

An impressionist painting of a house with a dark roof and two chimneys, partially obscured by a lush garden of colorful flowers, including many red roses. The style is soft and textured, with visible brushstrokes. In the background, a few figures are visible near a fence. The sky is a mix of light blues and whites, suggesting a bright, slightly overcast day.

EILEEN CASEY

THE BEAUTY OF SHADOW  
POETRY CELEBRATING BEALTAINÉ 2024

FIERY ARROW PRESS



Photo credit: Donal Greene

EILEEN CASEY

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POETRY CELEBRATING BEALTAINÉ 2024

FIERY ARROW PRESS

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Cover image:  
*The Artist's Garden in Argenteuil (A Corner of the Garden with Dahlias), 1873.*  
Painting by Claude Monet. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., U.S.A

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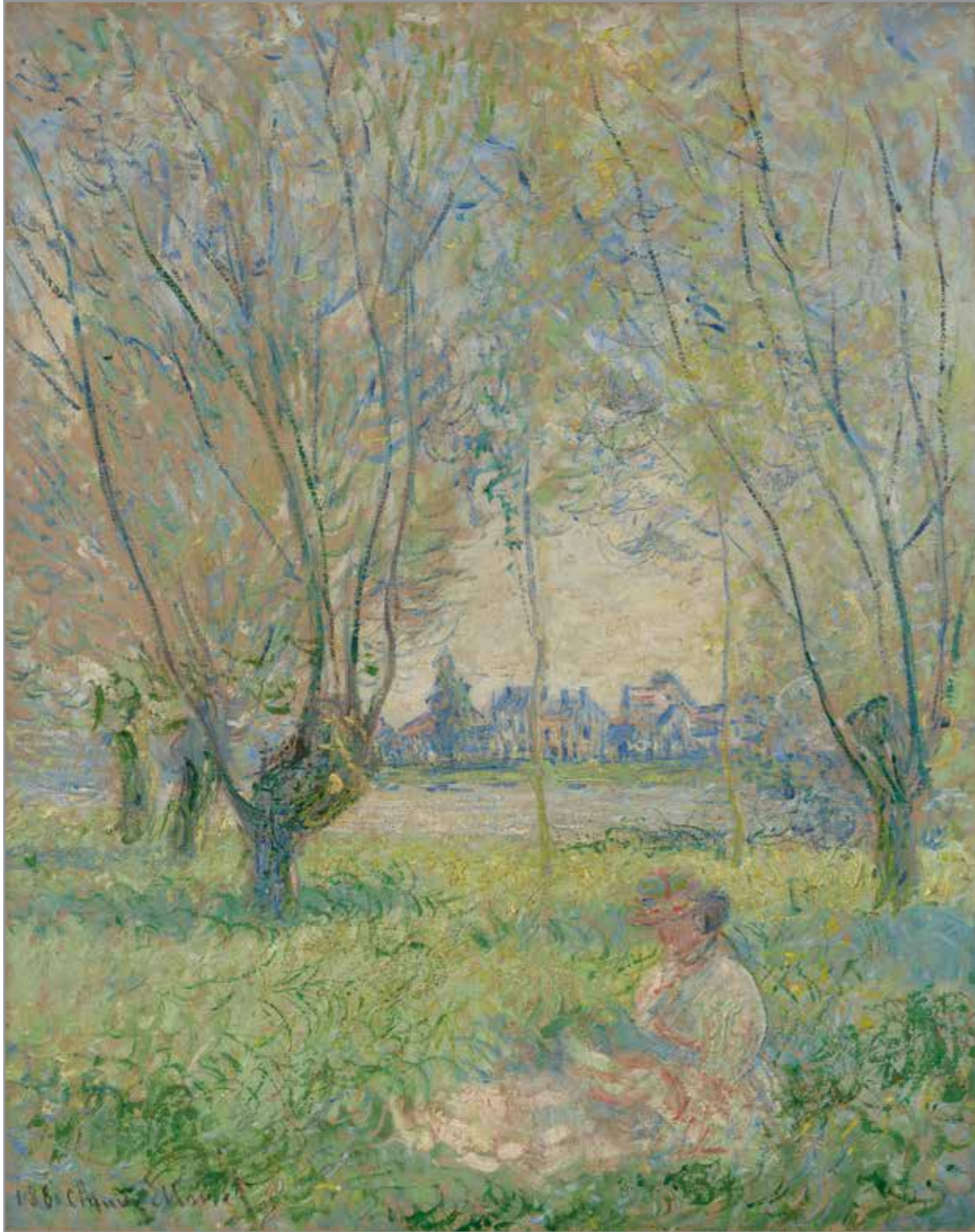


I wish to dedicate these poems to the friends, writers, visual artists, photographers and editors who have supported me down through the years.

