

Josée Bienvenu Gallery

Stefana McClure

Whatever You Say Say Nothing

Rage for Order

Derek Mahon

Somewhere beyond the scorched gable end and the burnt-out buses
there is a poet indulging
his wretched rage for order –
or not as the case may be for his
is a dying art,
an eddy of semantic scruples
in an unstructurable sea.

He is far from his people,
and the fitful glare of his high window is as
nothing to our scattered glass.

His posture is grandiloquent and deprecating, like this,
his diet ashes,
his talk of justice and his mother
the rhetorical device
of an etiolated emperor –
Nero if you prefer, no mother there.

'... And this in the face of love,
death, and the wages of the poor ...'

If he is silent, it is the silence of enforced humility
if anxious to be heard, it is the anxiety
of a last word
when the drums start for his is a dying art.

Now watch me as I make history. Watch as I tear down
to build up with a desperate love,
knowing it cannot be
long now till I have need of his
desperate ironies.

Last Orders

Ciaran Carson

Squeeze the buzzer on the steel mesh gate like a trigger, but
It's someone else who has you in their sights. Click. It opens. Like
electronic

Russian roulette, since you never know for sure who'd who, or what
You're walking into. I, for instance, could be anybody. Though I'm told
Taig's written on my face. See me, would I trust appearances?

Inside a sudden lull. The barman lolls his head at us. We order *Harp* –
Seems safe enough, everybody drinks it. As someone looks daggers at us
From the *Bushmills* mirror, a penny drops: how simple it would be for
someone

Like ourselves to walk in and blow the whole place, and ourselves, to
Kingdom Come.

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Falls Funeral

John Montague

Unmarked faces
fierce with grief

a line of children
led by a small coffin

the young
mourning the young

a sight beyond tears
beyond pious belief

David's brethren
in the Land of Goliath.

Funeral Rites

Seamus Heaney

I
I shouldered a kind of manhood
stepping in to lift the coffins
of dead relations.
They had been laid out

in tainted rooms,
their eyelids glistening,
their dough-white hands
shackled to rosary beads.

Their puffed knuckles
had unwrinkled, the nails
were darkened, the wrists
obediently sloped.

The dulse-brown shroud,
the quilted satin cribs:
I knelt courteously
admiring it all

as wax melted down
and veined the candles,
the flames hovering
to the women hovering

behind me.
And always, in a corner
the coffin lid,
its nail-heads dressed

with the little gleaming crosses.
Dear soapstone masks,
kissing their igloo brows
had to suffice

before the nails were sunk
and the black glacier
of each funeral
pushed away.

II
Now as news comes in
Of each neighbourly murder
We pine for ceremony,
customary rhythms:

the temperate footsteps
of each cortège, winding past
each blinded home.
I would restore

the great chambers of Boyne,
prepare a sepulchre
under the cupmarked stones.
Out of side-streets and by-roads

purring family cars
nose into line,
the whole country tunes
to the muffled drumming

of ten thousand engines.
Somnabulant women,
left behind, move
through emptied kitchens

imagining our slow triumph
towards the mounds.
Quiet as a serpent
in its grassing bouelvard,

the procession drags its tail
out of the Gap of the North
as its head already enters
the megalithic doorway.

III
When they have put the stone
back in its mouth
we will drive north again
past Strang and Carling fjords,

The cud of memory
allayed for once, arbitration
of the feud placated,
imagining those under the hill
disposed like Gunnar
who lay beautiful
inside his burial mound
though dead by violence

and unavenged.
Men said that he was chanting
verse about honour
and that four lights burned

In the corner of the chamber:
which opened then, as he turned
with a joyful face
to look a the moon.

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Ireland 1972
Paul Durcan

Next to the fresh grave of my beloved grandmother
The grave of my firstlove murdered by my brother

A Postcard From North Antrim
In memory of Sean Armstrong.

Seamus Heaney

A lone figure is waving
From the thin line of a bridge
Of ropes and slats, slung
Dangerously out between
The cliff-top and the pillar rock.
A Nineteenth-century wind.
Dulse-pickers. Sea champions.

