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Roscommon County Council Arts Office

Autumn Leaves

A broadsheet of poetry,
flash fiction and prose

Editor: Louise G. Cole

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Bog Warrior

I have to clean the turf-bank first, removing the top four or five feet of useless spongy material to get at the good fuel below. Well, it's not entirely useless; the cleanings are used to fill the water-filled bog-hole, the site of last year's cutting.

I'm out early, preparing the bank for this year. It's seven o'clock; I might as well start cutting, loading heavy wet sods on a barrow and tipping them in piles on the spread ground. Hard work, when you have nobody to help. I wish people would leave me alone, to work my bit of land the way my father did. I don't ask anyone for anything, I just do my work. I want nothing that isn't mine.

Not like the thief that called yesterday. He was inside the house before I could stop him; a big strong fellow.

'I know you have money,' he said. 'You sold cattle.'

He was right; I don't like putting money in the bank in case the pension department finds out about it. Those people nose around a lot in other people's business.

'It's up in the room,' I said.

It wasn't, it was under the armchair he was slouched in. The gun was up in the room.

I dragged him out to his furniture van; I swopped the bloodied armchair for one of his new ones and drove the van to the quarry. It burned easy. He's under my feet now, well buried, and I'm spreading newly-cut turf over his grave. I laid a few sods in the rough shape of a cross, just to give him a Christian send-off.

Last year's ground is firm now, well bedded down. I suppose I should make a bit of a cross there too, and say a prayer for that pension inspector.

In the Morning Air

As rainclouds gather overhead
A damselfly hovers, drizzling light
Iridescent hues shimmering
In the morning air.

Flit dance on sunlit rays
Like a butterfly it settles
Elongated elegance
Reflecting on still waters.

Willows waltz to a westerly wind
Swallows sweep swiftly by
Bumblebee on thistle high
A hive of activity.

Kingfisher, cyan, orange, blue
Like an arrow shooting through
Weaving silk-like, rustling reeds
Thirst quenched on a morning
dewdrop.

Thoughts immersed
In the glory of Nature.

The background of the entire page is an abstract, textured surface in various shades of red, orange, and brown. It has a painterly or marbled appearance with visible brushstrokes or folds, creating a sense of depth and movement. The colors range from deep, dark reds and browns to lighter, more vibrant oranges and pinks.

Civil Dawn

Mist buckles, blush red.
Worker bee cosy in his
honeysuckle bed.

Emma Towey

Quest

Late birds crossing the stars
are part of it. I see them
in the mind's eye as dark plums
ripening at sunset. Long grass
obscures the fallen fruit: enlightenment
if we choose to seek it, powers
in the cosmos that guide us inwards
until we are almost invisible to ourselves,
a faint sequence of quantum traces
to which ripeness comes and goes
while the plum boughs canker
and the pear tree sweetens its tears.
And what else remains to be done
to discover more sweetness? Words
incline skywards then are gone. Something
moves the fruit trees. Night
searches the heart for the spirit of birds.

Tom Noone

Dancing in the Rain

From the brow of the hill, I see the forest below, where my five warriors stand, beacons guiding me home.

My heart is filled with joyful expectation. Turning into our magical, tree-lined lane, dipping our heads like newlyweds as we pass under the leafy bower, dappled sunlight bounces through the foliage, to then emerge and behold our fairytale cottage.

Five majestic warriors stand tall and strong, spreading their limbs as in a warm embrace. On a hide, built specially for me, I sit among them listening to the music of the wind, loving where I am, loving being home.

This is the memory I have locked in my heart. A happy memory. From before the storms. My heroes were uprooted, along with every tree in the surrounding forest. It was a sorry sight. I walked upon the devastation of what used to be, tears fell.

We no longer live in a kingdom of leaves. No elusive animals rustle in the undergrowth. No curious fox cub will cautiously take a bow from between the curtain of trees.

There is more birdsong. Ferns gently unfurl, a myriad of untamable wildflowers appear in the timeworn walls on the path leading to our house. New life sprouts among the sticks where my warriors fell. The fuchsia full of summer flowers and buzzing bees. A wonderful panoramic view had been unveiled.