Grateful thanks to the editors of journals/anthologies where some of these poems first appeared: The Irish Times (*Big Bright Moon*), Dedalus Press (*Love in the Time of Abba*), Currach Books (*Treasure*), Arlen House Arlen House (*Subjunctive*) and The Nordic Irish Studies Journal (*From Bone to Blossom*). *Peacock Presenting at the Bealtaine Clay Modelling Workshop* featured as a finalist on Myles Dungan's Art Show, RTE.

Eileen Casey

The Artist's Garden at Vétheuil, 1881. Painting by Claude Monet.



Woman Seated under the Willows, 1880. Painting by Claude Monet.

## PREFACE

Bealtaine is one of the most treasured times of the year. Sparks of creative energy - in the words of Dylan Thomas - become 'The force that through the green fuse drives the flower.' It's the time of year when nature is at its most vibrant, when winter's grip loosens and fresh shoots and May flowerings can be seen. 'Bealtaine' is all about fires, the Druidic fire on the Hill of Tara, burning for all to see. It's the marriage of the male and female, Patrick and Brigid, producing all the life and promise yielded from a slumbering earth coming alive. Who could ever forget Seamus Heaney's poem *Beacons at Bealtaine*? The poet delivered this memorable poem at the Phoenix Park, May Day, 2004...

'Uisce: water. And fionn; the water's clear.

But dip and find this Gaelic water Greek.

A phoenix flames upon fionn uisce here.'

(from *Beacons at Bealtaine*)

What better way to celebrate than to put some poems together in this chapbook and surround them with the majestic beauty of Monet, Van Gogh, Millais, among others. Paintings create their own life force; shadowy undertones contrast with swirls of colour to draw the eye, brighten the heart. Visual vibrancy enhances and enlarges imagination. Before long, the spirit lifts and stirs the wellspring within. The creative source needs lots of nourishment and with all the wonderful events nationwide during Bealtaine, there is a veritable feast. Age & Opportunity deliver an awe inspiring programme each year.

These poems touch off various aspects of my life. I'm a true believer in the beauty of shadow. Without shadow there would be no light. John McGahern said words to that effect (paraphrased here); what happens during the progress of a day is all down to how the light falls. As a poet, I try to write the universal but in a personal way. I like to think that, some of the time at any rate, I succeed in saying what I set out to say. Being authentic is for my reader to judge and so, here are my Bealtaine offerings.

Eileen Casey  
May, 2024

## BIG BRIGHT MOON

An icy evening in winter, my brother and I danced  
(ceilí mostly) in Rathcabbin. Music over, outside  
the hall, our breaths ballooned around us. No lift,  
but still enough petrol in our teenage bodies

to walk towards Birr. Along a road dark as an oil  
slick, nothing to guide us but moon. Big and bright.  
We chatted about who danced with who. What  
might have been but wasn't. My brother spoke  
of a girl he regretted not asking out for a jive. She left  
on another's arm. Also discussed: who went outside  
for a court; flushed cheeks a sure giveaway.

Not one car passed us on that five mile journey.  
Wild birds skittered from hedgerows. Farm dogs  
barked. A ways off, alert to our passing all the same.  
I fell into a ditch but my brother yanked me out.  
As if I was a calf being pulled from a cow. Thin  
shoes ruined, tights laddered, knees blistered;  
I began to feel cold. My brother gave me his jacket.  
Daylight was breaking when we arrived  
into a town not long woken from sleep; worried  
parents too relieved to be angry.

Decades pass. Memory retrieves what's worth keeping.  
When my brother got sick, he tried every which way  
to hold onto the dance. There were no more remissions.  
No more trials. In the end, he made it home safe.  
At his back, the same moon. So big and so bright.

## BONES

*Does a dragon still sting from within a withered tree? - Dogen*

What I touch is a woman with sharp corners  
daggers at shoulder blade, knives in her eyes

scratching the sky with broken fingernails.  
Who breathes after sundown in shallow places.

There is a twist to her mouth and a sting on her tongue,  
she smells of bees yet should have been a spider.

What I touch shapes the hourglass of days chipped from bark,  
brown Sundays, the suck of a voice drowning in outer space.

## FALLING FOR ST ANTHONY

Fashioned from plaster, holding out  
chalky purity. A lily's luminosity  
sculpts him even more desirable.

Prayed to by old women, arthritic  
knees bent, scarfed heads dipped low.  
Supplicated to by peak-capped men,  
beads shuffled through dry hands.  
Cajoling treasures lost yet mourned,  
funeral flowers long since wilted  
on altars of disappointed love.

She is captivated by the curve of his lips,  
stars circling his head in a silver halo.  
Her eyes trace the shape of his thighs  
Beneath moulded folds of chocolate brown.  
She is oblivious to martyred icon images  
alive with suffering, hung on ancient walls.  
Instead she transforms this dusty church  
into wild, prickling fields.

Her uplifted face is trance-like. Pious.  
Destined for sainthood she is, by nuns  
lighting candles from flames of her devotion.  
Surely miraculous visions are her due?  
But all she longs for is to grasp the hand  
outstretched in her direction,  
dance down the aisle to a strange tune  
wild daisies in her hair.

