

BRAY ARTS JOURNAL

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Between Worlds by Catherine O'Donoghue

Somehow,
You are between worlds.
Just as the children
Choo-chooing and the adults
Trying to read are-
Not quite leaving
The departure behind,
Nor reaching
The destination.

Sea-full, up on a cliff edge
Drinking in the coast.
Savouring the last glass,
As the late autumn sun
Squints at your eyes
And tickles your skin.

Dogs run free
Below you,
Toying with waves
As summer fades out.
Your body soaking in
The very last of it.

Beyond the Window
coven of crows
medley of magpies
colonise
my bird feeders
tap suet balls, seeds
dip into water container

two doves balance on the rim
symbol of peace
home robins, capable
hedge sparrows
take turns pecking crusts
taken from my sister's table

honey and bumble bees
hum, sip nectar
on fuschia flowers, purple hebe
I settle at our father's desk
under the window
feel him close
wish as always
that I had known him.

Dalkey Tram by Michael Gordon

Maurice tightened the belt on his raincoat as the Number 8 tram squealed to a stop. He hurried from his shelter in Clery's doorway and trudged up the tram stairs. The backs of his legs ached. He slumped into a window seat, and loosened his collar and tie. Clery's had been bedlam all day. December the eighth was always like that. He had never sold so many hats and gloves. Rationing was well and truly over.

At College Green he took his hat and newspaper off the seat beside him to let a heavy set lady sit down. She was laden with parcels. He envied her. He and Mary had no children and he dreaded the loneliness of Christmas morning.

The tram moved steadily along the Merrion Road heading for Dalkey. It was full, but then it always was, this close to Christmas.

It was still raining and the lights on Howth Head were barely visible through the fogged up windows as he peered out through the darkness. The shops in Blackrock were brightly lit and the street was busy with shoppers. Tonight was his Sodality night but he didn't think he would have the energy for it. He would have to rush his tea. The heavy traffic forced the tram to move slowly through Dun Laoghaire. Most of the shops were still open and gaily decorated.

One shop caught his eye; the Singer Sewing Machine shop. It was closed but the window was brightly lit. It contained a nativity scene; a crib surrounded by angels and shepherds. His eyes narrowed and he looked more closely. He had to wipe the condensation from the window with his sleeve to see properly. He could not believe it. There was no baby in the crib. But there was a sewing machine in it; a Singer Sewing Machine.

"Do you see that?" He turned to the woman beside him.

"What?"

"There in the crib; a sewing machine instead of a baby."

"No." She tried to look over his shoulder to where he pointed, but the tram had started to move.

"Are you sure," she asked him?"

"Yeah, I saw it clearly. I can't believe it."

"But that's awful," she said, "that's blasphemy."

"You're right," he said, "they shouldn't get away with it. I won't let them get away with it."

His wife met him at the door. Are you all right dear? You look upset."

"Upset! I'm furious. You won't believe what I saw on the way home."

"But that's terrible," she said, "that can't be right."
"It's not," he said, "and they won't get away with it."

Mary sat and watched him as he hurried through his tea. Two slices of cold ham, a tomato and some bread. Mary wasn't the best of cooks. What did she do all day? He wished she would do something to brighten up the house. He had inherited it from his father and it still had all his father's old fashioned dark furniture. Gulping down the last of his tea, he said, "I'm off to the Sodality."

"Oh, do you have to go tonight?" she said. "You look tired. I thought we might go to the pictures."

"Sorry, but we're doing the parcels."

"But, surely someone else can do them. You do them every year."

"I know, but people depend on them."

"Then you'll be late again?"

"I suppose. But I'll do my best. I want to take up this sewing machine thing in Dun Laoghaire as well."

The Sodality meeting was held in the parish priest's house. Fourteen men sat around a large mahogany dining room table. Before the meeting started, Maurice related what he had witnessed earlier that evening.

Anger ripped through the room. "That is unbridled greed," said one.

"They're taking Christ straight out of Christmas," shouted another.

"We should not be fussing over this," said a third, "the Singers are Jews. They don't believe in Christmas."

"Well, they can't trample all over our religion."

"I think we should burn them out," shouted one man.

The Prefect rapped on the table. "Gentlemen, gentlemen, please calm down. We will discuss it. But, surely we should involve Father Pat."

"He's away until Thursday. I think we should smash the shop window tonight."

Everyone had an opinion, some more violent than others but eventually the Prefect regained control and conducted an orderly discussion. Six of them would meet in the morning and travel by tram to Dun Laoghaire to lodge a formal protest with the shop manager. Maurice would be their spokesman. Even though he would be late for work on one of his busiest days, he insisted on going. They got off the tram at the bottom of George's Street and strode determinedly to the shop.

"There it is," said Maurice, pointing to the sewing machine at the centre of the display. "C'mon, men," and they marched into the shop.

"We're here to see the manager," Maurice said loudly to the startled young man behind the counter.

"Well, I'm the manager," he said, "how can I help you gentlemen?"

"You should be ashamed of yourself," one of the men shouted.

"What?" asked the manager.

"Be quiet, George," said Maurice. Then, turning to the manager he said, "We're a delegation from the Men's Sodality in Dalkey. But we also represent the concerned citizens of Dun Laoghaire and surrounding parishes."

"Fair enough," the manager said, "but how can I help you?"

"We're here to protest at your window display; we think it's disgraceful."

"Our window display? I don't understand."

"Oh, don't play the innocent with us," shouted George.

Maurice said, "we are offended by your using a sewing machine in the crib instead of a baby."

"What?"

"You heard," shouted George; "take it out, or we'll take it out for you."

"Gentlemen, please. Come out the front. Show me what you mean."

They all trooped out onto the footpath and looked at the window display.

"There," said Maurice, "the sewing machine in the crib."

"That's not a crib," said the manager; "that's Aladdin's cave."

"Oh!" said Maurice.

"Oh!" said George.

"Oh!" said the other four men.



Michael O'Reilly

Starlight Flights by Anthony Uhlemann

Some would call it loneliness
and some would name it flight; *slightly bonkers*
some would mutter snidely.
All of them could well be right.
She didn't name them first of course
or their exact locations;
others introduced them to her,
when she was young,
star by star by star. With each
name came a dream. Simple reveries;
narratives not startling or strange.
Markers for dreams they became.
She thought that this would fix them. It didn't.
They moved and so did she; ties tightened.
In her cycle as it waned they brightened
and as she strengthened they almost died.
Creator and created meshed.
Blessed with marriage, children, small woes,
ordinary roads and bearable sorrows
the liking to be beneath them never
weakened
inside, not her head, heart, or soul
but in another place
she discovered, strangely, as her own.
Alone she would stop and stare into that
clotted sky
then work her way across it star by star;
name by name; dream by dream.
The why of it never meaning
as much as the doing; that doing
aligned with a gift unyielding and clean.