Behold the circle of life, death and rebirth. I'm grateful. My beloved home is safe. At the closing of the day I see sunsets from my kitchen window. On clear nights a starry splendour.

The memories of my warriors still bring me joy, and I have learned to 'dance in the rain'. A tiny problem: my love and I are known locally as 'the babes in the woods'. Whatever will they call us now?

Words

I like to think of my pad of paper as a garden. A place to bury words and watch
them grow.

The words are like laundry, hung closely together on the line to form a sentence.
The sentence grows and increases in size, like flour when warm water and yeast are
added to form paragraphs.

The paragraphs become thick slices of warm bread, dripping with butter, only
needing a quiet corner and natural light.

Theresa Ryan

The Lone Mate

after & IM Michael Longley

No doubt if you had been there
Walking with me on the Shannon bank,
The lone pen, preening herself in rhythm
Would turn your head too. Unaware your final
Poetic music has left us with the ripples

Of your absence, she preens as though in baptism,
A ritual of oil and water, her beak moves up and down.
Extending her wings, she gives me the nod
And feather flap as her extending neck
Water mirrors a miracle of white.

Noelle Lynskey

Like a Peridot

You are rare and there is none that can replace you.
You are vibrant, ever bursting with life and love.
You are balanced with patience and clarity of thought.

Your past though laden with fear and challenges,
will fade into the breaking light.
You will increase your self-esteem
and let go of guilt stemmed from past experiences.

You bring luck to those around you
And evoke positive energy to ward off darkness.
With your sight, the world is not afraid of the future;
staring distinctly into the Milky Way.

You provide a shield and many who run under your wings are safe.
You are as green as the fertile lands; blooming at the birth of the rains.
You are an evening Emerald, softer in looks but heavy in weight.

Like a Peridot, you are all of these; only better . . .
because you are human and you are unique.

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Fairy Bridge

Lough Key

Some say
fairies live beneath this bridge
where waters ripple from ridge to ridge.

Some say
they stand in a circle chanting words
only river can understand.

Some say
they forage the forest floor
to feast on milky mushrooms.

Some say
they wave their wands, rich in rubies and resin
to grant wishes for those who believe.

Some say
with wings spun of delicate lace
they take to the skies full of grace.

Some say
tinkling bells can be heard on a perfumed breeze
as they flutter between the trees.

Some say
beneath the canopy of ash and oak
they sleep in petals of sweet scented lavender.

The background of the entire page is a deep red color with a subtle, quilted or pleated texture. The texture consists of various shades of red and maroon, creating a sense of depth and movement. The lines of the texture are irregular and flowing, giving it an organic feel.

Right Now

Tomorrow
and
yesterday
end up
being
the same
distance
from now,
however
much time
we spend
worrying
about
the future,
fretting
about
the past.

Louise G. Cole

Little Waves on the Lake

I first encountered art
In the pages of old books
Beside a warm turf fire
In that draughty sitting room.
Grainy photos of Greek statues
Frescos of angels and saints
Bright Ottoman paintings
Of soldiers with scimitars raised
And The Great Wave off Kanagawa.
Who knows how many times
I stared at Fuji's white head
Peeking out from amongst the waves
As their foamy tips bared down
Like so many savage claws.
Afterwards I gazed
Towards stony hills to the west
So rarely capped with snow.
And then, so far from the sea,
I watched little waves lap
Against the empty pier
Of the little lake below.

A Moment of Beauty

Today's moment of beauty
came unexpectedly
when a pair of swans flew low
across the Gurteen road
on their way towards Monasteraden.
I called them Joy and Sorrow.
I named them Gift and Loss.
I called them Peace and War
I named them Paradox.
I called them Here and Now
and gave them, two-by-two
the names of every contradiction
from Gaza to Lough Gara
as they flew in unison
across the lake, leaving only
mystery and beauty in their wake.

Bernadette McCarrick

Elemental

8:00 am. A dead-quiet November morning. Not another soul about.

A man is going to chop timber. The dog knows the routine, walking ahead into the yard, before settling in a patch of low morning sun to watch.

