TotasM ot

for tea

I squatted beside Baz holding Jack. Baz spoke first. Is this it, d you think? I shrugged. What are we like? Getting upset over a jackdaw. He cleared his throat. Jack's part of the family. He coughed and went back to finish the chore he'd been doing outdoors, while I kept a vigil indoors. As he returned to the house with an armful of logs, I shook my head at him through the kitchen window. It began to snow as he dug the tiniest grave. He buried Jack alongside dogs, cats, gerbils, goldfish, over near the variegated hostas. I he buried from inside our warm kitchen, waiting for the kettle to boil again. This time watched from inside our warm kitchen, waiting for the kettle to boil again. This time

Jack gaped up at us both with his unblinking grey eyes. Sometimes they just need water. I dicked the dishwasher door closed in passing and stepped towards the sink, then knelt to tilt some water from a teaspoon towards the tip of Jack's shiny black beak. He shook his head, but swallowed. Well, now, that wasn't so bad, was it? Baz rested one hand over the fleecy. Is be warm enough d'you think? I slid my hand under the motionless jackdaw's wing, I'll put the kettle on, fill a hot water bottle.

It was after breakfast and I was loading the dishwasher when Baz came into the kitchen with the jackdaw. This fella needs help. He'd the bird cocooned in a blue fleecy. Found him perched in the woodshed. Didn't even struggle when I lifted him. A solitary wild jackdaw, Jack had been resident in our garden for several weeks. Roosting in the woodshed, he'd soon become trusting. All Baz would say, quiet like, was: Jananack, Jack, Jack, Jack, and the bird would strut down the garden path for scraps, unafraid.

Jack

Магу Lee

Does anything that's resurrected keep some taste of earth if it's to know itself again?

Or dream myself to be a dandelion to the last puff, hanging on to a fragile stem, yet humble in my standing—imagining that rebirth will happen only if my intricate, delicate parachutes are puffed off, whirled away, seeded in some unknown soil.

I want to sense the secret silence of trees' and seeds' relinquishing, grapple with the enigma of their sprouting life, intimate as breath, ceaseless sigh for completion.

Trees displaying their skeletons show up the shrinkage of years, skin tightening my hands, shrivelled leaves.

I feel their emptiness, bereft, like seeds scattered in damp soil.

I see light rise through branches, laying claim to the trees, their splendour surrendered.

pəpəəs

Monika Kaboth

This morning there were cartle grazing between tall trees where the turloughs will be in a few weeks. And yesterday, the first formation of geese flew crying over the house. The fuel shed high up to the rafters with logs waiting for a flaming feast when All Souls meet All Saints.

After the shower, sparkling raindrops left hanging, a scattering of gold.

A proud man with his flat cap singing, whistling to himself, king of the rubbish dump.

He pokes through the garbage, apreads it evenly, keeps it burning, will not look in her face when she unloads her black sacks.

The place now long closed and last week he died.

October

Amy Abdullah Barry

My daughters will taste fried rice, tinged with chatters of ginger and scallions, I'll scoop steamed nettles onto their plates, imagine it filter through their growing bodies.

In my suburban country kitchen, in a large wok filled with boiled rice, sliced okra and crushed garlic, fuse with an unfussed hush. It simmers to a dance of translucent onions.

cinnamon in boiled water,

to relieve aching muscles,

betel leaf to stop nose bleeds,

ginger for healthy heart,

turmeric paste spread on the face,

to calm the whims of unruly skin.

Papa told me of many remedies —

My neighbour, Mary explains, Nettles are best treatment for arthritis. Grasp the plant in a gloved band, swat them on stiff joints. This practice, called urtication dates back two thousand years.

Here in the country roaring verdant wild nettles, hymn the air, an invitation to harvest.

Remedies

S. C. Flynn

during their annual flutter in the wind. trail behind like rival festival flags and the distant solemn march of winter you can see the hope and promise of spring that will somehow make it through their absence; so much life and instinct from this landscape that twists and turns as fast as thought, stealing they all launch upwards in a giant ball on this very day and at this hour At a silent signal made every year under the weight of their massed impatience. as more and more arrive, bending branches You can sense the power building, peaking gathering energy for departure. a chattering, chirping autumn turbine thousands packed tightly together like smoke; e pulsing and boiling with birds, That clump of trees just up ahead

The Gathering

## A Birds Eye View

You pulled your face when we went inside, sulking like a child saying 'I don't like it'.