Sight and grasp became indistinct
as place and time co-mixed.
That energy she gave them came back
as kindness and anxiety from others.
Friends and family rushed at odd hours
to street, garden, stranger's yard
where she, sometimes naked often ill attired;
never rambling, never beyond control,
walked her own comfortable road solo.
Content in naming star as dream; letting
nothing, not distance, time, or attitude,
sully or demean.

Maple and Me by Nuala O'Connell

I was clearing out the attic when I spotted the brochure advertising my childhood home - the photograph captured *my* tree in full bloom. I remembered the day Daddy planted that tree saying "it's a Japanese Maple tree and when it's fully grown you'll be fully grown too!"

That was the same day we went into the dark, grey building and Daddy sat beside me in the low chair. A cross looking woman spoke to me. Suddenly, Daddy's gone and I'm left alone with the cross woman and a room full of strange children. My crying started then. When my outside crying stopped, my inside crying began.

I remember one day, the Principal gave us a talk. She said fat children are lazy. I am fat. She must be talking about me, I thought, I am fat and I am lazy. I am fat and I am lazy!

I loved lunchtime - I was the fastest in the yard! Then a girl in my class says that I'm poison. After that, none of them would play with me. Dad said she was jealous. But nobody could be jealous of me.

Mammy cried a lot. I stayed at home helping her. I couldn't keep up at school. I was stupid anyway. The teacher was cross. Every day I got a slap with the bamboo. The teacher made a passageway for me to go up. But I wouldn't cry for her. I stopped doing my homework. Slap! Slap! Slap! Dad says the teacher needs a rub of the relic. I asked "what's that?" and he winks at Mum and she says she is frustrated and when I asked what that is, she says it's for grown ups who aren't married. I wished *someone* would marry her. I asked Billy, my Dad's friend, if he'd marry her. But he said that he keeps hens in the back shed and they mightn't like a new woman coming in.

The maple tree was up to my elbow now. The branches skinny and bendy like marla and the leaves a deep pink. "It will never grow very big," Dad said. I thought maybe *I'd* feel better if *I* wasn't so big. So, I went on a diet. Soon, they all stopped calling me Big Bridie. I

couldn't stop my diet. My world became quiet and calm.

The Maple tree was bare next spring. I forgot to mulch it. Dad said it was sickly and it would get worse if we put the fertilizer on it. "Don't force feed," he said, "love; nourish and it will flourish". And that worked!

Dad died eighteen years ago but he's still here for me.

The brochure says: "Marie Villas, Bray. 3 bed, semi-detached house for sale with attractive front garden- including a beautifully matured Japanese Maple tree." I slip it into my apron pocket. No Daddy, this one is not for the bin.

Love by Paul Fitzgerald

Love

Is also very frightening
to those to whom
we are tender
to those to whom
we render
all of our possibilities.
Can our words show
a split second of rejection
sow seeds of discontent
a choice to walk away
yes they can
of course they can.
Yet we can change
make greater efforts
to be seen and heard.
Above all to be aware
using words that care
the hospitality of the heart
beating against all words
that would drive us apart.

Tinned Fruit by Phil Lynch

He stood in the queue for a boat
at the edge of a Spanish sea
Union Jack rucksack on his shoulder

not being ones to judge by a cover
we struck up conversation
to enquire if we were in the right line

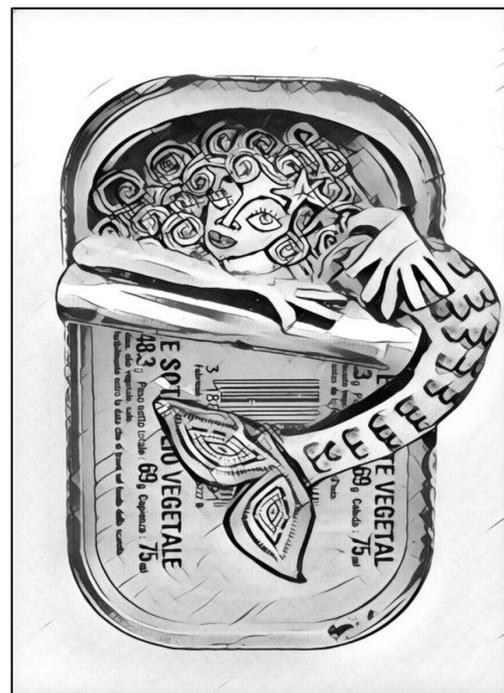
for our desired destination
yes, came the gruff and abrupt reply
that seemed to be that

as we examined the silent back
of his middle-aged balding head
he suddenly spun around

**you know, you are the first
English-speakers I've met here**, he said,
a mixture of relief and disbelief in his tone

the hotel is full of Spanish people
he sounded like he might invoke
some unfair trading rules

**and the other thing I can't believe,
the olives they serve
are out of a bloody tin.**



**Captured moments of boating on the
Shannon River September 2017** by Maire
Morrissey Cummins

Out of the Alder, a flash of blue
zips across the bow,
alights momentarily on a Hawthorn branch,
down the canal bank,
in the Ash then the Willow.

I watch in excitement
as far as my eyes can see,
over the fields, and away.

Past the soft fields and rotund trees
on the river by Clonmacnoise,
where white swans rise from inky waters
into a blue noon.
Swallows flash silver,
the sun on the bow,
water sparkles.all around.

Haiku

river fog

***we follow blackbird song
all the way upstream***

Past Lukers bar
at Shannonbridge,
the current flows with us.
Ragwort fields on both sides of the water,
a grey heron wades in the shallows
sheltering amid tall grassy reeds.

In the grey rain of County Clare
the reeds are a rich burgundy red.
I stand, ready to dock at the marina,
ropes heavy, sodden but content that there is no
wind today.

We moor between a sail boat and cruiser,
not a centimeter to spare.
Out of wet clothes,
I shower and change,
glad to be in Killaloe for the weekend.
We venture out to explore
yet another town
on the lake.

The Moon and My Mother

Siofra O'Donovan

We sat by the river, picking garnets
out of pomegranates
Wishing, under the moon, that the
first steps I took
Under the birch tree could be
retraced-
Like a silver map through time.

And we could know that the spiders
that watched
Had no malice
And the wolves creeping behind the
trees
Were not hungry.

That by the river, under the moon,
The world held us.

And my little feet knew
The tickle
Was nothing more
Than a lady bird going home.

Ave Maria
Thank you Mother.
Thank you Jenny.