The man glances out over the frosted lake and listens closely. An occasional beating sound, the swans clamouring, drying their wings and is that the wind in the reeds, the same sound Yeats heard in 1899? Time stands still, while inevitably moving forward.

He has driven three hours of night to get here. Behind his eyes linger the images of stressed faces, people in suits, tension, traffic. He feels exhausted too, but selects a sweet-smelling beech log and raises the axe. The crack - the surprising power of a simple act.

His lips move, a whisper from the past: 'chopping wood warms you twice'.

Phrases linger, searching too for that heat - the fire to light a word.

Anne O'Leary

Absence

The silence hurts my head, Each and every morning until it breaks me. I try to drown it out with music, block it out with anything. Sometimes it works, other times it only reminds me more. What once was present, a constant, now merely memories.

It's as if the mornings have been muted, all life being removed with the sound, leaving no echo of their existence. All that remains of them is their absence.

That one line of lyrics, from that one specific song, it only makes it worse. Perfectly describing the situation, their absence.

Telephone wires remain empty, as well as the clear blue sky. The worms now live in peace, free of fear.

'The early morning sings no more.'

David Ryan

Burned or Planted?

Hewers of wood and drawers of water, they settled into the landscape.
Hunters, gathers and farmers tilled the land burying seeds in the rough soil.
From Stone Age to the technological era our ancestors thrived.
Fighting pestilence, wars and famine, continuing their journey.
Progressing from one generation to the next they evolved and prospered.
Life was short and must be celebrated.
Respect for the dead and decent burial part of their ethos.
Wrapped in burial shrouds they faced their Maker.
Cremated on the funeral pyre they returned to ashes.
Placed in the tomb they completed their journey.
The one certainty in life is Death. Should we prepare for the inevitable?
Sympathising with mourners at a recent funeral, I stand by the coffin
and pray for the deceased.
My granddaughter, notices some elaborate urns on display.
A discussion on cremation and burial ensued, followed by the question:
'Well Granny, when you die do you want to be burned or planted?'
Decision time looms.

Margaret Mugan

Wood Pile

Swallows are nesting in the roof. They fly in and out through a small hole in the soffit board. Later, I hear a rattle at the water butt and when I pull back the blind, I see the rear end of a mink disappearing into that same opening. I go out to take a look. He shrinks back from the opening. He's seen me now, he'll probably not come back.

I often see mink on the lakeshore and I had seen one at the bottom of the garden, on top of the wood pile, a week ago. I clapped my hands to shoo him away.

All is quiet in the roof and I realise he's taken the birds. I get the hole boarded up that day. He can't get in. But he's clever and from the outside he pulls down one of the lamps that is recessed into the soffit board. I listen out and when I'm sure he's not there I put extra screws into the lamp fittings.

Later, that evening I hear crashing and banging over my head. It carries on until I unscrew one of the lamps. The wildlife people can't do anything as mink aren't a protected species.

'Are you sure it's not a pine marten? We would go out and catch him for you.'

'It's a mink.'

'Get a trap and bring him off, or get in touch with a local gun club.'

I borrow a trap and catch a pine marten. I let him go and give back the trap.

The mink hasn't come back. Being shut in traumatized him and I haven't seen him since. I do love animals but please, mink, stay at the bottom of the garden. Anything this side of the wood pile is my territory.

Rainbow Trout

Once in a lifetime, along comes the fish -
the fortune teller, the one in plenty
who once swallowed the golden ring of your
ancestor.

He may be battle-hardened,
his mouth bearing hooks and wisps of net
like the beard of some old pirate.

He may be the venerable shark
embellishing that tale of the wooden ship
laden with gold and men - the one that got away

or a magical fish changing elements
from brine to fresh, leaping leagues
the wrong way up a long river.

More likely he will be all of these
reborn in the neat bones of a trout
who will fix you with an enigmatic gaze

and in one quick movement be on his way,
the whole of the morning sky
repeating in his scales.