## FROM BONE TO BLOSSOM

*What did the tree learn from the earth to be able to talk with the sky?*  
-Pablo Neruda

Wisdom grows tall as trees of youth, there is much to make of the journey,  
its push towards the light – darkness too. Without shade,  
there would be no truths, no beauty borne by tender shoots or woods  
to cross, clearings reached in spaces between earth and sky, tooth and claw.

Although there's not much talk between Wild Cherry,  
Noble Fir, trees, like humans, are wanting to know  
who or what crunches through the leaves.

Contrary mates – one won't flower until September  
the other quickening early spring,  
leaves appearing only to be dropped again  
like a discarded lover, its woodland neighbour  
growing cones, upright pillars. Edible  
but bitter fruits of one, scattered  
by birds, tangerine scented needles  
piercing sharp as winter's bending bough.  
Reminding us  
how small we really are, spindling back to earth  
like falling stars.  
What then can be whispered to the skies?

## LOVE IN THE TIME OF ABBA

*For John*

You admired my yellow cardigan.  
Said it reminded you of a canary in dimly-lit  
pubs and snooker halls around Rathmines,  
sound-tracked by *Fernando* or *Dancing Queen*.  
Late night suppers in The Gigs Place; greasy fries  
followed by hung-over Sundays, sleeping 'till noon.

I adored your dark hair. Shades of a raven's  
blue-black wings. Traces still shadow the grey.  
The way you held your cue, squint-eyed, hip-  
swivelled. The soft kiss of the snooker ball  
before powering into the pocket.  
You smoked cigarettes down to the tip. How  
you lived life, nothing wasted. All that zest  
transferred to fatherhood. *Chiquitita*,  
*I have a Dream*; muted beneath crying babies.  
Mostly, it was *you* rose in the early hours.  
Changing nappies. Comforting toddlers.  
New Age Man. Before that term was invented.

Love is different now. We rise early on Sundays,  
vegetables and roast prepared the night before.  
Pinned to the fridge, emergency phone numbers,  
grand-children's rosy drawings. Framed  
under glass, glory days of youth brighten  
our twilight years. We still listen to Abba.  
*I do, I do, I do, I do, I do.*

## MATTRESS

No use for foraging crow or mistle-thrush,  
out to buttress early nests.  
Wadding from this stripped-down Leviathan  
lines our attic floor.

In the small cave beneath the eaves, scarce big enough  
to stand a man - or a woman, come to that -  
we eased clumps of speckled wool between the joists.  
Now that's done,

where we lay together, our fourth bed in as many decades -  
put to pasture in the attic.

All that remains is this arrangement  
propped against the garden wall,  
one steel coil hinging to the next.  
Vexatious labyrinth for earth worms  
or pigeon holes for empty skies?

A blackbird rustles the leaves,

each movement seeds another.  
Our plum tree showers down confetti  
over grass laced by a late fall of snow.

Our new mattress topped by a layer of memory foam  
takes us even further from the ground  
as if, after all this time, we float on air,  
like Clematis blooming up  
its climbing frame.





The Japanese footbridge, 1899. Painting by Claude Monet

## MONET AT GIVERNY

Motorbikes buzzed beelike on the road.  
 Hot July. Monet's lilies bloom.  
 Garden and cottage suffused dusky pink,  
 velvety green. Monet kept them at the right  
 temperature; swirls of sky and grassy contours.  
 Sky blues shadowing. Before he dipped  
 his sable in lily, they flourished on blank canvas.  
 Presence evoked each time I visit Birr Gardens,  
 crossing the bridge over a feast of floating lilies.  
 Hundreds Monet brought to birth. Some,  
 mere suggestions hint at form.  
 Obsessed, his palette always unsatisfied  
 as if some unattainable force possessed him.  
 In Birr Gardens, as Giverny, such frenzy  
 non-existent. Weeping willows bow before  
 stilled beauty. Monet's masterpiece at rest.

## MOON BIRD

A blackbird stole the moon,  
 thinking it his seer's eye,  
 his future written all over it.

So much wishing for its golden-  
 eyed song, thieved it  
 from its socket  
 on a cloud thickened sky.

A blackbird stole the moon  
 lifted it clean so it tumbled  
 to earth, un-broken.  
 Its mystery intact  
 as bluebells in a hidden glade.

Now the heavens are starved of light  
 except for a pinprick of stars.  
 A blackbird's song  
 becomes a hunter's moon  
 above the silence.

He pecks at his globe  
 with razor beak, sharp  
 as a bayonet. Testing it  
 for blood. Or a hint of blue.  
 An egg nested inside,  
 bone of his bone  
 song of his song;  
 like Adam, the mate longed for.  
 A fabulous version of himself.