They all sat round square tables playing games and doing jigsaws.

'Take me home, I want to go' was all I got from you.

In a room overlooking the garden was a large picture window.

I held your hand as we watched the birds eat the blossom off the flowering cherry tree.

Tlike it here,'you said. Twant to stay.'

Carol Beirne

# All They Will Call You

The boat is taking water, and losing air from its fat rubber tube. The engine is silent, damaged when a big wave washed across it. We are rocking on the heavy swell, the boat flexing ominously. We bail furiously, using our cupped hands. Children are crying in fear and their parents are trying not to frighten them by making a fuss.

The young man pulls repeatedly on the starting cord, but the engine won't fire. If we had some paddles we could make progress, not just sit here at the mercy of the waves

The Romans called this sea 'Medius Terra', the centre of the earth; their empire stretched all around its shores. Their ships must have made this crossing many times. Behind me I can see the lights of Tarifa, the town they established to collect tolls from ships entering the straits. It lies across the water from Tangier on the African coast, a mere hour on the fast ferry for legitimate travellers.

The rest of us have to trust our lives to the men with the cheap inflatable boats, pushed by undersized outboard motors and driven by inexperienced boys who steer us across the sea in return for a free passage from the smugglers. This is our only hope, as war, lawlessness and drastic changes in the weather make survival in our homeland impossible. We just want to work and to live in peace, to provide for our children.

A patrol boat appears out of the darkness, searchlight glaring. I feel despair, I've been here before and I know the routine; they'll attach a tow line and take us back. In twenty minutes we will be back where we started, back to food riots and a creeping ice-age. 'Fortress Africa' is closed to refugees.

John Mulligan

# I hold the alder in my arms to let you go

It's always September. Song-keeper, air-catcher.

You are patterned, knitting jumpers, the sun catches the teeth of the machine shinning in front of me like childhood.

Leaf bringer. Plain, then purl.

How Aran wool made me itch. How I wear it close to my skin, feel its cords, its diamonds.

Rough-bark, ring-maker.

Your sharp temper cut at an angle just above the growing point, made us quick to bloom again, quick to forgive, quick to hold.

Flowerer, fruit-holder, pabulum.

I try to erase your final image, nest-fallen you became a thing of bones, no breath left.

Arboretum.

You told us;

Never think of me below ground

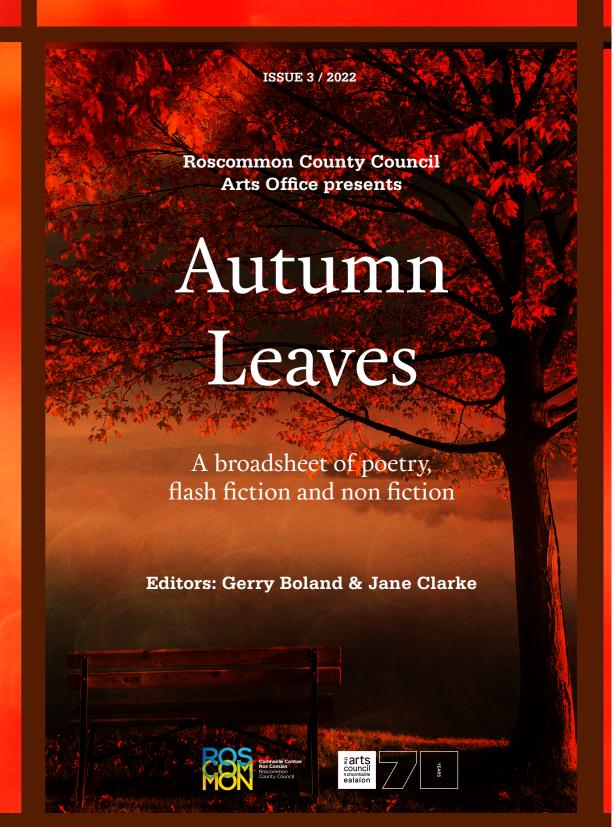
Planted deep in black soil

you are now hawthorn-rooted.