2 August 2018
Written on the last day
of my mother's life
on earth.



You are Dismissed by Jean O'Brien

The nuns warned us about sitting in the seats
the boys had been in, told us in hushed tones
it was an occasion of sin and impure thoughts,
sinking into Sean Wheelan's recently vacated
seat,
still warm with his heat I tried to glean what
she might mean.

In the pew we stood and we sat and we knelt
in unison with the rest of the congregation,
mass was agony for squirming, fidgeting
teens.

The ceremony was in Latin,
we chanted the responses sing-song to the
Kyrie eleison,
or was it Greek? We were learning to be
soldiers of Christ.

Our target were the boys in the front line,
surreptitiously hitting
and kicking each other along the long bench.
We ached to be
transformed by the Transubstantiation, not
into the body of Christ
you understand, but into older girls with
bruised red lips,
large breasts, great legs and hips.

Christ's agony in the garden was nothing on
ours
as we tried desperately not to snort with
laughter
when a bold boy drew a gross depiction of
Christ
bloody on the cross, with their teacher's name
as Gaelige underneath.
After genuflecting we sank back into our hot
seats and prayed
as if our lives depended on it. Finally the
priest ended it with
Ite missa est.

White Page by Rosy Wilson

pen poised
poppies, peaches, butterflies
decorate
a notebook cover, my daughter's
present
when I was confined, mental,
unable
to write a word.

Zen monk writes that paper holds
non-paper elements: clouds float
bring rain, sun shines, trees grow
tall,
without these there are no sheets
for handwritten poems;

white page reflects these elements
and I perceive a forest of larch trees
needles sparkling with morning
showers
in present sunshine, the paper is a
white cloud
my pen begins to form a poem.



Brigid O'Brien

Return Ticket by Kathleen Greaney

Keith sat in his usual corner near the Bank. He placed his tin box in front of him. An ice cold wind blew in from the Liffey. An April snowfall covered the ground. He had slept in a doorway in his sleeping bag the night before. All the hostels were full. The city was waking now. Business men hurried by in dark suits carrying briefcases, young ladies tottering along in shoes that were too high carrying fashionable handbags. A grey haired woman in a fur coat threw a coin into the box.

"Thanks Mam" he muttered. Jackie the flower seller was setting up her stall nearby. Buckets of daffodils and tulips were placed on a stand along with pots of hyacinths.

"Keith, I'm getting a coffee" she called. "Do you want one?" The feel of the hot container warmed his hands.

"Ta, Jackie, would you have a fag?" "Alright then, you owe me at least a packet". She lit the cigarette for him and moved back to her stall. A group of pale faced schoolboys passed by. They stared at him.

"Look at the loser" a red haired boy in the group laughed. He felt like going after him and giving him a thump but the Gardaí would be on to him like a shot. Then he saw the note. It moved slightly in the breeze towards Jackie's stall. She was busy doing up a bouquet for a customer. He moved quickly. She did not notice anything.

"I'm going for a walk-about" he called. Keep an eye on my gear. He walked down Nassau Street past Trinity College. He turned into Lincoln Place and then crossed into Pearse Street. At the station he purchased a return ticket to Greystones. He could not remember when he had last travelled on the Dart. It was mid morning so the carriage was empty apart from a young woman with a baby and an elderly couple who sat opposite one another in silence. Two tall sporty types got on at Lansdowne. Keith noticed their designer tracksuits and trainers. Rugby heads he thought. He stretched out his legs. He felt conscious of his shabby jeans. Nobody was going to sit near him anyway. He still had a

ten euro note. He'd have to get into a hostel tonight. He needed a shower badly. He'd save the cigarette he found in the pocket of his hoodie for later.

The elderly couple got off at Blackrock. A pretty young girl with long blonde hair in a denim mini skirt and wearing knee high Swede boots sat in the window seat on the aisle opposite him. She caught him staring at her and smiled. Keith was taken aback. Pretty girls did not usually smile at him.

"You'd look like a young Brad Pitt if you cleaned yourself up" Jackie had told him once. The Dart was pulling into Dun Laoghaire now. The anchored boats and yachts bobbed up and down on the choppy waves. The blonde girl was reading a book. On a sudden impulse Keith crossed over and sat opposite her. After a few minutes she looked up.

"Is that book good?" he asked. She nodded.

"I've just been to a job interview."

"How did it go?"

"I'm not sure, they may have been looking for someone with more experience." she answered.

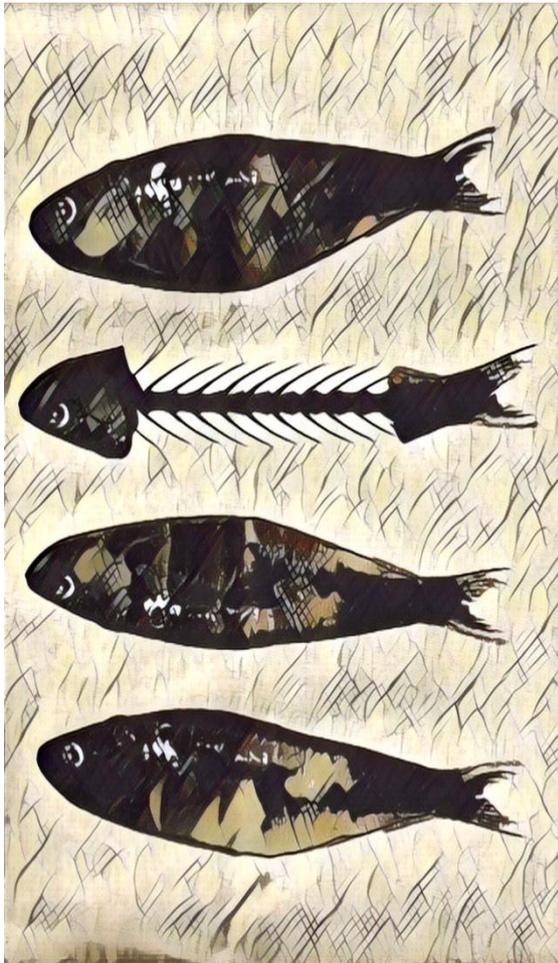
She opened her book again. They were coming into Killiney now. People were walking their dogs on the beach below. He could see Bray Head in the distance. Memories of trips to the sea-side town flooded back: his Mam carrying bags of sandwiches, the time he and his brother got burnt to a cinder on the stony beach, the candy floss, Mam carrying back a pot of tea for the picnic from a cottage up a lane near the seafront. There was always a go on the bumpers and then back to the city that evening.