All night he's pondered  
 whether to warm it beneath his breast  
 until ripe enough to break its shell  
 or give in to the sea's angry pull  
 follow the sweep of the waves.

He rolls it about, playful with its roundness.  
 Still, it shows no sign of breaking,  
 no cracks on its delicate casing.  
 He buries it under rustling wind,  
 in the clawed out cavern of his dreams.

## MULBERRY DREAM

Stars stick like thistledown across a thumbnail sky  
two daughters adrift in a world of juicy spring.

All night I search for mulberries  
along the silken roads of Samarkand,

enough to glut the greedy worms. Spin two dresses.  
Yet, all I can find is air, hard as frost, an aspen stump

gnarled between empty spaces and a rustling thirst  
snagged on a blackthorn tree.

## OLD MAIDS

ought to sprout beards.  
Pair thick stockings in sensible shoes.  
Recline on cushioned sofas to crochet miles of wool.

Old Maids  
never preened before the rails so  
Old Maids have bouquets and swollen bellies  
aimed in their direction,  
suffer platitude confetti  
showered on their plainness  
by wise virgins gone to wedding feasts,  
lamps trimmed with fear of missed boats  
sailing away at speed.

Old Maids  
get sent to cold beds, perms tucked neatly  
under hairnets. Old Maids must devour  
romance and lukewarm cocoa between limp  
paperback sheets because  
Old Maids surely never pleased a man  
or matched the quickening of his flesh.

Old Maids are women,  
pruned by blades of scorn until  
flowerings that make them  
radiant as any bride  
dries on lonely shelves  
labelled

Old Maids.

## PEACOCK PRESENTING AT THE BEALTAINÉ CLAY MODELLING WORKSHOP

Screened by a hedge of romantic fictions  
I browse library shelves with others of my age  
here for the clay modelling workshop  
celebrating creativity for the older woman.

Shy titles tightened together, wait to be taken up,  
devoured for a time by a passionate reader,  
tucked inside a warm, tobacco scented pocket.  
Dawdled over until coffee cups grow cold.

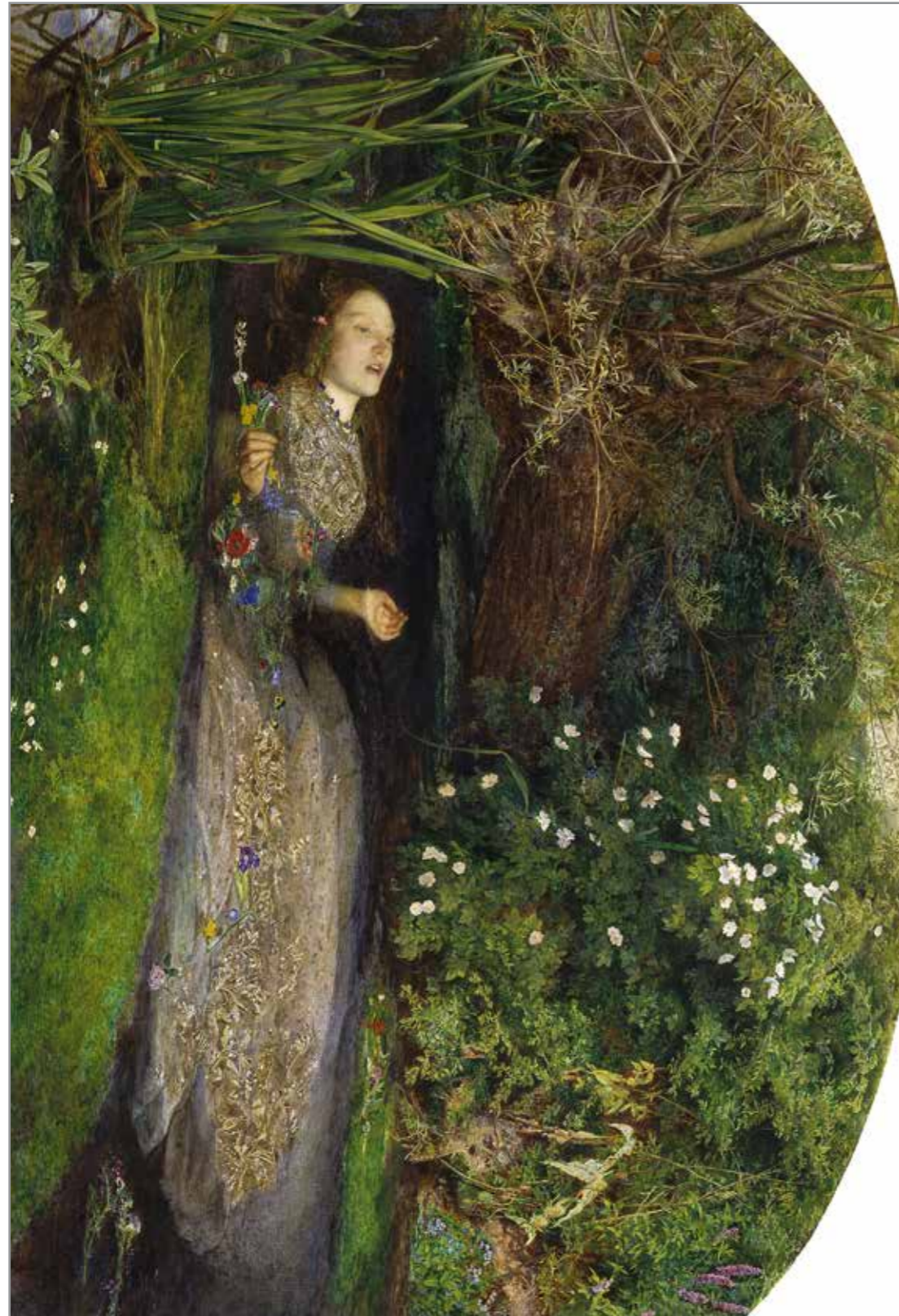
Our tutor arrives. Late, but gorgeous –  
and better late than never.  
His apologetic arms, sheened by glossy dark plumage,  
sweep us into his male space.  
Eyes, two indigo torches, flicker around  
our middle years, register the language of admiration,  
flicks tossed back over shoulders –  
my white flecked short hair doesn't quite pull it off.

