

Time to Listen

Poetry Day Ireland 2020

With Cavan Library Service
and writer Heather Brett



Poetry
Day
ireland
Thursday 30 April 2020
www.poetryday.ie

There Will
Be Time

Triptych Oh Ireland, Mother, Night Shift

Oh Ireland

For Katie and Margaret McAleese

The second leaving,
a Spring day in March
and a railway station in the north.
and the very last time you see your sister.
She gets an hour off from the mill
to say goodbye forever.
Then Belfast, the docks, the pier awash with tears.
A boat to Southampton
for the liner out.
You're on your own now,
the first leaving back
when you fell for the protestant,
threw your hat in with the other crowd,
broke free from every sort of rope
that bound convention.

March sea, the cheaper fare.
A full week moored to your cabin
while the ocean swells,
falls back,
waves tilt and thicken with ice.
Ireland behind you,
the Atlantic below
and a new found coastline beckons.
Those were the years of telegraphs and distance
thin airmails and funerals,
snow drifts, and lamps for the darkness.
All the leaving and the waiting,
to go or get there or even return,
two sides of the same tossed coin
a silver bright half-crown,
or perhaps, that unfamiliar dollar.

Heather Brett

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Mother

Keeping it relative

we skirt the lowlands of Slemish,
through Kilnacolpagh, Carnstroan,
Ballygelly, Aughanure, Rathkeel -
guided by the flailing remnants
of your memory.

Lisnamurrican Brae to school, where the
master took you in at three years old
when your mother died.

A farmer came for you each morning
laboured the mile back up with you on
the handlebars of his bike, your sisters
of five and seven and ten waving.

At almost 90
you speak of your mother with reverence,
the loss no less raw.

Dunaird. Three lint dams on the marsh,
The creak of windmill vane flatly slicing
and paddling the air. Only a trundling spoke left.
Your sisters and you tie stooks, hold hands
as your bare feet rummage in the stagnant pool.
The years skid away, Scotland towards Canada,
brought up short against the irony
of another start, another Ireland, another life.

And now you sit, my passenger.

We journey through your years,
reducing decades to hours, reliving
a different past every weekend,
spanning the gaps of your favourite ditches
a gorse bank, a primrose cutting,
drills of flowering potatoes.

We make warp time back for our hotel lunch.

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Night Shift

Metronome of the dark. Keeping count.

Time arcing between tick and tock,
softer, lighter, faster than the
remembered:

that ominous calibrating of childhood,
dank afternoons laden with
the portent of threat:

angry buzzing from interned bluebottles.

Tonight, slack-mouthed, you breathe in
the face of the moon,

Almost full, you said earlier:

I opened blinds to show you,
the moons' bright spread.

Old arguments settle like sediment
layers, fog coloured and just as heavy.

From here the face of Jesus is a pastiche
coming and going with the throb

of a pulse. It could be anyone, the heart
a black, imbued hole. Photographs watch
tightly, their places guarded, indistinct and rallying in numbers,
an army skulking.

By morning they'll all have returned to prop up
your day.

Popcorn bursts of frozen rain slap your reflection,
tadpole furtively into your open mouth.

Heather Brett