Berry-builder. Fairy-wanderling.

My branches bend towards you. Breeze-ruffle. Willow-wane. Shake loose the seedling broadcast to the wind.

Sinéad McClure



### Summer's Farewell

The last blackberries, sour as broken promises.
Behind cobwebbed curtains the loosestrife unties its hag-hair, discards the purple petticoats.

Summer writes its final letter with a grey shadow pen – green is no colour for a suicide note.

The woodland's scapegrace suitors leave with treacherous kisses, confetti that dances down in crimson, orange and gold. Farewells are rarely so beautiful.

Kristine Harvey

#### Remorse

You can make a fresh start... Bertolt Brecht

You can lay it down now here in the nearest wood, deep in the forgiving mulch under your feet.

Your remorse is a small dead creature ready for burial.

Don't wait until tomorrow.

The time has come and in this green silence you can hold your own private ceremony, and remain for one last moment of clean and wholesome sorrow before you head for home.

Bernadette McCarrick

#### A Rare Talent

A song thrush lands before me in the lime, Blocking my way, and will not meet my eye. He firms his gaze an inch beneath my chin And puffs his tweedy chest as if to say: "I'm going to recite - this may take time."

I search for exits, but it's all too late. He's sensitive as butter in the sun. I won't disturb his flow, I'll have to wait, But on and on the endless stanzas run. "Told you!" Is his opener, "Told you so!"

Repeated twice, then; "What's for tea?" Four times. Poor bird, he does his best. He takes a breath, And trickles notes like rivers catching rain, Then eyes me proudly, knowing I would stand All Summer, just to hear his song again.

Marian Griffin

#### Late October

This light always takes me back and hits me a glancing blow of regret.

Even when I was away

I tried to remember the clouds and the stone when I stood beneath the berries and the bough.

I saw the fence, the marshland and the Westport train, all headed for November with the prospect of north wind and frost.

You are part of this as well, the falling away, the giving up and letting go.

You are all this cool silence under the sky.

Eamonn Gordon

#### Moma

We'll remember her –
Not coffin-bound in a Strokestown graveyard,
but vigorous –
a lover of the great outdoors,
attuned to nature and with God,

attuned to nature and with Go gathering in hay, forking, twisting ropes, or tying, stooking, golden sheaves of corn.

I'll remember her -

planting potatoes, spraying blossoms, purple, white – on a November day – digging, heedless of bitter, frosty air, I could not tolerate – "I'll pick them, run home and warm yourself", she'd say.

Her kindness infinite.

Brigid Kavanagh

# The Dig

They turned the green sods with spades and picks, found the outline of a road,

clay and more clay, then stones, but nothing to show the presence of a man or woman, no clay pipe stem, no broken plate;

they knew the date of the road, unfinished as it was and going nowhere.

When they finished the dig the display trays were still clean and artefact bags unopened;

they washed clay from every trowel and spade, from every boot and glove, knew this was a graveyard of the spirit.

Mary Turley-McGrath

#### Ross

Where are you now?
I wonder and wait.
Will I see you in the clouds,
or in the reeds by the lake?

Will you blossom as a daisy, or hover close as a bee, or come again as the robin that graces the evergreen?

Might you be the wind, that blanketing breeze, or the dramatic lone headland that towers over wild seas?

No. You are the Light, that brilliant white ray that softens all nature, and brightens all days.

Ríona Egan

# Closing In

We made an orchard of the straggled plums, a single Bramley's Seedling, damsons, pears.

Their harvest now is meagre, but they earn their keep as high perches for garden birds:

dunnocks, chaffinches and bramblings, blue tits, magpies, a pair of collared doves,

and two robins, Christmas card bright, ever at war over territorial boundaries

in a place so lush, so fecund, it could support a flock of thousands each winter.

But sole possession is what they fight for, in a bloody battle to the death, when

the loudest redbreast banishes the weaker in feathered squabbles, to starve in full sight

of laden feeders, tasty titbits. He's chased away until the inevitable happens, and one

robin is left, alert to feathered invaders, unaware of feline intent a whisker away.

Louise G Cole

# Dreaming of the Boar

The boy walks on water, the early mist curling like smoke about his bare legs. His movements are slow, his gaze fixed on the silhouette of the ancient fir that cuts the skyline, stabbing like a spear into the belly of the heavens.