Legs cross and uncross, my eyebrows also twitch  
nervous mime. Eyebrows as yet un-plucked.  
Lips moisten, necks mottle.  
Lengthen towards him as he takes up the clay,  
the wet clay.  
He pummels and strokes it with strutting fingers,  
flattens it, fattens it. Again and again  
the heels of his pink palms dance the ancient rituals  
of shape. Sweat breaks on my forehead.

He begins to dole out the remains of the clay,  
leaves the tiniest imprint of a thumb on my portion,  
Tells me to do whatever I feel. Within reason  
Is left unsaid.  
What do I feel?

Images form and reform, the raw material of fantasy  
moulds into the plump round loops coiled lazy  
under my warm hands.

I hear the feathering train of him as he passes me by.  
My clay stretches long and lean  
as far as memory can carry it.  
Right back to a time  
peacocks presented only to impress me.  
Who wore brylcream and pinching shoes,  
lit untipped cigarettes  
and choked on the smoke.  
While I, 'oul peahen that I was, even then,  
let on not to care.



Sir John Everett Millais, Ophelia, 1851-52.

## OPHELIA

*After Millais*

Taken from the Greek, her name. Same  
 Daughter to Polonius. Laertes Sister. Resister?  
 No! Potential wife to Denmark's Prince. Since

Millais paints her shrouded in green. Seen  
 as rebirth. Healing. Fertility. Spring. Brings  
 envy(and)Greed, (not of her making). Guiding  
 her under a bridge; a fallen tree. You see  
 willow means 'false love'. Like hand in glove.

Eyes wide open, as if at last she derails, unveils  
 hazy mists, Millais glides her gowned. Renowned  
 virgin; river swollen, she died without child. Wild  
 until river volume waterlogs her down. Drown.  
 Glossy hair floats like drifting floss. River moss  
 around her shoulders. Lips parted. Startled.  
 Words staunch in her throat. Unable to speak. Meek.

Elegant hands cup empty air. Stray birds, stirred,  
 might rest there, lend purpose, however brief. Grief  
 flowers in bouquet by Gertrude gifted. Drifted  
 crow flowers, daisies, long purples. Unsettled,  
 slip away. Trailing pinks, blues. White roses. Posy  
 vibrant as plucked from thorny stems. Condemned.

Innocent, Millais Ophelia consigns. Resigned  
 to babbling brook. Centuries framed by art. Heart  
 fragmented. Had Millais imagined songs? Rank  
 melodies. Madness nibbling her mind. Behind  
 nonsensical rhythms, sanity mimes. Rhymes

the key to her fate, long before her birth. Girth  
 widening; unwitting foil in the world of men.

Ironic how Millais paints her in death. Regret?  
 About to break profound silence, speak? Meek.  
 Grasp at meaning? However futile. Without guile.

ON HEARING  
PAUL MULDOON INTERVIEWED

*John Hewitt Summer School, Armagh*

Relaxed as a Sumo after battle – language on the ropes, eyes

full of mischief too – a schoolboy’s eyes, truant from Professorships

or whatever it is a Pulitzer Prize winner does when *not* writing poetry,  
*not* listening to Chuck Berry, Cole Porter or

Paul Simon. *Not* playing guitar, *not* finding the eight year old child inside himself  
– he still tells the tale about the competition he judged

won by an eight year old boy who wrote about a tortoise movey-ing  
(wonder whatever happened to that boy?).

How do we keep that part of us alive? Where poetry surely thrives.

If this is so, my granddaughter spouts poems the live long day;

Her arm’s ‘gone fizzy’ (pins and needles), ‘the sun has no shadow’

(when she’s hot) – the holly tree in my garden looks like a prickly crocodile.