A postcard for you, Sean,
And that's you, swinging alone,
Antic, half-afraid,
In your gallowglass's beard
And swallowtail of serge:
The Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge
Ghost-written on sepia

Or should it be your houseboat
Ethnically furnished,
Redolent of grass?
Should we discover you
Beside those warm-planked, democratic wharves
Among the twilights and guitars
Of Sausalito?

Drop-out on a come-back,
Prince of no-man's land
With your head in clouds or sand,
You were the clown
Social worker of the town
Until your candid forehead stopped
A pointblank teatime bullet.

Get up from your blood on the floor.
Here's another boat
In grass by the lough shore,
Turf smoke, a wired hen-run –
Your local, hoped for, unfound commune.
Now recite me *William Bloat*,
Sing of the *Calabar*

Or of Henry Joy McCracken
Who kissed his Mary Ann
On the gallows at Cornmarket.
Or Ballycastle Fair.
'Give us the raw bar!'
'Sing it by brute force'
If you forget the air.'

Yet something in your voice
Stayed nearly shut.
Your voice was a harassed pulpit
Leading the melody
It kept at bay,
It was independent, rattling, non-transcendent
Ulster – old decency.

And Old Bushmills,
Soda farls, strong tea,
New rope, rock salt, kale plants,
Potato bread and Woodbine.
Wind through the concrete vents

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Of a border check-point
Cold zinc nailed for a peace line.

Fifteen years ago, come this October,
Crowded on your floor,
I got my arm around Marie's shoulder
For the first time.
'Oh, Sir Jasper, do not touch me!'
You roared across at me,
Chorus-leading, splashing out the wine.

From The Frontier of Writing
Seamus Heaney

The tightness and the nilness round that space
when the car stops in the road, the troops inspect
its make and number and, as one bends his face

towards your window, you catch sight of more
on a hill beyond, eyeing with intent
down cradled guns that hold you under cover

and everything is pure interrogation
until a rifle motions and you move
with guarded unconcerned acceleration —

a little emptier, a little spent
as always by that quiver in the self,
subjugated, yes, and obedient.

So you drive on to the frontier of writing
where it happens again. The guns on tripods;
the sergeant with his on-off mike repeating

data about you, waiting for the squawk
of clearance; the marksman training down
out of the sun upon you like a hawk.

And suddenly you're through, arraigned yet freed,
as if you'd passed from behind a waterfall
on the black current of a tarmac road

past armour-plated vehicles, out between
the posted soldiers flowing and receding
like tree shadows into the polished windscreen.

After a Killing

Seamus Heaney

There they were, as if our memory hatched them,
As if the unquiet founders walked again:
Two young men with rifles on the hill,
Profane and bracing as their instruments.

Who's sorry for our trouble?
Who dreamt that we might dwell among ourselves
In rain and scoured light and wind-dried stones?
Basalt, Blood, water, headstones, leeches.

In that neuter original loneliness
From Brandon to Dunseverick
I think of small-eyed survivor flowers,
The pined-for, unmolested orchid.

I see a stone house by a pier.
Elbow room. Broad window light.
The heart lifts. You walk twenty yards
To the boats and buy mackerel.

And today a girl walks in home to us
Carrying a basket full of new potatoes,
Three tight cabbages, and carrots
With the tops and mould still fresh on them.

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The Northern Ireland Question
Desmond Egan

two wee girls
were playing tig near a car...

how many countries would you say
are worth their scattered fingers?

The Importance of Elsewhere

Philip Larkin

Lonely in Ireland, since it was not home,
Strangeness made sense. The salt rebuff of speech,
Insisting so on difference, made me welcome:
Once that was recognised, we were in touch

Their draughty streets, end-on to hills, the faint
Archaic smell of dockland, like a stable,
The herring-hawker's cry, dwindling, went
To prove me separate, not unworkable.

Living in England has no such excuse:
These are my customs and establishments
It would be much more serious to refuse.
Here no elsewhere underwrites my existence.

