of the self. One thinks, in this context of Eliot’s notion of ‘dissociation of sensibility.’

And so, as opposed to (‘Arches’) ‘the *Mayflower* men / [who] build their settlement: a rancid poultice that infects the land,’ we have (‘All of which are American dreams’) the ‘dream, like you and me, of one slow, inevitable touch.’ Perhaps that ‘inevitable touch’ is the touch of God. For the final poem of this second section, ‘The Blue Rose’ gives us a list, a Babel of different languages’ words for ‘rose,’ and in the next verse, again, a list and Babel of (imaginary or not) names of kinds of rose. The ‘blue rose of forgetfulness,’ in this poem dedicated to Brigley’s passed paternal grandfather, is like, to repeat, the absence that is requisite and that in-forms what’s present in the world, things like this redolent collection.

In the last of the three sections, romantically titled, ‘The Lady and The Unicorn’, we have, again, images of disenchantment amidst the more expected spells of fantasy. The sequence of poems in this closing section were written after Brigely’s visit to the Parisian Musée de Cluny, and the six tapestries on display there: five to represent the senses and the sixth and last one titled, ‘*A mon seul désir*’. One assumes that that which is beyond (meta) the fives senses, that which is desired after the satiation of all physical desire, is God, or, we might say, as opposed to different refractions of concrete loves, a final ‘participation’ of Love. (This is an ancient idealist motif, appearing in Plato’s *Symposium*, and revived in the twentieth-century in Ford’s *The Good Soldier*, Greene’s *The End of The Affair* and Durrell’s *The Alexandria Quartet*.)

And so: the minuet of disenchantment and fantasy, as in, say, the counterpointing of (‘The face in the Mirror’): ‘The spell of his eye breaks when his ego flowers / to nothing, so he is only a man in the garden;’ with (‘Full Moon, Full Bloom’), ‘All night, he is a flaming victory flag, a lit window / in the dark, where nothing can disturb the sweetness / of my long-ago dreams, the desire of my budding years.’ Perhaps that final image is a return to the opening heady gambits of the collection, and, more minutely, a return to or reconfiguration of a father figure out of a lover (God?) (I find Brigley far more tender (and clearly less troubled) than

Plath, say; yet in no way less intelligent, incisive or intense: merely more understanding of the surrounding world. As author, she has and deploys more pardons.)

And yet, then again, as if to extend the heavy drama of womanhood, on the next page we read, quite conclusively, of 'how women have always been outed, / broken, dissected, grafted, transplanted,' all of which results in [her] 'crumbling orchard walls' ('Don't Touch' – fate, then, of a female Adonis.) She leaves us, thus, alive, wiser, but un-tenanted (the last poem of the collection is titled, 'Home From Home').