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*and another thing*

Louis de Paor



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*Translations by Kevin Anderson,  
Biddy Jenkinson, and Mary O'Donoghue,  
with the author*



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Conamara

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# Blackberries

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She plucks blood from the briars,  
shadowed eyes as bright  
as time to come  
that has not yet darkened her days.

If I remember rightly, she says,  
a year after our return,  
the blackberries aren't nearly as sweet  
as last year's snow.

The white tide  
is high as the sun  
surging in her pulse,  
and a thorn in her talk,  
unbeknownst to her,  
skins my fingers.

She wants me to taste  
the black sweetness,  
bitter as truth  
on the tip of my tongue.

If I could take this day  
and all the little days  
of my life, now gone,  
I would; catch time by the throat,  
and choke it until it stopped

so she could taste time and again  
the leaving light of this day  
silent as last year's snow  
that never fell (nor will fall)  
upon this earth.

# Sméara Dubha

---

Priocann sí braonta fola den sceach,  
súile daite chomh glé  
leis an am le teacht  
nár dhoirchigh a hóige go fóill.

Más buan mo chuimhne, adeir sí,  
bliain tar éis filleadh ón iasacht,  
níl na sméara chomh blasta in aon chor  
le sneachta na bliana seo caite.

Tá gile na taoide  
chomh hard leis an ngrian  
a líonann gach cuas dá cuisle,  
is dealg sa chaint i ngan fhios di  
a réabann craiceann mo mhéar.

Ba mhaith léi go mblaisfínn  
den mhilseacht dhubh  
atá chomh searbh  
leis an bhfírinne ghlan  
ar bharr mo theanga.

Ó thabharfainn an lá seo  
is na laethanta gearra go léir  
a tháinig roimhe dem shaol  
ach greim scrogaill  
a bhreith ar an uain  
is é a thachtadh,

go mblaisfeadh sí arís is arís eile  
de sholas an lae seo ag dul as  
chomh ciúin le sneachta na bliana seo caite  
nár bhuail (is nach mbuailfidh)  
urlár an tsaoil seo go deo.



# Cycle

---

There I was  
half sitt-  
ing, half stand-  
ing, sideways,  
in the saddle, sort of,  
backside to the wind,  
to the whole childworld  
I wished behind me,  
clumsy  
as Ó Ríordáin's duck,  
and you running,  
breathless beside me  
so I wouldn't fall  
headfirst.

(If you ask me now,  
I don't think you kept  
even a fingertip on the saddle  
as you crossed your heart to do;  
the only thing that kept me from falling  
was my complete faith in you.)

When I finally got the hang  
of that awkward contraption  
between my legs, I kept on  
pedalling the air,  
as far away from you  
as I could get.

Now and again I hear  
in the farthest corner of my memory  
your laboured shout after me  
sending me off on life's knotted road:

'Keep going, boy, keep going,  
and for the love of God,  
don't look back.  
Don't look back.'

And I didn't.

The last time,  
I believe, I was tricked

into believing anything.

---



# Rothar Mór an tSaoil

---

Bhíos-sa im shuí-  
sheasamh,  
sceabhach,  
sa diallait ar éigin,  
tóin le gaoth,  
leis an saol leanbaí go léir  
ba mhaith liom a fhágaint im dhiaidh,  
chomh tuathalach  
le lachain an Ríordánaigh,  
tusa agus saothar ort  
ag rith lem thaobh  
sa tslí nach dtitfinn  
i ndiaidh mo chinn.

(Ag cuimhneamh siar dom anois air,  
is dóigh liom nár choinnigh tú  
oiread is barr lúidín sa diallait  
mar a gheall tú go sollúnta a dhéanamh,  
gurb é mo chreideamh ionatsa amháin  
a choinnigh slán sa tsiúl mé.)

Nuair a d'éirigh liom ar deireadh  
an t-inneall místuama féim ghabhal  
a thiomáint, leanas orm ag treabhadh  
thonnta an aeir chomh fada uait  
agus ab fhéidir liom dul.

