

Introduction

The Kilkenny County Council Arts Office is delighted to announce the publication of the eighteenth issue of the very popular Kilkenny Poetry Broadsheet. The aim of the publication is to give local writers a platform for their work. Ninety five poems by fifty one poets were submitted for consideration this year and twelve poems by ten poets were selected.

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About the Editor Peter Sirr

Peter was born in Waterford before moving to Dublin with his family as a child. Educated at Trinity College, Dublin, Sirr won the Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Award in 1982, and the poetry prize at Listowel Writers' Week in 1983. He has divided much of his time between Ireland, Italy, and Holland, though he has now settled back in Dublin. Peter's most recent collection of poems is Sway, versions of poems from the troubadour tradition, published by Gallery Press in 2016.

The Rooms, published by Gallery in 2014, was shortlisted for the Irish Times Poetry Now Award and the Pigott Poetry Prize. The Gallery Press has also published Marginal Zones; Talk, Talk; Ways of Falling; The Ledger of Fruitful Exchange; Bring Everything; Selected Poems and Nonetheless. A novel for children, Black Wreath, was published in 2014 and RTE has broadcast three of his radio plays. A play for stage, Krakow, won the 2017 Eamon Kean Award at Listowel Writers' Week. Peter is a member of Aosdána.

Peter Sirr Editor's Statement

'When I read poetry, I want to feel myself suddenly larger ... in touch with – or at least close to – what I deem magical, astonishing. I want to experience a kind of wonderment.' So says the American poet Mark Strand and it's a good summary of what I look for in poetry.

When asked to edit this year's Kilkenny Poetry Broadsheet and teach the workshop, this is what I had in mind. Imaginative freshness, attention to detail, to the possibilities of language and form, but also preparedness to take risks: these are the elements that draw us to poetry.

The poems I received from Kilkenny poets covered a wide spectrum in terms of subject matter and approach, from the natural world to personal loss and the wider social political issues of the day. It was a hard choice in the end, and there were many poems that could have been published here, but the poems I ended up choosing were those that, whatever the subject, showed a spark of the magic necessary for the weird alchemy of poetry. I hope you enjoy them in all their variety.

Thanks to Kilkenny Arts Office for their support and Alé Mercado for his design.



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BROADSHEET #18

Sink

We stand shoulder to shoulder
(Where once I held you on my hip).
We face the mirror,
Thirteen years of you and me.

On your chin are nine delicate hairs, bristling.
On the sink, the tools: razor, foam and cup.
In my heart, regret (that another is not by your side).
On your face: utter dismay.

We go to it, all thumbs, fumbling,
Gasps and sucks of air ...
Afterwards, I clean up. You bled:
It was your first time.

I rinse the sink of you and raise my eyes
To see you – my Prince!
Standing tall
To face himself.

I kowtow my leave
Clutching the soiled rag at my heart.
With my shame a little smaller
I clear the space for you
To shine back at yourself.

Janice Woodgate

Scéal amháin an chéid

‘An fear a dhóigh Teach Woodstock’
sin an scéal a lean le linn a shaoil,
gan aon trácht ar a chrógacht, a ghráin, a mhian.
É ina thost, cúng, seasc,
a chóta chogaidh criosach go daingean,
é mar iarsma, íomhá ó Keating.

An oíche úd, ag filleadh ar a acraí fliucha,
a chompánaigh imithe,
tornach an tine á leanúint,
na fuinneoga ag pléascadh,
ar chas sé soir chun féachaint ar a ghníomh?
A ghaisce?

– lasracha an tí mhóir,
mar bhreacadh an lae,
ag éirí as troscán,
as éadaí leapan agus boird,
as saileanna daracha an dín,
as an leabharlann.

Carmel Cummins

Brief Encounters with Kingfishers (for Mark Roper)

Once in the school corridor
In a glass case
Perched ready for flight
Against a painted background

Once in a poem
In the linen drawer, dead
Keeping the clothes
Fresh

Once in a dream
Assuring you
That all manner of things
Will be well

Once and only once
Where the bird should have been
Pointed out to you
In the dappled shade by the river
In the park

So blue
It could have been behind glass
In a poem
From a dream.

Noel Howley

Close Encounters

I read somewhere
About not being able
To slip a razor blade
Between the stones
of the great pyramid Cheops.

That’s closeness.

Wish the edifice
Of our togetherness
Was the same.

The kisses that we carve
Are often jagged and imperfect
Fitting poorly against
The wind and rain.