A weak light flits across the lake, the moon blurring softly against the sacred mound of Keash. He stops, feeling the weight of the old ones, as though they breathe still beneath their temple of stone.

Something shivers against his skin.

He grips his spear tighter, takes another step, exhales slowly as his foot finds the next placing.

He stops again, rubs the sweat from his brow, wishes for the splash of his father's passage to guide him, looks towards the sky.

There is a sun, half-buried in the folds of an aged night, pulling itself slowly into the world. The horizon bleeds, a hint of red dripping onto the eastern ridge above the lake. He feels for the pouch about his waist, thinks of the days spent sharpening his flints, the claps on his back as the men saw him off, the glimmer of fear in his father's eve

He'd told him he'd been dreaming of the boar. The leather thong hangs empty against his chest, waiting.

Before him, the mist is lifting. He can see his foot in its watery grave. He smiles, takes another step...

Stones, black with age and moss, crawl like slugs onto a broken shore.

People pass; some sit, taking in the ill-formed islands, the darkened humps like whales that break the surface, the fern-smothered trees.

The old ones watch from their shrunken temple.

A boy bends, pulls something from the crush of pebbled stone.

They watch as he presses the slender curve of bone to his chest.

The lake stirs...somnolent...remembering...

Anne Byrne

#### Feathers

Her mother's gifts were practical. After Dadda used the oak in the lower acres to gasp and claw his way to heaven, the farm had no place for dollies and fancies. One Christmas, Mother gave her a clutch of chickens and Baby Sister a pup.

Sister and the pup bonded in mischief. Mother grumbled half-heartedly, tolerating gnawed shoes and furniture. Her chickens grew into layers, each known by cluck or splash of feathers, each named by quirk or gimlet glance.

The day everything changed, she traced feathers from coop to kennel. Mother rang Uncle Freddie: *that dog has to go*.

She offered to help. Mother shrugged, indifferent: a bit late now, girl.

Sister was sent to her room once Freddie arrived.

She waited outside the bedroom, whispering a litany while Sister cried.

Catweazle, Touchwood, Carrot. Downstairs – no place, sentimentality on a farm – mother

plucked the birds. She pushed open Sister's door.

'Uncle says doggie's gone back where he came from.' Sister clutched the dog's

'Uncle says doggie's gone back where he came from.' Sister clutched the dog blanket. 'I didn't even say bye-bye.'

Nor I, Sister. She fingered Uncle Freddie's 12-gauge cartridge in her pocket, the New Hampshire feathers she'd slipped inside the spent casing. She bit her tongue and tasted blood, managed somehow to reach out and stroke Sister's hand. She thought to keep her powder dry, for now.

Kevin Hora

## St John's Wood

I sense the forest's lore, its motherlode, as a humid, fragrant stillness,

**Fat Women Dreaming** 

Fat women also have their dreams

that fill the sky by night and day,

strong, mysterious, stark and fey,

fat women also have their dreams.

Fettered by flesh, to you it seems,

yet thoughts soar lightly as they may,

spinning in beauty, power and grace.

The eye of the mind dictates us reams

of fire, joy, passion, to sing and say,

fat women also have their dreams.

Ideas are sewn with fairy seams,

fantastic costumes in which to play,

spinning in beauty, power and grace.

Blinkered is he who, righteous, deems

Fat women also have their dreams,

spinning in beauty, power and grace.

**Carol Wilson** 

Flesh must weight thoughts, to sluggish lay.

Fragile and delicate as lace,

spinning in beauty, power and grace.

as if all the secrets of the universe, its portals and intuitions, all its runes

and infinite blossomings are hothoused beneath this ancient canopy.

The only wisdom here for me; the slow waltz of dandelion seed, the bluebells' blaze,

and along the lakeshore, the windtossed swash that bleaches rocks bare as potholed skull.

When I take my measured leave
I will transport nothing from this place.

Though I cannot tap its bloodstream or feast on the fruit of the hazel,

it is enough for me that it is still here, ungovernable, knowing everything

and nothing and that when the rain dances on the treetops and upon the Shannon swell

someone will always feel the rhythm.

Tadgh Carey