Airím ó am go chéile  
san aragal is sia isteach im chuimhne  
do ghlaio giorranálach im dhiaidh  
dom chur uait ar bhóthar casta an tsaoil:

‘Coinnigh ort, a bhuachaill, coinnigh ort,  
is ar chraiceann do chluas,  
ná féach id dhiaidh.  
Ná féach id dhiaidh.’

Ná níor fhéachas.

An uair dheireanach,  
creidim, ar imríodh  
cleas sin an chreidimh orm.

# Past Master

---

He taught us bloody poetry,  
cutting us with sharp words,  
Lepanto, The Siege of Athlone,  
The Charge of the Light Brigade,  
till we felt his heart  
beat in the pulse of the poem,  
Don John of Austria coming from the war.

He had no time for the feeble lies  
that built high walls between a child's mind  
and the great cry of the world:  
there were children in Vietnam,  
he said, buried alive by thugs  
dropped from the sky  
who wouldn't waste a bullet  
on anything as small,  
as piddling as us.

The air was thick as dirt  
when I woke that night  
with the curtain twisted round my head;  
the more I struggled to get out,  
the tighter the knot  
he had tied on my conscience.

We thought he'd explode  
that Monday morning in 1972;  
his eyes bulged at what he saw  
in front of our eyes, a rubber bullet  
fat as a Guard's baton,  
black as a horse's prick.

When he drew a lash of the baton  
on the desk without warning  
we could feel the sweat  
on the soles of our feet,  
the clamour of blood in my ears  
was loud as the silence  
you could hear as far away as Derry.

We would never have believed then  
that anything as small,  
as piddling as death,

could find home or shelter  
in the master's heart.

---

We were receiving confirmation  
from the bishop's hand  
when we heard the news  
that all his rage was spent;  
there was a knot in his heart  
that no words could undo,  
no doctor's hands unravel.

No sooner had the earth dimmed  
the light we saw  
above his head in battle  
than the flying column of his words  
deserted the spineless chatter  
that melts as quickly now  
as sweet lies in my mouth.

No matter how often I call them back,  
to show me again that fierce light  
that was seen before at Ferdia's Ford,  
they are beyond my reach,  
those toughtalking words  
that could never break that gentle man.

# Máistir Dána

---

Mhúin sé fuilíocht dúinn,  
ár leonadh le focail ghonta  
Lepanto, The Siege of Athlone,  
The Charge of the Light Brigade,  
gur bhraitheamar a chuisle féin  
ag bualadh fé chraiceann an dáin,  
Don John of Austria ag triall ó pháirc an áir.

Níor ghéill don gcur i gcéill  
a chuir fál go haer idir aigne linbh  
agus goltraí mhór an tsaoil:  
bhí leanaí i Vítneam, a dúirt sé,  
á gcur ina mbeathaidh  
ag ceithearnaigh a tháinig ón spéir,  
nárbh fhiú leo piléar a chur amú  
ar rudaí chomh beag,  
chomh suarach linn fhéin.

Bhí an taer chomh tiubh le cré  
nuair a dhúisíos i lár na hoíche sin  
le cuirtín trom casta ar mo cheann;  
dá mhéid dar fhéachas le héaló  
is ea is mó a chuas i bhfastó  
sa tsnaidhm a chuir sé ar mo choinsias.

Mheasamar go bpléascfadh sé  
maidin Luain i naoi déag seachtó a dó;  
d'at a shúil ag stánadh ar an bhfeic  
os ár gcomhair amach, piléar rubair  
chomh ramhar le truinsean Garda,  
chomh dubh le bod capaill.

Nuair a tharraing sé lasc  
gan choinne leis ar a dheasc  
tháinig allas amach tré bhoinn ár gcos,  
bhí torann na fola im chluais  
chomh hard leis an dtost  
a chualathas chomh fada ó bhaile  
le Doire Cholmcille.

Níor chreideamar an uair sin  
go bhfaigheadh rud chomh beag,  
chomh suarach leis an mbás

faoiseamh ná spás  
i gcroí an mháistir.

---

Bhí ár dtoil á cur againn  
fé láimh an easpaig  
nuair a tháinig scéala  
gur shíothlaigh a ríastradh;  
bhí nasc ar a chroí  
ná féadfadh focail  
ná méara dochtúra a scaoileadh.