The blade of insecurity
And doubt slips often
Between the smooth warm
Sculpture of our love.

Sometimes
The great pyramid itself
Could fit between us.

Gerry Moran

Out of the Depths

Across the haggard gate
knee deep in buttercups
she watches him
swinging the enamel bucket
and whistling
near the hollow field
almost out of sight now
until he emerges again
climbing steps of time
walking towards her,
his white shirt sleeves
rolled up to the elbows.
She hopes he won’t spill any
or fill it with trawneens.
He comes to her
sweat dripping.
She dips her cupped hands,
lifts them and drinks.
Like a dam burst
streams and rivers
flow into her veins
drenching her mind,
droplets trickle down her arms.
Opening her eyes
she whispers a silent prayer.

Willie-Joe Meally

Scattering the Dark

I wanted words to bud
and blossom, fill the page
with memories of you.
Nothing came but the stark fact
of your going.
In the dead of night
Kavanagh’s *flat, flat grief of defeat*
breaking you,
you reached for an exit
and walked through, leaving
no footprints.

I turned my gaze, saw
a song thrush bounding across the grass.
She paused, tilted her head
then scurried towards my window
and stared. Days and weeks she came
scattering the dark.

And when I walked with sorrow
it was the song of the mistle thrush
that kept me company.
Shy bird of childhood:
blue eggs nesting
in the mossy green mouth
of a stone ditch,

her presence now so stark
in its fluency,
her loud melodious sound released
into the summer air
as if to say you have not gone
into the dark but into the light.

Nora Brennan

So you can say you had two mothers

So you can say you had two mothers
I will listen to the radio in the dark
and collect bones and seaweed
to hang from our windows

So you can say you had two mothers
I will lay the table with bread and wholesome meals
sweep dust from the corners of our rooms

So you can say you had two mothers
I will conduct music in a silent room
and paint abstract pictures on our walls
show you how to really own art

So you can say you had two mothers
I will pack a lunch in plastic boxes
say a prayer at bedtime

So you can say you had two mothers
I will perform my daily duty
to you and to
my muse

One of us
mother
one of us
anonymous.

Sharon Verrall

Necessary Prayers

I search forest floors
and shadows of trees,
kneeling for
the bones of leaves.
Things skeletal and intricate
announce themselves, delicately
folding into another phase.

Browns turning golden,
ochres lace-patterned,
wood-loused, spider-webbed
and wormed – like us,
afterwards, in the ground.
A thing so small.

I gather up the relics
of low tawny places,
draw them to my breast,
nourishing them with my concern,
praying those necessary prayers.

Sharon Verrall

Tightrope Walker

Sound-waves arc, the needle graphs a jagged shoreline,
a storm is coming – a storm to up-end your life,
curate your possessions onto the floor,
washing a well-meaning caller to your door,
with a bonsai gift to tip you over the edge –
‘another bloody thing to tend’ – but all that is yet to come,

the beat slows, like a motorboat arriving into a cove,
the spaces between the notes are all you can bear.

The rhythm-keeper has stopped. The air thickens
to hold your body in space. Your lungs fill with a longing
to retrace your steps, IV drip-stand aloft for balance,
soft-shoe along the high-wire painted through corridors,
slide by *Casualty*, hoof it to the car park to feed
the machine your day-old ticket, then wait for the coins to drop.

Nuala Roche

Know who you are

He played in his garden,
Gathered stones in his new toy,
Set up his game
And put it in order.

Out on the road men at work
Dug holes, filled cracks, spread tar.

The boy watched,
Didn’t miss a move,
Rubbbed his nose when the smell of tar was strong
Then back to his game.

I would bide my time
Then ask “Are you a big man working on the road”?
He didn’t look up,
Just shook his head.

“No,” he said, “I’m just a boy with a wheelbarrow.”

Rose Kelly

The Day Before Christmas

The funeral was held on Christmas Eve.
Afterwards, we shopped like everyone else
Searching for last minute half-forgotten groceries
In tinselled aisles, politely waiting our turn
For weighing scales, fresh meats, cheeses, shiny oranges,
The Christmas meal unfolding before our eyes;
And as we felt our way around row after row
Of shelving heaving with Christmas promise
We caught, then, the barest hint of excitement, of expectation
Only to lose it again, suddenly,
As we remembered what had passed,
Our hearts tightening at how it would feel
To wake on Christmas morning without him.

Mary Malin