The Dart pulled into Bray. A group of Spanish students got on. They spoke loudly in animated conversation oblivious to the other passengers. The blonde girl looked up. Keith noticed her blue eyes.

"We're not far from Greystones now" she stated. Seagulls squawked and flew on to the ledges of the cliffs below. He looked at the waves crashing against the rocks.

Imagine if the Dart went off the rails and crashed down into the sea he thought. "Do you have friends in Greystones?" she queried. "No, I just came out for a look around." It was on the tip of his tongue to ask her would she like to come for a coffee.

The Dart ground to a halt. The carriages quickly emptied. They both walked along the platform towards the exit. "Brian" she called. A tall dark haired chap stood waiting for her. She turned and waved and in a flash they both disappeared hand in hand. Keith pulled the return ticket out of the pocket of his jeans. The next Dart to Dublin was leaving in five minutes and he would be on it.



Michael O'Reilly

For The Moon by Patricia Aherne O'Farrell

Drifting to the window and looking out
I see there's a squashed moon up there -
it's steady gaze fixed, taking no heed
of the dense wisps of cloud moving
across her image in indigo and purple tint;
herself remaining steady.

With night approaching and it coming her turn
to shine, she bids her time - allowing her
fellow
orb the sun one last moment of glory,
as he blazes the top of Bray Head with
a fiercely strong band of yellow ochre -
so strong that to the spot I stand transfixed.

Lifted, I wonder if ever I've seen this crest of
hill,

some locals call the Egyptian's belly, more
beautiful.
This golden rocky outline undulating upwards
onto the
canvas of a waning day - top lit by the low
sun, flashing his
short burst to impress his mot the moon, and
collaterally,
for my, for our, animal and human, delight
alike.

Weathering the Storms by Ellen Britton

Storm clouds gathered in the summer of 1946. It was only a matter of time before the Donegal Railway closed for ever. Its employees no longer whitewashed goods wagons to accommodate hoards of people who came to Rosstown to see the only Orange Order parade south of the border. Increasing motor car usage, cheaper road haulage and escalating running costs spelled death for the railway and emigration for its employees.

Hugh McDonnell's home was the property of the railway company and when his work as station master was finished, the company would sell his home to the highest bidder, and it wouldn't be Hugh. He would have to leave Ballintra with only the clothes on his back, and with his family. follow his peers to Glasgow or to Edinburgh and work for a pittance to put bread on the table.

In the meantime, Hugh, his wife Mary and their two young sons lived under the pine trees in the

grey granite station house. It was the only inhabited house left on this stretch of coast. Throughout the summer it represented a welcome respite to travellers who alighted from the railbus.

Ubiquitous purple heather and wild flowers carpeted the bogland and petered out where white-capped Atlantic waves pounded the shore. Tall pine trees shielded the house from howling gales and the incessant rain that lashed the coast during winter. The glistening silver train tracks that snaked below the narrow platform, south to Ballyshannon and north through Laghy represented a lifeline that would soon be cut off.

When autumn came visitor numbers slowed to a trickle and no one came in November. Like a spectre, the threat of forced emigration drew close to the station house, damping spirits. The goods wagons lay empty. There wasn't much to do. It was lonely. The sunny aspect of the station house changed from welcoming to brooding. Withered bracken, sparse blond grasses and shrivelled heather trembled under metallic grey skies. All through December waves battered the shore and the sea encroached on the land. High winds lashed the sheltering pines and howled around the gables like a ravaging beast. The banshee screamed down the chimney. Hugh travelled the county seeking work and the railbus continued to run like a ghost train empty of passengers.

January crept in, icy cold. In the bright stillness of morning, long icicles graced the hedges and ditches lining the road. The calm, cold beauty didn't last more than a few days. Fierce gales shrieked in from the Atlantic and snow whirled around the ticket office. On the phone to the Ballyshannon office Hugh confirmed that the railbus was still running. Radio updates indicated that not much else moved, at least not in Donegal.

Anxious to let Mary know that the railbus would come, Hugh hurried along the platform, avoiding the tips of pine branches, brought low by the weight of snow. A finger of cold and a flurry of snow accompanied Hugh's entry to the warm kitchen. The peace there was disturbed only by the crackle of burning logs and the kettle singing gently on the hob. Mary looked up, a question in her hazel eyes.

'No passengers today!' Hugh said.
'But the railbus will come?'
'Yes, thank God. It has the supplies for the village'.
'They will have to be kept here until the weather eases.'
'Ach! . . . I think I will go to the village with the supplies.'

'But. . . look out, Hugh? You can't tell the road from and the fields!

He yanked the curtain back and stared out. He leaned his forehead against the window frame and sighed.

Mary watched him. Of late he was uncharacteristically moody and depressed. He worried about his job and his family's future.

'Well, if you are intent on going, take the boys with you for company,' she said.

'That's not a bad idea. They could do with a diversion.'

Hugh brightened visibly.

'I can see clear sky out over the sea. The weather is clearing', he said. .

'It's not unknown for people to die out in the snow,' Mary said. 'You will be careful, won't you?'

'People don't die in the snow in Donegal, Mary!' Hugh said.

'But, you've said it yourself. We've never had weather like this before.'

Hugh's mind was made up. There was nothing Mary could say to dissuade him so she comforted herself with the thought that Kevin and Jack would be with him. Her gaze flew to the Sacred Heart picture, its red lamp glowing above the mantelpiece, emitting an aura of reassurance. She tried to shake off the inexplicable dread that had taken hold in her mind.

'Call the boys in,' she said.

Kevin and Jack were at work, clearing snow from the railway siding so that the railbus could come in. It had been fun at the beginning, but now it was back-breaking. They were glad to take a rest. Flushed from physical exertion and the heat of the kitchen, they stood, mindless of the snow melting from their boots, making a puddle on the floor while Mary and Hugh explained what they had to do.

From the wood pallets stacked on the platform, between them they assembled a sturdy sled. The wind shrieking in the pines made it impossible to hear the whistle, but Kevin felt the vibration in the tracks.

'She's coming; she's coming!'

Mary's heart sank. The railbus came into view round the bend and juddered to a halt.

'Get the supplies on to the sled and we'll be off,' Hugh directed.

Gerry jumped down from the driver's cab.

'I'll go with you. I won't be taking the railbus back today.'

'Is that because of the weather or lack of business?'

'To tell you the truth, Hugh, it could be either. All I know is they don't need the railbus today, so I'm finished work now.'

The sky was blue overhead and in a vast wasteland of snow the only visible landmark was the bell tower of the church rising above the village. Harnessed like plough horses, the men and boys bent to the wind and pulled the sled, two at a time, changing every ten minutes. The strong hessian rope rubbed their shoulders raw under their heavy clothes. They sank up to their knees in soft wet snow. Despite the biting cold, sweat poured from their bodies. It took two hours to get to the village, and Hugh was tired, more than he cared to admit.