Ní túisce a dhoirchigh an chré  
an solas a chonaiceamar  
os a chionn sa chath  
ná chuaigh macra na bhfocal  
ar a gcoimeád ón gcaint mheata  
a leánn chomh prap  
leis an éitheach álainn im bhéal.

Dá mhéid dá bhféachaim  
lena mealladh is an ghrian bhorb  
a chonacthas tráth ag Áth Fhirdia  
a thabhairt leo abhaile,  
ní dán dóibh filleadh,  
na focail chrua ná féadfadh  
an fear bog san a mhíniú.

# Deichtine's Daughter

---

On Newcastle Road, a fairhaired girl  
is walking towards town, an ash-stick  
swinging in her hand, easy as the lock  
of hair dancing on her forehead.

As you'd expect, there's a nick  
in the seasoned wood, another  
in the girl's cheek, the fire  
of combat blazing in her eyes;  
her hip bones jut and angle,  
turned like the blade of a hurley  
that grew unexpectedly in her fist.

Blood will be spilt  
when she arrives at Culann's feast.



# Iníon Deichtine

---

Ar Bhóthar an Chaisleáin Nua,  
tá cailín fionn ag siúl i dtreo an bhaile,  
maide fuinseoige ag sileadh óna láimh  
chomh héasca leis an loca  
a rinceann ar chlár a héadain.

Tá mant, mar is cóir, san adhmaid críonna,  
is marc dá réir ar ghrua na mná,  
faghairt na himeartha ina súil  
is a cromán chomh casta sa tsiúl  
le bais an chamáin  
a d'fhás gan choinne ina glaic.

Doirtfear fuil ach a dtiocfaidh sí  
chomh fada le cóisir Chulainn.

# Catwoman

---

The cat in her insisted  
the filthy pelt  
be let in,  
dragging its pain  
over the threshold  
of our dirty looks.

For a whole month  
she opened the door  
of her heart  
to the diseased creature  
that crouched by the dish  
she left on the window-sill.

When I made fun  
of their strange liaison  
the sharp claws of her eyes  
left raw welts on our love.

Herself was out  
and the man next door  
replacing the thatch with slates  
on the high roof of the world  
when the dogs tore  
the cat asunder,

and you honestly couldn't tell,  
said the kindly neighbour,  
whether it was the racking of bones  
or the larynx being scrunched  
that sounded its voiceless death.

*When the swans fly south,  
cutting and bruising the air,  
is it the throb of their wings  
or the cry of their throats  
that proclaims the sky  
and all beneath it belongs  
by right to the beautiful?*

The catwoman said nothing,  
just chewed her claws,  
ignoring the kind words

I left out for her that night,  
like milk in saucers,  
all around the house.

---

But give her a gun  
up on the neighbour's roof  
and she'd do for all  
the beauty of this world,  
scattering its smathered feathers  
to the four winds  
so that our dogdumb ears  
could never forget  
the squealing agony  
of that wretched thing  
we had all wished dead.

# Catbhean

---

Ní cheadódh an cat inti sin  
nach dtabharfaí bheith istigh  
don mothal lofa  
a d'iompair a thinneas  
thar tairseach ár ndoichill isteach.

Roinn sí ar feadh na míosa  
a nádúr fial leis an bpian  
a tháinig go dtí an mhias  
a bhí leagtha aici  
ar leac na fuinneoige.

Nuair a dheineas beag  
den gcaidreamh neamhghnách  
nochtaigh a súil inginí géara  
a chuir riast ar leiceann ár gcumainn.

Bhí sí féin as baile  
is an fear béal dorais  
ag cur sclátaí in áit na scolb  
ar dhíon ard an tsaoil  
nuair a réab na coin  
géaga an chait ó chéile,

is níor léir,  
adeir mo chomharsa lách,  
arbh é stracadh na gcnámh  
nó scrios an bhosca ina scornach thiar  
a thug guth do bhás an bhalbháin.