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The Boundary Commission
Paul Muldoon

*You remember that village where the border ran
Down the middle of the street,
With the butcher and baker in different states?
Today he remarked how a shower of rain*

Had stopped so cleanly across Golightly's lane
It might have been a wall of glass
That had toppled over. He stood there, for ages,
To wonder which side, if any, he should be on.

Catholics

Johnston Kirkpatrick

They left before the anthem,
out of seats and up the aisles,
the lights still down, in glow.

What did they miss, if anything?
Sometimes, the final embrace, the hero
riding away in a skitter of dust.

Perhaps, too, the fantastic sentiments
of a world in order where justice
works at last. Always,

the trusted music and the drawn
curtains bumping like two clowns
looking the wrong way.

Whatever You Say Say Nothing

Seamus Heaney

I

I'm writing just after an encounter
With an English journalist in search of 'views
On the Irish thing'. I'm back in winter
Quarters where bad news is no longer news,

Where media-men and stringers sniff and point,
Where zoom lenses, recorders and coiled leads
Litter the hotels. The times are out of joint
But I incline as much to rosary beads

As to the jottings and analyses
Of politicians and newspapermen
Who've scribbled down the long campaign from gas
And protest to gelignite and Sten,

Who proved upon their pulses 'escalate',
'Backlash' and 'crack down', 'the provisional wing',
'Polarization' and 'long-standing hate'.
Yet I live here, I live here too, I sing,

Expertly civil-tongued with civil neighbours
On the high wires of first wireless reports,
Sucking the fake taste, the stony flavours
Of those sanctioned, old, elaborate retorts:

'Oh, it's disgraceful, surely, I agree.'
'Where's it going to end?' 'It's getting worse.'
'They're murderers.' 'Internment, understandably ...'
The 'voice of sanity' is getting hoarse.

II

Men die at hand. In blasted street and home
The gelignite's a common sound effect:
As the man said when Celtic won, 'The Pope of Rome's
a happy man this night.' His flock suspect

In their deepest heart of hearts the heretic
Has come at last to heel and to the stake.
We tremble near the flames but want no truck
With the actual firing. We're on the make

As ever. Long sucking the hind tit
Cold as a witch's and as hard to swallow
Still leaves us fork-tongued on the border bit:
The liberal papist note sounds hollow

When amplified and mixed in with the bangs
That shake all hearts and windows day and night.
(It's tempting here to rhyme on 'labour pangs'
And diagnose a rebirth in our plight

But that would be to ignore other symptoms.
Last night you didn't need a stethoscope
To hear the eructation of Orange drums
Allergic equally to Pearse and Pope.)

On all sides 'little platoons' are mustering-
The phrase is Cruise O'Brien's via that great
Backlash, Burke-while I sit here with a pestering
Drouth for words at once both gaff and bait
To lure the tribal shoals to epigram
And order. I believe any of us

Could draw the line through bigotry and sham
Given the right line, *aere perennius*.

III.

'Religion's never mentioned here', of course.
'You know them by their eyes,' and hold your tongue.
'One side's as bad as the other,' never worse.
Christ, it's near time that some small leak was sprung

In the great dykes the Dutchman made
To dam the dangerous tide that followed Seamus.
Yet for all this art and sedentary trade
I am incapable. The famous

Northern reticence, the tight gag of place
And times: yes, yes. Of the 'wee six' I sing
Where to be saved you only must save face
And whatever you say, you say nothing.

Smoke-signals are loud-mouthed compared with us:
Manoeuvrings to find out name and school,
Subtle discrimination by addresses
With hardly an exception to the rule

That Norman, Ken and Sidney signalled Prod
And Seamus (call me Sean) was sure-fire Pape.
O land of password, handgrip, wink and nod,
Of open minds as open as a trap,

Where tongues lie coiled, as under flames lie wicks,
Where half of us, as in a wooden horse
Were cabin'd and confined like wily Greeks,
Besieged within the siege, whispering morse.