A dog barked, bringing some villagers out to see who had come. They came singly and in pairs, ploughing their way through knee high snow. They were glad to get supplies and the mail brought from the railbus. Gerry and the boys would have liked to accept an invitation to stay a while longer than the time it took to drink a cup of tea.

However Hugh noted that the blue sky had given way to dark clouds and he was mindful of the danger of being caught in a snowstorm despite his dismissive words when Mary had expressed doubt about this expedition.

'We had better head back. We will make it before nightfall if we don't waste time,' he advised.

Already the snow had started to fall.

Dragging the empty sled, amid cheerful goodbyes they left the relative shelter of the village. A few hundred yards into the journey, Kevin looked back. The bell tower had all but disappeared into the blizzard that was now raging about them.

'Get up,' Hugh said, motioning Kevin toward the sled. Kevin hesitated. 'Go on, get up. Take a rest. Jack can have a rest in a while.'

It didn't take much persuasion. Kevin was tired. He wrapped sacking around himself and snuggled down.

Hugh worried. Nothing was as it should be. The landscape was strange, eerie and unknowable. The sky had vanished into a vortex of whirling snow. Darkness pressed in. Hugh noted a spindly tree sticking drunkenly out of the snow. They trudged on and on. The journey seemed endless. Oh, God! There was no doubt . . . it was the same spindly tree! They had walked in a circle. Gerry turned to Hugh, a question on his lips. Hugh stopped him short before he could articulate it.

The boys were hanging in, dazed with hypothermia and fatigue.

Hugh couldn't tell them what had occurred. Inwardly he castigated himself for putting his family in jeopardy to relieve his frustration and boredom. How could he have been so selfish?

Not knowing which way to turn, Hugh put his hands in his pockets seeking temporary relief from the cold.

He touched the smooth wooden rosary Mary had put in his pocket as they were starting out. He had forgotten about it. He fingered the beads; he began to pray, silently, with desperation. His dark despair gave way to anger and bleak determination that he and his family would not end like this. In his mind, he saw Mary smiling at him, encouraging him, exhorting him not to give up. He vowed that he would listen more attentively to Mary in future. If they weathered this storm, they would survive emigration when the time came, whatever privation it might bring. Ironically, for the first time in months he looked to the future with a glimmer of hope.

'Let's push on. We will be home soon,' he said with a confidence he didn't quite yet feel. He grasped the rope with renewed vigour.

At the station house, Mary tried to keep busy but nothing could relieve her anxiety. She stared fixedly at the Sacred Heart lamp. Abruptly she donned her coat and wrapped a scarf round her throat. She went into the darkness and the howling wind. The big brass station bell gleamed dully in the corner of the ticket office. With some effort she climbed with it on to the woodpile. She swung the bell for all she was worth. Her arms grew heavy; her fingers froze, despite the sweat running down her back.

A half mile away, Kevin sat up like a corpse rising from a bier.

'What was that?' he said.

'It's only the wind,' Hugh replied.

'I heard something. It's not the wind. Listen.'

Hugh stopped. A faint sound came on the gale. A bell?

'It's Mary!'

'A hallucination,' Gerry said.

'We have nothing to lose by following the sound.'

Gerry's silent acquiescence was a tacit acknowledgement of a painful truth. It was a small thread of hope. The faint intermittent sound became clearer and drew them on. Then . . . they could hear only the wind. Hugh stared into the void, listening.

'Mary, don't stop; please don't stop,' he yelled sobbing with fatigue, frustration and fear. Gerry

screamed too. The gale hurled their noise back at them. All around them was blackness, whirling snow and the relentless howling wind.

Desolated, Mary stood defeated on the wood pile and stared into darkness. Screaming wind; driving snow. She shivered. Her arms ached. Her eyes smarted with unshed tears.

A long drawn out despairing wail raised the hairs on the back of her neck. Hugh! With renewed energy she swung the bell with all her might. Her arms were leaden, and her throat sore from yelling into the unforgiving storm when out of the maelstrom four shadowy figures emerged.

The Tinkling Angels by Jonathan Saint

Wake up Gwanpa.
Comes from far away.

A thin tinkling entering a good ear. An itchy head.

Gwanpa?
Pushing at the shoulder.
Hmmm?

Hazy red edges appear. Pinpricks of flickering light.

Ting-ting-ting-ting.

Round and round.

Spinning.

Gwanpa, Mum says to come.

There are blurred spaces. Places. They are places.

It's warm down by the fire, Gwanpa.

There are placemats.

One. Two. Three, four, five. Ten.

Eleven. Then twelve.

Angels are whirling above low-burning candles. Tinkling brass chimes.

Who are they?

Jenny. Mike. Peter?

That's a high chair.

Spent cracker shells on the table cloth.

Thin glasses sparkling.

Just here an empty plate. Swipes of red and brown – gravy and cranberry sauce.

C'mon Gwanpa. The movie's starting.

Wipes an itchy brow. It's wet. Removes a soggy pink hat that clings to a lowering hand and drapes across the white beard that flows over a napkin, tucked high into a collared shirt, under the bearded chin, and down across straining buttons, hiding a belt, buried below the table edge.

Who is this sweet child?
What's your name my angel?
Stop it Gwanpa. Mum says to come.

There is pressure, from below and above. There is a burning at the top of the chest. Or the bottom of the throat. A fizzing. Reaches for the tall glass close at hand and sips. Warm. And fizzy. Soothing, briefly, then burning again, after it slips down.

So, leaning forward, with two hands on the table, stands, heavily, sliding the chair away with the back of the knees, napkin dangling. The small hand reaches into the big one. Straightening. And holding. But then a sudden eruption of gas.

Gwanpa!
Bless me.
I'm going Gwanpa. It's starting.
Alone again. And quiet.
Just the angels tinkling.
Eases back down into the chair.
Settles back.
And nods off.



Brigid O'Brien

Three Pieces by Brian Quigley

Peashooters

In the days before rock and roll
And reliable or affordable alarm clocks,
A knocker-upper's work was to rouse the
sleeping
In time for their own work.
Amongst the tools of their trade
They set off before the crack of dawn with
Were batons for downstairs windows,
Long bamboo sticks for upper-storey ones
And, so the story goes, peashooters
For those too difficult to reach;
There was I thinking a peashooter
Was just a toy version of a blowpipe.