Fully fledged poems trip from her five year’s old mouth,  
into my gathering arms.

TO CELEBRATE  
MY MAGENTA COMING OF AGE

Arrive no later than half past three,  
taste scents of begonia spilling lazy  
on the window sill, riotous as a Picasso.

All hazy left and plump bird shape  
I stare down the hours on the hot clock of noon.

Shadow melts down the ledge,  
wakes the sleeping cat  
who stretches and lets out her claws  
as if unlacing tight pinching whalebones.

Make a soft click with the latch  
so I know it’s you come  
to fill this magenta coming of age space  
with lighter shades of love and grace.

## SOOT

We should be drinking tea, reading newspapers,  
shuffling our daughters from their beds. Instead,  
masked and gloved, our furniture shrouded  
in dustsheets, glass and mirrors covered,  
our Sunday morning transforms to mourning room.

My role is this: deliver on cue each spiky rod,  
keep down the mess – as all good wives should.  
You my husband of so many winters past  
disappear to shoulder line up the tunneling gateway  
such caution – Hades himself might pull you up!

But you come back again – even Elysian Fields  
could not tempt you from me now – none the worse,  
except for charcoal speckles in your graying hair,  
brimming shades of how it used to be.

Each time the rod goes up you give an extra heave,  
Sisyphus rolling the stone so steep this chimney  
climbing. Smells of smoke bring fires we burned  
into lengthening evenings. The rods too  
grow longer, divining their way to the top  
shooting out like a hornbeam's domed crown.

How many times you might, I wonder, have cheated death?  
slipped away in sleep? As the sun too,  
swerving on midnight bends, goes down, rises again.  
This last push sheens your forehead –

you are no longer the boy in bare feet at Muckross shore  
pulling on the tug of war rope – in another life.

A blizzard of soot floods our grate. Abundant sands,  
like seeds carried by birds,  
grow the toughest timber. Above our masks, eyes meet –  
such pleased surprise we see-

as when our first born came shooting down  
the birth canal, or, having flocked in rhythmic patterns,  
we settle again on roosting branches,  
shake our feathers clean.

## SUBJUNCTIVE

There is no warning, no funeral in my brain.

Morning's mirror unveils my left eye, drenched  
in a crimson flood, shaped more exotic bloom  
than floating lily. When I look to right or left,  
it prances across my optic wilderness,  
more Bowie than O'Donnell.

The doctor calls such sudden detonation  
*a Subjunctive Haemorrhage*  
(Sub H in layman's language), citing causes  
for such violent explosions as:

*Increase in blood pressure*  
*Constipation*  
*Coughing*  
*Sneezing*  
*Lifting heavy objects*  
*Advancing Age*

This sudden *apparition* – his word –  
(I do not claim it has the face of Jesus  
or any of the Saints)

could surely just as well result from:

Laughter (the belly wobbling kind)  
Sex (strenuous)  
Dance (Hip Hop, Salsa, Tango)

yet, these remain unlisted.  
He suggests I wear an eye patch.

No doubt I could. Become  
an older, New Romantic (my words)  
like Boy George or Adam Ant.

Yet, as it fades, lighter shades drop  
paler berries into this subjunctive stream;

more silver apples of the moon,  
than golden apples of the sun.





Still Life Oranges and Lemons. Painting by Vincent Van Gogh.

## ORANGES

April winds drive me homeward  
 and the lure of oranges  
 tempting with shape and shade.  
 I unpeel gloves, coat, scarf  
 drop them careless on the hallstand,  
 like underwear on a bedroom floor.  
 I peer into the glass, smile  
 at the face that smiles back.  
 Nothing behind those eyes  
 save a cold-eyed woman  
 feeling her years, split in two  
 segments, one half imprisoned  
 behind glass, preserved  
 like a museum piece;

the other feeling sinew and bone.  
 In my north facing kitchen  
 a clutch of oranges nestle  
 in a porcelain bowl  
 fresh as new-laid eggs, breast soft.  
 I look at their goose-pimpled skin  
 swaddled over white, cottony flesh,  
 what lies at the heart of them  
 once the outer layer is pierced.

I lift one from its bed, prick  
 with my nail until juice  
 drenches my fingers, scents  
 of sweet fruit drifting  
 like a warm body  
 towards my lips.

## TEA AT STEWART'S HOSPITAL

(Bealtaine Workshop)

*Come into the room with me. Lay out the table,  
put your cloth on bare wood. Make your centrepiece a dragon shaped  
tea-pot, a pinch of this, a drizzle of that, so scents linger on the empty chairs.  
The mantelpiece with huge mirror glints the light of this May day,  
colours from the garden I cannot see from this angle.  
These cups and spoons are my own, this purple glass sugar bowl  
bought last year in Venice, shaped like a gondola.*

I wait for sounds of footsteps, rubber soles on waxen floors -  
white faces reflecting in the wide mirror.  
Two sisters, arms linked, are the first to peer around the doorframe.  
All their adult lives in this place – looking out for each other,  
two men, smiling yet withdrawn, I don't remember names.  
My voice welcomes them, eases us into the gathering of ourselves;  
kettle coming to the boil, tea-leaves infusing, then poured.