IV

This morning from a dewy motorway
I saw the new camp for the internees:
A bomb had left a crater of fresh clay
In the roadside, and over in the trees

Machine-gun posts defined a real stockade.
There was that white mist you get on a low ground
And it was déjà-vu, some film made
Of Stalag 17, a bad dream with no sound.

Is there a life before death? That's chalked up
In Ballymurphy. Competence with pain,
Coherent miseries, a bite and sup,
We hug our little destiny again.

The Mouth

Ciaran Carson

There was this head had this mouth he kept shooting off.
Unfortunately.
It could have been worse for us than it was for him.
Provisionally.

But since nothing in this world is certain and you don't know
who hears what
We thought it was time he bit off more than he could chew.
Literally.
By the time he is found there'll be nothing much left to tell
who he was.
But of course some clever dick from the 'Forensic Lab'
reconstructs
Him, what he used to be – not from his actual teeth,
not fingerprints,
But from the core – the toothmarks of the first and last bite
he'd taken of
This sour apple. But then we would have told them anyway.
Publicity.

Belfast

Louis MacNeice

The hard cold fire of the northerner
Frozen into his blood from the fire in his basalt
Glares from behind the mica of his eyes
And the salt carrion water brings him wealth.

Down there at the end of the melancholy lough
Against the lurid sky over the stained water
Where hammers clang murderously on the girders
Like crucifixes the gantries stand.

And in the marble stores rubber gloves like polyps
Cluster; celluloid, painted ware, glaring
Metal parents, parchment lampshades, harsh
Attempts at buyable beauty.

In the porch of the chapel before the garish Virgin
A shawled factory-woman as if shipwrecked there
Lies a bunch of limbs glimpsed in the cave of gloom
By us who walk in the street so buoyantly and glib.

Over which country of cowed and haunted faces
The sun goes down with a banging of Orange drums
While the male kind murders each its woman
To whose prayer for oblivion answers no Madonna.

Belfast Confetti

Ciaran Carson

Suddenly as the riot squad moved in, it was raining exclamation marks,
Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys. A fount of broken type. And the explosion
itself – an asterisk on the map. This hyphenated line, a burst of rapid fire ...
I was trying to complete a sentence in my head, but it kept stuttering,
All the alleyways and side-streets blocked with stops and colons.

I know this labyrinth so well – Balaclava, Raglan, Inkerman, Odessa
Street –
Why can't I escape? Every move is punctuated. Crimea Street. Dead
end again.
A Saracen, Kremlin-2 mesh. Makrolon face-shields. Walkie-talkies.
What is
My name? Where am I coming from? Where am I going? A fusillade of
question-marks.

Counting The Dead on The Radio

Thomas McCarthy

All that winter we lined and limed the earth.
We read books too, and ordered even more –
History rested on the brown hall table
beside the bird-guides and seed catalogues.
We read books hungrily as Edmund
Burke, with more affection than any dauphiness.
Chaos in hard covers broke in upon us
with beautifully assembled themes, perfect
indices. Their authors played games with
being Irish, my father said. He should know.
Elsewhere, there were troubles that
the keenest authors couldn't deal with.
The way books had juggled nostalgia and fear
left us useless in the face of threat.
Who has been making midnight phone calls?
Who has been canvassing in the name of the dead?
My father has left for the city, running scared:
he wants no part in this. He has left
his number but says we should only trust
the *News*. We'll read more books, my mother said.
Fatherless, the radio has plenty to say.

II

My brother has been hunting a rabbit at the water-
trough; we heard the muffled thuds and grunts
of its torture, its boy-inflicted wounds.
My mother brings the tea to the living-room,
drawing sons from their serious porcelain books
into low air-raids across lemon juice.
Southern ears clogged by too much of this,
we can barely comprehend what the radio says –
something has happened up the North; it has ruined
the Taoiseach's weekend. Adolescent soldiers
have gone wild. Peace shouldn't be fatal like this.
Lemon rind sticks to my mother's throat.
She throws up in an effort to understand. I say
*Mama, a whole regiment was attacked
by a catholic priest waving a blood-stained
handkerchief. That's what the radio says.*
My brother, with rabbit blood on his arm, sips tea,
puts his adolescent ear to the ill-tuned radio
whose crackles could be gunfire or a mild electric storm.
A household filled with books, a brother used to death:
my mother coughs again. We retune the wireless set.