Titration

Acid-base, reduction-oxidation;
The titration measures a shift
From one state to another,
A transformation whose endpoint
Is indicated by a colour change.
Spring-summer, autumn-winter;
Nature makes a shift
From one season to another,
A transformation whose endpoint
Is indicated by a colour change.

Pins & Needles - Haiku

I missed your attack,
How your icy sting crept up.
I feel you retreat.

Death by Plebiscite By Seymour Cresswell

Sir Roderick stood by the window and stared at the leafless tree by the pavement outside. He couldn't see the heavily armed police guard at the bomb-proof front door, but he knew it was there, and derived no sense of security from that knowledge. Dusk had come early in the city smog. He sighed and turned back towards the pool of light that glowed from his desk lamp. Just beyond its reach sat his visitor, only a shadow now because of the failing light.

'So, what, exactly do you propose?'

'Well, Home Secretary, the Chancellor and the Health Minister are in agreement that radical steps are needed, otherwise the whole National Health service will collapse within the year.'

'Yes, yes, I know what those buffoons think, But what do you suggest?'

Aylesbury Crawley, the Permanent Undersecretary, made a movement in his chair to indicate that he was discomfited by the question, although Sir Roderick knew that he had anticipated it, and had a response at the ready. Only a little rodent like Crawley could have aspired to the position with the everlastingly second-best title of Permanent Undersecretary. There was a pause, which the Home Secretary knew was intended for dramatic effect, as if the suggestion was being extracted against the civil-servant's will. He allowed the pause to develop, now standing with his back to the bullet-proof window.

'Well, Home Secretary, there has been a certain amount of clamour about the Assisted Suicide issue.' he looked over his spectacles at Sir Roderick, who thought, *clamour* indeed— it had taken riot police with water cannon to quell the disturbances; he remained silent, coldly observing Crawley, who continued, 'The Europeans seem to have come up with a solution, perhaps you might choose to follow suit Home Secretary?'

'Remind me.'

'Well, after the restraining hand of Britain was removed from the EU, what they call their 'Parliament' voted in Union-wide legislation to decriminalise assisted suicide.' Again he paused to peer at his political master. Sir Roderick was barely able to curb his disgust at Crawley's rabid *gung ho* Brexiteerist attitude and his snobbish sense of superiority over the rest of Europe. His lisping sibilance in pronouncing 'assisted suicide' caused Sir Roderick to wince, but it went unnoticed because by this time he had turned his back to the

other man and was making his way around the desk to sit, across an expanse of tooled burgundy leather, to face his adviser, who continued,

‘And in France and Germany in particular it has been found that the total cost of health care has reduced quite markedly, due to the increasingly large numbers of their citizens who have *chosen* the new legalised option. Their respective nonagenarian populations have halved.’ Perhaps Sir Roderick imagined it, but it seemed to him that Crawley had put a very slight emphasis on the word ‘chosen’ as if to caress the possibility that choice didn’t in fact enter into it.

‘I see.’

Earlier that week the PM had barely scraped through a ‘no confidence’ vote in the Commons, and it was well known among the Cabinet that unless something was done to appease the populace, the Government could well fall. And me with it, thought Sir Roderick, grimly. This little toad Crawley, he thought, has written me off. He steepled his fingers, tapping the tips together in a manner that he hoped would unnerve the other man.

‘Well, Home Secretary, you will be aware that the PM is struggling to hold the coalition together. According to Social Media,’ —he used the term as if it was capitalised, like God thought Sir Roderick — ‘the Government could fall and cause a third general election in less than two years.’ Sir Roderick continued to stare across the desk; governments may come, he thought, and governments may go, but Permanent Undersecretaries go on forever, you little shit.

‘And you propose that the solution would be to decriminalise assisted suicide?’

‘Oh, Home Secretary, I couldn’t possibly suggest such a thing!’ Sir Roderick wondered if the conversation was being recorded; Crawley was certainly putting up a tour de force performance. ‘But good leadership requires bold decisions,’ Crawley added, looking down at his notes, as if to disassociate himself from the decision-making process and absolve himself altogether from whatever decision was arrived at.

‘And what do you mandarins suggest as a strategy?’

‘Well, if you were to put the idea forward, it would have to be in the House, sir.’

Sir Roderick sighed again and observed the Permanent Undersecretary over his steepled fingers.

‘Very well, Mr. Crawley, that will be all for now. And please tell security that I will be leaving for home in ten minutes.’ Crawley stood, and almost bowed to the Home Secretary before leaving the room, to all intents backwards, closing the door behind him so gently that Sir Roderick wasn’t sure at what stage he had let go of the handle.

Sir Roderick sat in the gloom, the tips of his fingers still joined and his brow in a frown. He thought that if he put the proposal before Parliament, the government’s goose would be properly cooked, and he, Sir Roderick, would be the apple stuffed up that goose’s arse. The PM would be eaten alive on the floor of the House — in an involuntary reflex, Sir Roderick’s tongue flicked across his lips—the coalition would disintegrate, and all the independent support would evaporate. The attempt to drag the Brexit deal through the Houses had been the downfall of three successive governments, and had to be abandoned, leaving Britain skewered like a kebab before the super-heated wrath of Europe. Sir Roderick’s party, the People’s Progressives had come to power on a wave of popular hatred for all the other parties rather than support for the PPs (the name had been the PM’s idea, stupid woman —the slogan ‘I’m going for the PPs’ shouldn’t in any rational country, have attracted any votes). But with more MPs than any of the other, even more odious parties, the PM was able to stitch together an ugly, fragile patchwork of alliances to form a government. The whole debacle still reeked of the Brexit fallout, and the ludicrous hold that the Ulster MPs had had over the then government. They refused to agree to anything that was suggested, insisting that their ‘wee province’ should be treated exactly-the-same-and-in-no-way-different to the rest of the UK. Now the same wee province was in open, bloody civil war, and it had been impossible to hold elections there for eight years.

The Home Secretary stood, he felt an idea form, almost lost its thread when he heard the intercom buzz to announce that his armed motorcade was ready, then retrieved the pieces of the notion and reassembled them. Spun it once in his mind, clapped his hands and smiled. And two decisions cemented.

His first decision was that he would propose to introduce the new liberalised suicide laws in Northern Ireland only, on a trial basis. His second

decision was that he would use the modern plebiscite mechanism known as Online Referendum to vote in the new laws without reference to parliament or political parties. Leading by referendum, is how he thought of it. Northern Ireland would be used as the Petrie dish for the experimental new laws. He figured that it didn't matter what the electorate in Northern Ireland thought, because they had no MPs any more, and their devolved government hadn't functioned for more than a decade. Moreover—a good word, 'moreover', he thought—the rest of the UK didn't care what happened to Paddy after the shambles of their 'No Surrender' politics had wrecked Brexit. He was certain that the rest of the UK would vote to allow the Paddys to kill each other.