There's an eagle in a sister's cup, rising into air. Below  
her nest, tangled lines weave like a switchboard  
transferring voices.  
The other sister gets a bull's head outline, a moon on the white rim,  
an elephant trunk raised, all burden lifted. Elephant for long life,  
preservation.

One of the men stares at the bottom of his cup,  
a dreaming look takes him far away on a tugboat  
held at anchor many years.  
The bottom of the other man's cup is full of letters  
opening and closing, blowfish gasping for air.  
My cup shows me my pelvic bone – four children passed  
through, finding their destinies.

After tea, Victoria sponge, strawberry jam; comes the singing.  
The man whose dreaming place is traced in leaves on porcelain  
rocks backwards and forwards, a sound filling his throat;  
the same primal sound our cat makes before springing on a bird.  
I think of the yogi swallowing down the linen rope, Sauca,

pulling it up from the depths of bile, inch by solid inch.

## THE FOUR O'CLOCK FLOWER

Mirabilis Jalapa.\*

Like a spinster you move through  
daylight, in plain full view, drab  
plumage un-detected. Out of  
fashion, mothball smelling  
skin. Papery. Hair in a tight coil.

No whispering breezes waft  
promise - what's yet to come,  
so others lure to your presence.  
Arms folded, layers cover you  
like petals tucked tight  
around your stem.

Midday fading towards late afternoon  
begins a transformation. As when lights  
go down in an auditorium, the stage  
a blaze of brightness  
or an attentive lover hovers, intent on  
peeling away outer layers,  
reveal true nature.

The song-bird himself  
parachutes from his high perch  
to sing at your colours.  
Your hour has come.

\* *Mirabilis Jalapa is the flower that comes to its true beauty late in the day*

## THE AGE OF FISHES

A woman falls in love with a fish.

Tiktaalik Rosea

(large freshwater fish, named from Inuit speech).

Linked with lobed finned fishes,  
early amphibians. Aquatic. Able to walk  
on shallow water floor.

This woman and this man-fish dance in deep water,  
beribboned by crinoids (sea lilies) and coral.  
Baroque masterpieces by Handel play. Water music  
above splashes of smaller fish bubbling  
among clustered reefs. This man-fish has jaws.  
Gills. Skull spiracles. Can breathe on land.  
He should be extinct, known only from fossils  
but here he's seen, large as life, on a movie screen.

He might come from Devonian time, *The Age of Fishes*,  
419.2 million years ago. Numerous as minnows,  
years spanning Tetrapod species (backboned animals,  
birds, reptiles) after Silurian. Up until now.  
True origins may be sourced in 'flesh' and 'wings'.

This woman birthed in Eden - from another man's rib.  
Her reward? A watery kingdom, her every breath  
dependant on her Pescatarian Prince's ability to swim.  
Who can deny his existence?  
No less real than Andersen's 'Mermaid', a fish woman  
who gave up her voice to walk on limbs.

*\* Inspired by 'The Weight of Water' directed by Quentin Tarantino*

## WINDOW DRESSING

Behind glass, yellowing plastic shield  
preserves stock from direct sunlight.  
Fabric swirls around a tailor's dummy;  
bald head half-hidden by a synthetic wig  
losing its grip. Net curtains dress both sides,

funerary for dead bees, belly up.  
No living relatives to gather them, provide  
decent burial. Or tear down dusty pelmets  
draped corner to corner. Boxed corsets

stand upright. Boned. Embroidered. Pink  
laces snake through eyelets. Tightens  
winter flab when summer finally came.  
She knew what farmers' wives might buy  
or women from nearby housing estates;  
who could afford to pay her prices.

What lies beyond this mildewed frame,  
out of sight in living quarters, is anybody's guess.  
Homely comforts? Or a cobwebbed woman?  
Veiled in a town's dying memory.

## TREASURE

for *Tina Claffey*

Each time I pass a bog,  
I feel his presence bloom  
mysterious as galleons  
sunk deep in dark.  
Dense as bark.

He's in there somewhere  
layered through serrated gloom  
perched on a ledge of rime.

Crowned with thorns  
his universe not yet born;

he sank to his knees,  
the mighty fallen;  
mired in his own mythology.

Each time I pass a bog  
His giant elk skeleton gleams  
white as bone  
on the edge of time.  
Bog cotton will-o-the-wisp\*  
lanterns flicker moonlit  
spools. Like lotus flowers  
rooted in pools of murk.

Each time I pass a bog,  
I hear such loud bugling calls  
unfrozen from his dead mouth.  
Songs of battle, death or victory.