Sanctus (for Gerald Dawe)
for Gerald Dawe

Padraic Fiacc

Sinking on iron streets, the bin-lid-
shielded, battleship-grey-faced kids

Shinny up the lamppost, cannot tear
Themselves away, refuse to come in

From the dying lost day they douse
With petrol and set the town's holy

Cows on fire, as if the burning bus or car
Could light up their eyes ever, much less
The burning of our own kitchen houses

Coming over the TV screen had held
Any surprises, for really, we
Wallow in this old-time Westerns, where
The 'savages' are bad
And lost the war because the white men

Always have to be the Good Guys.

Stefana McClure

Protest Jackets:

A New Siege (for Bernadette Devlin): a poem by John Montague

Punishment: a poem by Seamus Heaney

Viking Dublin: a poem by Seamus Heaney

The Ministry of Fear: a poem by Seamus Heaney

Ulster Names: a poem by John Hewitt

Derry: a poem by Seamus Deane

Procession: a poem by John Montague

Funeral Rites: a poem by Seamus Heaney, 2018

Three wool jackets, three corduroy jackets, two cotton jackets,

ten wooden pegs, 16 poetry-wrapped stones

28h x 80w x 7d in

71.12h x 203.20w x 17.78d cm

SM046

A New Siege (for Bernadette Devlin)

John Montague

*Once again, it happens.
Under a barrage of stones
and flaring petrol bombs
the blunt, squat shape of
an armoured car glides
into the Catholic quarter
leading a file of helmet-
ed, shielded riot police;
once again, it happens,
like an old Troubles film,
not for the last time...*

Lines of history
lines of power
the long sweep
of the Bogside
under the walls
up to Creggan
the black muzzle
of Roaring Meg
staring dead on
cramped houses
the jackal shapes
of James's army
watching the city
stiffen in siege

Lines of defiance
lines of discord
near the Diamond
brisk with guns
British soldiers
patrol the walls
the gates between
Ulster Catholic
Ulster Protestant
a Saracen slides
past the Guildhall
a black Cuchulain
bellowing against
the Scarlet Whore
twin races petrified
the volcanic ash
of religious hatred

SMALL SHOT HATH
POURED LIKE HAIL
THE GREAT GUNS
SHAKEN OUR WALLS
a spectral garrison
no children left
sick from eating
horseflesh, vermin
curs fattened on
the slain Irish
still flaunting
the bloody flag
of 'No Surrender'
GOD HAS MADE US
AN IRON PILLAR
AND BRAZEN WALLS
AGAINST THIS LAND.

Symbol of Ulster
these sloping streets
blackened walls
sick at heart and
seeking a sign
the flaghung gloom
of St Columb's
the brass eagle of
the lectern bearing
the Sermon on the mount
in its shoulders
'A city that is
set on a hill
cannot be hid.'

Columba's Derry!
ledge of angels
radiant oakwood
where the man drove
knelt to master
his fiery temper
exile chastened
the bright candle
of the Uí Néill
burns from Iona
lightens Scotland
with beehive huts
glittering manuscripts
but he remembers
his secret name

Rearing westward
the great sunroom
of Inis Eoghain
coiling stones of
Aileach's hillfort
higher than Tara
the Hy Niall
dominating Uladh
the white stone
of Sliabh Snacht
sorrow veiled
the silent fjord
in *uaigneach Eire*
a history's wind
plucks a dynasty

'He who set his
back on Ireland.'

Lines of leaving
lines of returning
the long estuary
of Lough Foyle, a
ship motionless
in wet darkness
mournfully hooting
as a tender creeps
to carry passengers
back to Ireland
a child of four
this sad sea city
the loneliness of
Lir's white daughter's
ice crusted wings
forever spread
at the harbor mouth.