*Is an fhuaim ghéar  
a ghortaíonn an t-aer  
is na healaí ag imeacht ó dheas,  
an é buille na sciathán  
nó éamh na bpíob a fhógraíonn  
gur leis an rud álainn an spéir  
is a bhfuil laistíos di go léir?*

Ní dúirt catbhean faic  
ach inginí a dhá lapa  
a chogaint, gan beann  
ar bhainne na bhfocal  
a dhoirteas-sa ar fud an tí

an oíche sin ina comhair.

---

Ach gunna ina glaic aici  
ar dhíon na gcomharsan,  
scaoilfeadh sí áilleacht an tsaoil  
ina clúmh smeartha le gaoth  
le nach nglanfaí go deo  
dár gcluasa gadhair  
an gheoin chráite  
a lig créatúr gránna  
arbh fhada linn go léir a bhás.

# Archaeology

---

The tip of her finger  
barely brushed my elbow,  
a touch as soft – no,  
softer than that –  
as the air stirred  
by her fluent walk  
down the wooden gangway  
of McBrayne's joyless ferry

Yet she left her mark,  
like the Viking  
whose footprint remains  
in the unforgetting earth  
at the ford of hurdles,  
an amber path  
from the metal workshop  
to the adulterer's house,  
where no trace of man  
or woman remains  
after each little death.

If the ground were dug up now  
around the black pool of my heart  
below the Corporation buildings,  
under Handel's concert hall  
and the ascendancy mansions,  
right down beneath the foul shambles  
and the ruined mud-houses,  
they'd find the amber arch  
of her instep walking there,  
high-heeled shoes  
confused in her hands,  
her laughter in the street  
as bright – no, brighter than that –  
as the sun on her face  
when she barely brushed my elbow  
as she went her way slowly  
from the moored longship  
of my heart a thousand years ago last night.

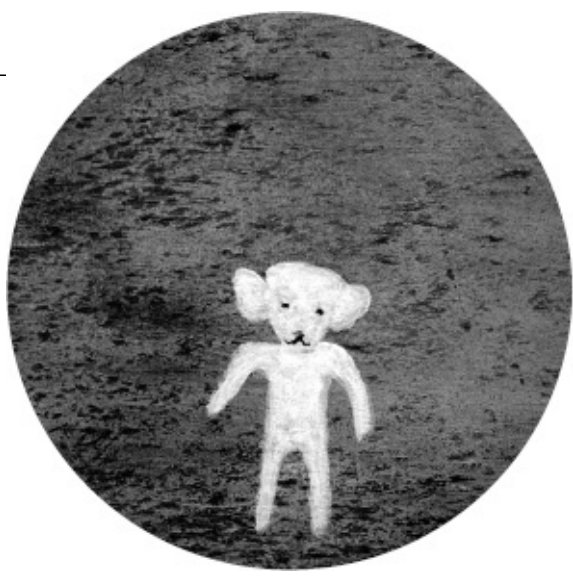
# Seandálaíocht

---

Chuimil a láimh  
le cupán m'uilleann ar éigin,  
tadhall chomh séimh  
– níos séimhe ná sin –  
le corraíl an aeir  
á bhrú i leataoibh  
ag siúl éasca a cabhla  
is í ag teacht i dtír  
ó bháidín dúr McBrayne.

D'fhág ar a shonsan a lorg  
mar an Lochlannach fir  
a d'fhág a mharc  
sa chré shíoraí  
ag áth na gcliath,  
cosán ómra  
ón gceardlann mhiotail  
go teach an adhaltranais,  
áit ná maireann iarsma  
de mhian an duine  
tréis a bháis gan aird.

Má bhaintear an chré  
de linn dhubh mo chroí,  
laistíos d'oifigí an Bhardais,  
faoi cheolteach Handel  
is na tithe móra go léir,  
thíos faoin seamlas bréan  
is fothraigh na mbothán dóibe,  
gheofar cuar ómra  
a coise boinn ag siúl,  
bróga sálarda ag dul  
thar a chéile ina láimh,  
a gáire chomh lonrach sa tsráid  
le dath na gréine ar a héadan  
– níos gile ná sin, a dhuine –  
nuair a chuimil a méar  
le faobhar m'uilleann  
ar éigin is í ag imeacht  
gan deifir i dtír  
ó longphort ceangailte  
mo chroí, míle bliain  
is an oíche aréir.





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