He's in there somewhere.

Vanquished by brute forces  
cossetted in layers.

Deep as dark  
Dense as bark.

*\* In folklore, a will-o'-the-wisp or Ignis Fatuus is an atmospheric ghost light seen by travellers at night, especially over bogs, swamps or marshes.*



## UMBRELLA

Tossed over park railings or shoved  
into bins. Or spread-eagled  
across concrete, spokes crushed,  
no longer functional.

Graceful, ingenious contraption,

you mushroom from the handle,  
unfold hidden designs;  
glory days spent sheltering new  
coiffed hair, bearing brunt  
of rain and wind. Providing  
flirtatious rotations, sunshine  
too much to bear.

Screen for gossiping companions.  
Graceful, ingenious contraption,

silky parachute, metal bones  
exposed, spidery shape  
strips back to bone.  
Transformational chassis.  
Fantastical alien being.

Woman with a Parasol - Madame Monet and Her Son, 1875. Painting by Claude Monet.

## WILLOW MAN

*After a visit by Michael Hartnett to Virginia House, Tallaght, July 1993*

He arrived late in a pre-booked taxi but I'd wait  
 Longer even for that first glimpse of him  
 leaning through the doorway as if a birthing,  
 shoulders coming first, then the rest.  
 This small, dark man. Brooding eyes,  
 tweed jacket, cap peaked as a diviner's rod.

Half in, half out, unsettled  
 like a foal finding its awkward stride  
 before shufflings of paper. His voice grown strong,

clear well water, child-like magic  
 spilling from his mouth.

Poems drifted outside; willow branches  
 winding paths as voices he connected up  
 from the telephone exchange in Exchequer Street.  
 It must have pleased him, conversations  
 flying on witcheries of wire.

That tree, symbol for wisdom, *Salix*  
 (he knew its Latin name)  
 long gone. Gone too Virginia House.  
 Replaced by shape shifting landscape,  
 apartment blocks like totem poles.  
 A Luas Line snakes its way to a city of many tongues.

We are different yet the same since he was here.

Dublin Mountains tower still behind our houses,  
 thrushes sing with wrens in Gleann na Smól,  
 winds sweep away winter's ghosts,  
 moon and stars sickle our skies,

willow roots, like language, go deep.

## MR HARDWARE MAN

You steer me past nails, shiny as bait, spiked brushes for chimneys  
 wood turning tools, tongued and grooved flooring –

towards shelved tins of magnolia.

- 'Very popular, neutral,' you say.  
 Magnolia creates an illusion of space, I'm told  
 as if baronial acres were sealed under lids.

'And muted,' you add – like mufflers and blinkers, turning down  
 what might otherwise be amplified

- Or worse, turned on!  
 You even suggest I 'do' the whole house the same magnolia shade  
 so I can glide through the house  
 a bewildered shell in a magnolia hell.

Mr. Hardware Man, in this magnolia wilderness  
 you do not quench my thirst. You don't see  
*Vermillion* in my amber yes,  
 That it's red I want, hot on the skin of my bedroom walls,  
*Atomic orange* – taking me off in the kitchen,

Songs of *Wild watermelon* dripped from the bathroom tap,  
 And, when the shades are low, though you wouldn't know,  
*Magenta Blush* is on my lips, a tinge of *Mediterranean Blue*  
 lusting in the hollow of my throat.

So keep your job lot  
 your creamy ten per cent off –

I'll take my business elsewhere.



Palazzo da Mula, Venice, 1908. Painting by Claude Monet.

## THE BEAUTY OF SHADOW

I dip parched hands in its ancient pool. Oarswoman  
pushing off from familiar shores. I turn my back  
on tidal days, those ebbs and flows of happiness.

I am no saint. I burn, look to the shadow  
cast by oak deepening down, further even  
sins committed before I was born.  
I too add to their store.

I steer under gull's lonely sigh, weathers of the heart  
forecast by darkening skies. It cools my skin  
slips its moist flesh over me,  
prized caul, protection from too much sun.

I bathe my breasts in silky moss and lichen, breezes  
brush berries. I drown in rosy midnight.  
My feet I leave until the very last, so many miles  
walked or ran from the source, like roots  
twisted away from yet mapping a way back.

In the shadow of oak, I hear the linnet's song  
fed on weed, caterpillars. I see the moon's face,  
mirror bright.

*Eileen Casey* is originally from County Offaly, based in South Dublin. Poetry, prose, short-fiction and journalism are widely published. ‘River Songs,’ her seventh poetry collection, appeared 2023, a Creative Ireland funded project. Individual collections are published by New Island, Arlen House, AltEnts and Fiery Arrow. Work is anthologised in volumes from Faber & Faber, New Island, Arlen House, The Stinging Fly, Abridged, Salmon, The Nordic Irish Studies Journal and many more.

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Cover Image:

*The Artist’s Garden in Argenteuil* by Claude Monet