Marian Griffin

Lough Ree – Mo Loch Álainn

Before I came to the lake of the king
my old home wore a halo of treetops
casting dark shadows long before sunset.
I rarely saw the whole of the moon —
its roundness severed in slices between dark branches.
Stars on frosty nights
were distant stage lights within a circle of sky
flickering above cold stone steps
But here, at the edge of the Lough Ree
I watch the sun rise over Galey:
orange and crimson water rippling towards three counties
I feel its space — sheer openness —
a portal to its history, myths, and legends, opening memories
Bloody waves wash over the souls
of fallen Vikings and Normans, pig stealing pirates,
long buried beneath its boggy depths
At noon a curlew soars from the grassy bank,
its plaintive cry piercing that part of the heart
that is present to its rarity, its return from silence.
Mist falls, blurring slanted sunlight.
Quickening waves burst cloudy reflections
onto the rocks, tingling my skin as I join the swimmers.
A powerful youth with titian hair
moves swiftly through the choppy waves,
diving deeply, connecting with the wisdom of the element —
its softness on his skin.
He moves with grace and fluidity underwater.
We watch in wonder as he surfaces smiling to share his joy,
our little orange floats bobbing like mandarins towards the castle
on the beautiful lake of the king.

Winnowing

June and the meadows are in rapture
after rain, born again and riotous,
wild with ox-eye, foxtail,
purple loosestrife. Night is mustering
near and the dropping sun bathes
the awestruck fields in sacred light

I wish I cut a dash through long grass;
blade-swathe like an explorer hot
with the purity of a dream, full sailed with zeal.

I am more familiar with cold sweat, bedraggled
journeys home, the aimless drifting,
a compromised vessel slipstreamed by jetsam
frantic for safe harbour,
some familiar shore.

In the dense foliage, sedge warblers
in furious council, defy convention,
renounce onomatopoeic stereotype
and deeper still, amid the meadows'
mid-summer murmur, a snipe's eerie
winnow haunts the twilight, air streaming
through outstretched feathers
showcasing the best version of itself.

Here in the fading light, serene
as a river bed, meek as reed grass,
I allow the breeze through me
purging chaff, saving grain,
shedding the detritus of the day.

The background of the entire page is an abstract, textured surface in shades of deep red, maroon, and burnt orange. The texture resembles heavy, draped fabric or perhaps a close-up of a mineral surface, with various folds, creases, and tonal variations creating a sense of depth and movement. The lighting is soft, highlighting the tactile qualities of the material.

Moment

Seven o'clock in the morning
empty space on the horizon
amplifying the silence
of dew drenched grass.
The kind of dew that seeps
into your toes
over and over and over
to the season of childhood.
Transient as the shadow on the wall.
Time hasn't touched this.

Bernadette Murphy

Be Hex Be Herons

The old mantel clock had stopped. With its white enamel face and tiny blue flowers, it had sat on a windowsill above the kitchen table. 'It's a job for Sonny,' my mother said, and six weeks later I was given the task of collecting it.

On Saturday, Dad lowered the saddle on Mother's bike. No children's bike then. My twelve year old toes could just about reach the peddles. Nora and I set off on a two mile journey down country roads. I was excited to be given this task and there was a sense of adventure attached.

We cycled two abreast, chatted and sang songs, as we meandered over and back on the car-less roads. Loving the hills we lifted our legs and freewheeled down shouting 'yippee' in childhood freedom.

My clock was repaired and we said our goodbyes. Nora wanted to stop at the cemetery on the way home. Her father was buried there and she wished to say a prayer.

At home everyone was busy with farm chores. Sitting around the table at teatime, Mother asked about the clock. With horror I realized I left it in the graveyard. After a dressing down by my father, I felt embarrassed and disappointed as I headed for bed. Mickey loved his Saturday night game of cards and ceili-ing in his neighbour's house. They exchanged local news and told the odd ghost story. Cycling home, he was half way by the cemetery wall when the clock alarmed into the silent night. Frightened out of his wits and Shouting: 'Be hex, be herons,' repeatedly, he cycled with all his might. His hat flew off but he never glanced back.

Imagine the buzz locally as the story grew legs and 'hands' with each retelling.



DISCLAIMER

Each piece within these pages reflects the unique voice and imagination of the author. While the Council proudly supports artistic expression, the themes and perspectives are those of the writers alone and do not represent the official stance or endorsement of the editor or funders.