Lines of suffering
lines of defeat
under the walls
ghetto terraces
sharp pallor of
unemployed shades
slope shouldered
broken bottles
pubs and bookies
red brick walls
Falls or Shankill
Lecky or Fountain
love's alleyway
message scrawled
Popehead: Tague
my own name
hatred's synonym

But will the meek
inherit the earth?
RELIGION POISONS US
NORTH AND SOUTH.
A SPECIAL FORCE OF
ANGELS WE'D NEED
TO PUT MANNERS ON US.
IF THE YOUNG WERE
HONEST, THEY'D ADMIT
THEY DON'T HOLD
WITH THE HALF OF IT
THE SHOWBANDS
AND THE BORDER HALLS
THAT'S THE STUFF
Said the guardian
of the empty church
pale siege windows
shining behind us

Lines of action
lines of reaction
the white elephant
of Stormont, Carson's
raised right paw
a protestant parliament
a Protestant people
major this and

from the ramparts
bids a rival
settlement rise

London's Derry!
METHOUGHT I SAW
DIDOE'S COLONY
BUILDING OF CARTHAGE
culverin and saker
line strong walls
but local chiefs
come raging in
O'Cahan, O'Doherty
(a Ferrara sword
his visiting card)
a new mythology
Lundy slides
down a peartree
as drum and life
trill ORANJE BOVEN!

Lines of protest
lines of change
a drum beating
across Berkeley
all that Spring
invoking the new
Christ avatar
of the Americas
running voices
streets of Berlin
Paris, Chicago
seismic waves
zigzagging through
a faulty world

Overflowing from
narrow streets
cramped fields
a pressure rising
to match it
tired marchers
nearing Burntollet
young arms linked
banners poled high
the baptism of
flying missiles
spiked clubs
Law and Order's
medieval armour
of glass shield
and dangling baton

Lines of loss
lines of energy
always changing
always returning
A TIDE LIFTS
THE RELEIF SHIP
OFF THE MUD
OVER THE BOOM

captain that and
general nothing
the bland, pleasant
face of mediocrity
confronting in horror
its mirror image
bull-voiced bigotry

The emerging order
of the poem invaded
by cries, protestation
a people's pain
the defiant face
of a young girl
campaigning against
memory's mortmain
a blue banner
lifting over a
broken province
DRIVE YOUR PLOUGH
a yellow bulldozer
raising the rubble
a humming factory
a housing estate
hatreds sealed into
a hygienic honeycomb

the rough field
of the universe
growing, changing
a net of energies
crossing patterns
weaving towards
a new order
a new anarchy
always different
always the same

Across the border
a dead man
drives to school
past the fort
at Greene Castle
a fury of love
for North, South
eats his heart
on the far side
a rocky promontory
his family name
O'Cahan, O'Kane
my uncle watches
sails upon Foyle
(a flock of swans)
drives forward

Punishment

Seamus Heaney

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.

It blows her nipples
to amber beads,
it shakes the frail rigging
of her ribs.

I can see her drowned
body in the bog,
the weighing stone,
the floating rods and boughs.

Under which at first
she was a barked sapling
that is dug up
oak-bone, brain-firkin:

her shaved head
like a stubble of black corn,
her blindfold a soiled bandage,
her noose a ring

to store
the memories of love.
Little adulteress,
before they punished you

you were flaxen-haired,
undernourished, and your
tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.
I am the artful voyeur

of your brains exposed
and darkened combs,
your muscles' webbing
and all your numbered bones:

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in tar,
wept by the railings,

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.

Viking Dublin

Seamus Heaney

I

It could be a jaw-bone
or a rib or a portion cut
from something sturdier:
anyhow, a smaller outline

was incised, a cage
or trellis to conjure in.
Like a child's tongue
following the toils

of his calligraphy,
like an eel swallowed
in a basket of eels,
the line amazes itself

eluding the hand
that fed it,
a bill in flight,
a swimming nostril.