He went down to the basement of the Home Office bunker and stepped into his armoured vehicle. 'Home, James!' he said into the onboard communications system, knowing full well that the driver's name was not James and that he wouldn't understand the archaism.



Michael O'Reilly

Morning Coffee by Anne Bevan

The curtain lifts on a drippy Saturday morning
 Waking the city from its hangover. Seagulls
 Screech as they seek out their weekend
 breakfast
 From fish and chip papers, flung on the dirty
 pavements
 By Friday night revellers. Shopkeepers lift
 window
 Shutters, waking the homeless in their chosen
 doorways.

A woman of indeterminate age stretches
 under her duvet,
 Turning to face the street, hurting as she
 shifts her cold
 Body in her concrete bed. She touches her
 hair
 As women do when waking, to check how
 high the bed head is.

In the reflection of the toughened glass of the
 shop front
 She sees that she is not a pretty sight, but she
 hasn't been
 A pretty sight for a long time now. She can't
 remember
 When she last sat in the reclining chair of a
 hair salon,
 Having her locks shampooed and cut, the only
 treat

A woman will not give up, even in times of
 recession.
 She spits on a crumpled tissue taken from her
 jeans pocket
 And washes her face before rising to greet the
 city

Her stomach rumbles and she makes her way
 to a small
 Coffee shop on Prince's Street, hoping for the
 kindness
 Of some shop assistant or beautician on their
 way to work;
 There may even be a cigarette in it for her.
 She checks her reflection again and rubs her
 hands down
 Her crumpled clothes, smoothing the
 wrinkles.

In the doorway across from the coffee shop,
 she sees
 A man with lined face, bleeding. He's been
 beaten
 By young men who drank themselves into
 superiority
 The night before; she gives him her coffee.
 No point
 Calling anyone to help him, they won't have
 time
 For a junkie. She pulls her collar tighter and
 moves along.

The Gathering by Mitch Staunton Moore

They gather on roof tops
Ominously squawking in descent
from a windy sky,
tattered ragged kites of prophetic
doom
basking in the slow orange demise
of sunset.
Their petrol black plums
navyed by the dying sun.

Then all at once; they fly
Into the dusky cooling air,
towards swaying deciduous abodes.
Black bodies in flight
Their gathering ended
By diminishing light

hewed from its severed arm, edged-sharp,
a hook

to hack the briars that cuffed my feet.

In Grafton Street tramps will play
on golden harps when next we meet.

Sing of Dublin town
of gilded birds in Stephen's Green,
that throat the new day's dawn,
red as Cain's first crime.

The children of the town are fed,
on curdled milk and blackened bread,
in Grafton Street, they will play
in sandaled feet when next we meet.

By Liffey's stream I knelt,
broke a sally twig and traced
on water's placid face.

All sorrow is theirs who love in haste.

**By Liffey's Stream for Patrick
Kavanagh** by Eddie Tynan

I must abide, for love I must
or love no more!
The times are ripe,
ripe as the flaming fruit in Autumn's
purse.

I smashed the plough that bled my youth,



Brigid 'Brien

Memorial Day USA by Judy Russell

Peeling potatoes in the California sun
traffic drones nearby, families

coming into town for pancakes
at the fire-house, a big parade, barbecues.

I've planted scabious and lithodora
in my brother's garden
for their shades of blue

herbs in tubs, watered the lemon tree
and hellebores under a high arching elm

not being of this place I am cold-footed
by patriotic flags on picket fences

honouring the dead of many wars
with righteousness and razzmatazz.

Memories of Gran Byrne by Anne McAllister

Bray was a great place to grow up in the late forties early fifties. Population then was about 12,500. It was known as the Brighton of Ireland with a mile long promenade flanked on one side by fine Victorian buildings and hotels and a sandy beach with cast iron railings and seats overlooking the Irish Sea. English Scottish and Northern Ireland visitors descended on the resort after the war. To us children it was magic. The Esplanade, the Baths, the Cove Swimming Club, Bray Head with its cable cars to the Eagles Nest, and further up on top "The Cross" erected in Holy Year 1950. There was entertainment every night at the bandstand on the Promenade with touring groups, plays, talent and bonny baby competitions, deckchairs for hire, kiosks vying with each other selling candy floss, ice cream not forgetting Dawson's Amusements, Bingo, Dodgems, Slot Machines and the fat Laughing Clown when you fed him a penny. Last but not least was The Arcadia Ballroom-the biggest in Ireland beside the famous International Hotel at the Station.

Now my Gran Byrne was very tuned into all this. She lived in a red-bricked terraced house one row behind the Strand and used to take the overflow PGs (Paying Guests) from the big hotels - B and B and High Tea. Her husband was dead and she liked the company. She became quite proficient and started her own direct booking system and we got roped in to help on our school holidays. She moved her big brass bed, starched linen accoutrements together with hand crochet bedspread into the "shed" in the back yard in order to give over the good bedroom to her PGs. Now they were mostly regulars and booked from year to year, smitten by her and maybe by us, and at a fraction of the hotel prices.

Our Dada had died and it seemed a good idea that we would help her with her PGs on our Summer holidays as Mama had to go back to work. We made beds, filled the jugs on the washstands, emptied earthenware hot water bottles, dusted and made sure the "emergency" pretty decorative pos under the beds did not protrude! We would serve high tea at 5pm in the good room with the mahogany dresser, grandfather clock and three tables with starched linen. There was always something tasty invariably followed by jelly and custard, rice pudding, or fruit cocktail with evaporated milk. She didn't have a fridge but a metal mesh "safe" in the back yard where butter, milk, ham sausages, rashers and the likes were stored.

Gran referred to her summer room (the shed bounded by the high wall of the Dublin/Wexford Railway Line) as "MONTEVIDEO". We thought it an exotic name not knowing its meaning or its location on the planet. It had lino like Egyptian tiles on the floor, thick lace curtains on the window, a lovely brass headboard, a carved mahogany wardrobe, matching dressing table topped with lace runner, silver vanity set all overseen by a gold framed picture of the Sacred Heart over the bed with a little red bulb permanently flickering.

We enjoyed our summers with Gran Byrne and the PGs we met especially the Scots. My younger sister had a problem with the accent though and asked me where did I learn to speak Scottish! We also had a Piggy box each half full for going back to school

Invisible Art by Jessamine O'Connor

Fingers stroking
eight pound tickets,
they stand together,
murmuring,
admiring,
appreciating,
studying the blank canvas,
the solitary plinth,
the empty spaces.