II

There are trial pieces,
the craft's mystery
improvised on bone:
foliage, bestiaries,

interlacings elaborate
as the netted routes
of ancestry and trade.
That have to be

magnified on display
so that the nostril
is a migrant prow
sniffing the Liffey,

swanning it up to the ford,
dissembling itself
in antler combs, bone pins,
coins, weights, scale-pans.

III

Like a long sword
sheathed in its moistening
burial clays,
the keel stuck fast

in the slip of the bank,
its clinker-built hull
spined and plosive
as *Dublin*.

And now we reach in
for shards of the vertebrae,
the ribs of hurdle,
the mother-wet caches—

and for this trial piece
incised by a child,
a longship, a buoyant
migrant line.

IV

That enters my longhand,
turns cursive, unscarfing
a zoomorphic wake,
a worm of thought

I follow into the mud.
I am Hamlet the Dane,
skull-handler, parablister,
smeller of rot

in the state, infused
with its poisons,
pinioned by ghosts
and affections,

murders and pieties,
coming to consciousness
by jumping in graves,
dithering, blathering.

V

Come fly with me,
come sniff the wind
with the expertise
of the Vikings—

neighborly, scoretaking
killers, haggars
and hagglers, gombeen-men,
hoarders of grudge and gain.

With a butcher's aplomb
they spread out your lungs
and made you warm wings
for your shoulders.

Old fathers, be with us.
Old cunning assessors
of feuds and of sites
for ambush or town.

VI

'Did you ever hear tell,'
said Jimmy Farrell,
'of the skulls they have
in the city of Dublin?

White skulls and black skulls
and yellow skulls, and some
with full teeth, and some
haven't only but one,'

and compounded history
in the pan of 'an old Dane,
maybe, was drowned
in the Flood.'

My words lick around
cobbled quays, go hunting
lightly as pampooties
over the skull-capped ground.

The Ministry of Fear (for Seamus Deane)
Seamus Heaney

Well, as Kavanagh said, we have lived
In important places. The lonely scarp
Of St Columb's College, where I billeted
For six years, overlooked your Bogside.
I gazed into new worlds: the inflamed throat
Of Brandywell, its floodlit dogtrack,
The throttle of the hare. In the first week
I was so homesick I couldn't even eat
The biscuits left to sweeten my exile.
I threw them over the fence one night
In September 1951
When the lights of houses in the Lecky Road
were amber in the fog, it was an act
of stealth.

Then Belfast, and then Berkeley.
Here's two on's are sophisticated,
Dabbling in verses till they have become
A life: from bulky envelopes arriving
In vacation time to slim volumes
Despatched 'with the author's compliments'.
Those poems in longhand, ripped from the wire spine
Of your exercise book, bewildered me—
Vowels and ideas banded free
As the seed-pods blowing off our sycamores.
I tried to write about the sycamores
And innovated a South Derry rhyme
With hushed and lulled full chimes for pushed and pulled.
Those hobnailed boots from beyond the mountain
Were walking, by God, all over the fine
Lawns of elocution.

Have our accents
Changed? 'Catholics, in general, don't speak
As well as students from the Protestant schools.'
Remember that stuff? Inferiority
Complexes, stuff that dreams were made on.
'What's your name, Heaney?'

'Heaney, Father.'

'Fair

Enough.'

On my first day, the leather strap
Went epileptic in the Big Study,
Its echoes plashing over our bowed heads,
But I still wrote home that a boarder's life
Was not so bad, shying as usual.

On long vacations, then, I came to life
In the kissing seat of an Austin 16
Parked at a gable, the engine running,
My fingers tight as ivy on her shoulders,
A light left burning for her in the kitchen.
And heading back for home, the summer's
Freedom dwindling night by night, the air
All moonlight and a scent of hay, policemen
Swung their crimson flashlamps, crowding round
The car like black cattle, snuffing and pointing
The muzzle of a Sten gun in my eye:
'What's your name, driver?'

'Seamus ...'

Seamus?

They once read my letters at a roadblock
And shone their torches on your hieroglyphics,
'Svelte dictions' in a very florid hand.

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Ulster was British, but with no rights on
The English lyric: all around us, though
We hadn't named it, the ministry of fear.

Ulster Names

John Hewitt

I take my stand by the Ulster names,
each clean hard name like a weathered stone;
Tyrella, Rostrevor, are flickering flames:
the names I mean are the Moy, Malone,
Strabane, Slieve Gullion and Portglenone.

Even suppose that each name were freed
from legend's ivy and history's moss,
there'd be music still in, say, Carrick-a-rede,
though men forget it's the rock across
the track of the salmon from Islay and Ross.

The names of a land show the heart of the race;
they move on the tongue like the lilt of a song.
You say the name and I see the place
Drumbo, Dungannon, or Annalong.
Barony, townland, we cannot go wrong.

You say Armagh, and I see the hill
with the two tall spires or the square low tower;
the faith of Patrick is with us still;
his blessing falls in a moonlight hour,
when the apple orchards are all in flower.

You whisper Derry. Beyond the walls
and the crashing boom and the coiling smoke.
I follow that freedom which beckons and calls
to Colmcille, tall in his grove of oak,
raising his voice for the rhyming folk.

County by county you number them over;
Tyrone, Fermanagh...I stand by a lake,
and the bubbling curlew, the whistling plover
call over the whips in the chill daybreak
as the hills and the waters the first light take.

Let Down be famous for care-tilled earth,
for the little green hills and the harsh grey peaks,
the rocky bed of the Lagan's birth,
the white farm fat in the August weeks.
There's one more county my pride still seeks.

You give it the name and my quick thoughts run
through the narrow towns with their wheels of trade,
to Glenballyemon, Glенаan, Glendun,
from Trostan down to the braes of Layde,
for there is the place where the pact was made.

But you have as good a right as I
to praise the place where your face is known,
for over us all is the selfsame sky;
the limestone's locked in the strength of the bone,
and who shall mock at the steadfast stone?

So it's Ballinamallard, it's Crossmaglen,
it's Aughnacloy, it's Donaghadee,
it's Magherafelt breeds the best of men,
I'll not deny it. But look for me
on the moss between Orra and Slievenanee.

Derry

Seamus Deane

I

The unemployment in our bones
Erupting on our hands in stones

The thought of violence a relief,
The act of violence a grief
Our bitterness and love
Hand in glove.

II

At the very most
The mind's eye
Perceives the ghost
Of the hands try
To timidly knock
On the walled rock.
But nothing will come
And the hands become
As they insist
Mailed fists.

III

The Scots and English
Settling for the best.
The unfriendly natives
Ready for the worst.
It has been like this for years
Someone says,
It might be so forever, someone fears,
Or for days.

Procession

I.M. Grandmother Hannah Carney

John Montague

Hawk nose, snuff-stained apron;
I stand beside you again in
the gloom of your hallway
peering up & down Fintona's
cattle-stained Main Street
some thronged fairday evening.

As you ramble on, like someone
sick or drunk, confessing to
a stranger in a bar, or train;
ignoring my small years, while
you spell out your restless pain,
mourn a tormented lifetime.

Frank, your pride, eldest boy,
interrogated again and again,
arrested in your warm kitchen,
bayonets and British voices
bullying him abruptly away
to the barbed wire, the tin

huts of Ballykinler, model
for Long Kesh, Magilligan.
Your youngest son, Tom, then
drills in the old bandroom
to follow him; soon lands
himself into the Curragh prison.

Released, your two internees
were met at the railway station,
cheered and chaired home
with a torchlight procession:
but one half of the town
held its blinds grimly down.

Still hatred and division
stain that narrow acre
from which you sprang.
A half century later
the same black dreams
return to plague your daughter,
their sister, my mother.

A Paisleyite meeting
blared outside her window.
A military helicopter
hovered over the hospital,
a maleficent spider. Her
dying nightmares were of her
sons seized by soldiers!

Across the rough, small hills
of your country girlhood –
the untamed territory of
the Barr, Brougher Mountain –
we brought your daughter home,
yellow car beams streaming;
a torchlight procession.