Reading carefully
all the little labels
which tell them
what they're seeing,
it's about imagination
they nod,
and drift
from label
to label.

A stalker
jiggles barefoot
through the crowd.
No one looks
at his bouncing balls,
his conductor's hands,
his Rubenesque flesh.
Eventually
the whisper goes round;
The Emperor's here.

Latin Lover by Catherine Brophy

He stood at the counter sipping an espresso and casting his gaze around the cafe. Lord but he was handsome. His clothes looked expensive, casual, classy, but maybe it was just how he wore them. There's people who always look smooth and there's people who always look rumpled. He was the smooth type. The type who could wear a refuse bag and still look good.

She'd seen him here in this café, sipping espresso every day since she'd arrived to study Italian in Rome. As she watched, his eyes strayed her direction, they raked her from head to toe he smiled. Jesus, she thought, he's gorgeous but she

pretended not to notice and busied herself with her phone.

"Prego," she heard, "you speak English?"

She looked up. His eyes were liquid and dark with lashes the length of your arm.

"Yes I do." She replied trying to sound glacial.

"I see you many times... I just wish to tell... your eyes, they are so beautiful. Light eyes with dark hair... it is like miracle."

That was definitely O.T.T. but she couldn't help it, she was flattered. Italians were past masters at this kind of guff. Irish men never paid extravagant compliments like that, if only they knew, it works! She couldn't help smiling.

"May I sit?"

"Sure"

"Where you from?"

"Ireland."

"That is why the beautiful skin. White, like milk."

"Oh go on outta that." she laughed.

"No, no, I have fall in love with you, your eyes and your skin."

"Ah now...!"

"It is true! I am in love!"

"Don't be an eejit, you don't even know me!"

He laid his hand on his heart and closed his eyes for a moment.

"But the heart knows" he said looking deep into her eyes. She felt her own heart skip a beat.

"Please I show you Roma. You will be my Julietta and I make love like your Romeo."

"Yeah right." she said. "And then we can commit suicide, yeah?"

"What you mean... I don't understand?"

"I'm not as green as I'm cabbage looking. You are very charming but I know you say this to all the ladies... I saw you last week with those Swedish girls!"

He had the grace to admit it. He took another sip of his espresso and looked up with a puzzled expression.

"Please, can you explain me what you say about green cabbage?" She explained. He laughed.

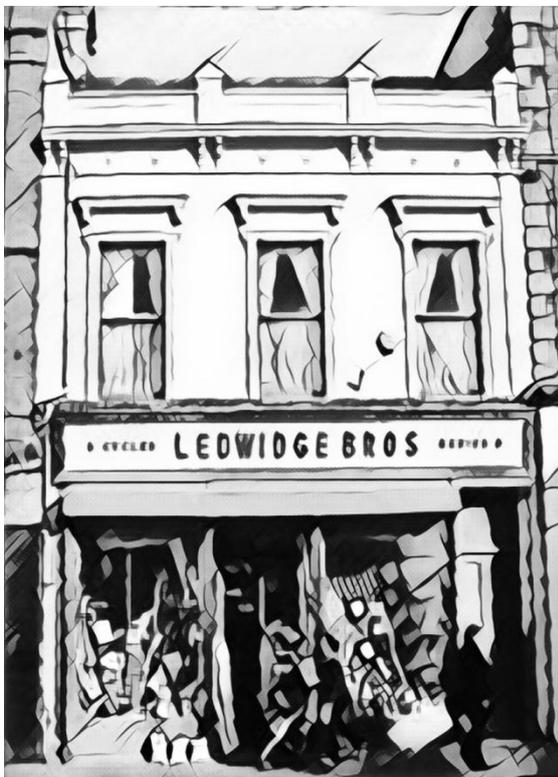
And several weeks later, when her Italian improved, they became quite good friends.

Imperfection by Sam Ferrie

Alone in a void, I watch at peace.
The world below frozen, where time
forgot,
Yet tempting, teeming with life, red, raw,
hot,
Raging bulls fighting, kicking, never cease.

Above a mythic land of sweet release.
Writhing together in a painful knot
Of passion and ecstasy. When there's
nought
Else they kill for their great final reprise.

I stand in between; lost in confusion,
At once repelled and attracted by each
With the best of both, but double the
worst.
Clouded in a mist of the illusion
That I am alone with no one to reach.
Here I float, but I know I'm not the first.



Colour Thesaurus by Michael O'Reilly

Inspired by the work of Ingrid Sundberg

cherry rose **red** jam
crimson garnet ruby merlot
scarlet brick wine apple
mahogany blood sangria berry
blush currant candy lipstick

tangerine marigold pumpkin cider
ginger rust tiger fire
bronze apricot cantaloupe **orange**
carrot honey squash spice
marmalade sandstone amber yam

canary gold **yellow** daffodil
mustard lemon butter flax
corn medallion dandelion fire
banana butterscotch bumblebee dijon
honey blond pineapple sun

green chartreuse juniper sage
lime olive emerald fern
pear moss shamrock seafoam
pine parakeet peppermint seaweed
pickle pistachio basil crocodile

navy **blue** slate sky
cobalt teal ocean cornflower
peacock azure cerulean lapis
spruce aegean prussian berry
arctic denim aquamarine sapphire

wine mulberry orchid raisin
amethyst heather iris plum
indigo hibiscus electric byzantine
thistle helio fandango royal
eggplant lollipop wisteria

violet mauve purple boisonberry
lavender plum magenta lilac
grape eggplant burgundy.
Jenny Joseph's colour to be
worn when old.

EXERCISE Invent your own colour names!

I Am Wicklow by Martin Swords

I am a Big River and a Small River
I am a Valley of Two Lakes
I am a Norse Name, a Grassy Meadow
I am a Toothless Monk

I am a Stag on a Boggy Hill
I am a Glen where a Devil Lives
I am a Seal at a Fishman's Shop
I am a Mackerel with a Bright Eye

I am a Red Kite with No Strings
I am Brown Bread marked with a Cross
I am a Garden for All Seasons
I am an Old Place with Young Blood

I am the Gorse on a Stony Field
I am a Stubborn Sheep
I am a Safe Harbour in a Storm
I am the Shifting Stones on a
Wave Washed Shore

I am a Market Town
where little is sold
I am a hungry child
unable to eat the scenery.

Do please consider submitting some of your work for future publication in our journal. The editorial team is interested in sketches, drawings, fiction, prose, poetry and in particular writings about our own town of Bray. Please submit material for the consideration of our editorial team to

editor @brayarts.net

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Julie Rose McCormick
Brigid O'Brien
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John Walshe
Michael O'Reilly (Editor)

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