

Introduction

Kilkenny County Council Arts Office is delighted, once again, to announce the publication of the twenty first issue of the ever popular Kilkenny Poetry Broadsheet. The aim of the publication is to give Kilkenny poets the opportunity to be published alongside their peers in a beautifully illustrated broadsheet. Ninety-eight poems by fifty poets were submitted for consideration this year and twelve poems by eleven poets were selected by our editor Jessica Traynor. The Broadsheet is hugely popular amongst our writing community and the wider public and one that we in the Arts Office look forward to every year.

Jessica Traynor Editorial Statement

I became aware of Kilkenny's proliferation of poetic talent early in my own career as a poet, while studying at UCD. A poet on my course was a Kilkenny native, and I remember her excitement at attending the launch of the broadsheet, and her hope that her work might one day be included. She showed me that year's edition and I remember how lovely the notion of poetry in print in such a format seemed – the broadsheet format reminiscent of a newspaper in all its urgency and immediacy, the graphic design adding a beauty beyond the quotidian. Holding this tactile item, the thought of having my words included in such a publication felt greater than any prize. I think this still holds true for most aspiring writers; although we live so much of our lives online, the book as an object still enchants us. In the course of this difficult year, how many of us have longed to open the door of a bookshop and be enveloped in that new-book smell, to turn a page and feel the roughness of paper against our fingertips?

In terms of this very difficult year, I was intrigued to see how it might have impacted on the poems produced. Would the majority of the poems reflect on Coronavirus and its impact in a direct manner? Or would the poetic imagination escape the confines of our lockdown and bring the reader to farther shores? What I found in the poems submitted was intriguing; a deepening of attention, a journeying inwards to the world of family, domestic life and nature. So, traditional subject matters in many cases, but approached with a care and attention that only an enforced pause can give. There are poems here that shine a new light on tradition, that look at nature through a fresh lens, and that examine the minutiae of family life, either in the present moment or through memory. There are poems of formal and linguistic invention, of humour and of mourning. They speak volumes of a place and time, and I'm honoured to have been here, at this moment, to read and select them.

None of the above would be possible without the continued dedication of Mary Butler and Deirdre Southey at Kilkenny Arts Office, and Carol Ann Treacy's wonderful design. And of course, none of it would be possible without the poets themselves, quietly and diligently cataloguing human experience for us. I could have filled the broadsheet three times over, such was the quality of this year's submissions. And so, as we face into a welcome return to a faster-paced way of life, I'd like to take one final pause to salute the continued passion and creativity of all involved.

Jessica Traynor Biography

Jessica Traynor is a poet, dramaturg, librettist and creative writing teacher. Her debut collection, *Liffey Swim* (Dedalus Press, 2014), was shortlisted for the Strong/Shine Award. Her second collection, *The Quick*, was a 2019 Irish Times poetry choice. In 2019, she co-edited *Correspondences: an anthology to call for an end to direct provision* with actor Stephen Rea, bringing together asylum seekers in Ireland's direct provision system with Irish writers. The book was a best-seller, with all proceeds going to MASI (Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland). She was also commissioned by Music for Galway to write an opera with composer Elaine Agnew for Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture. The resulting opera *Paper Boat*, will be performed in 2021.

Current projects include a commission from Offaly County Council and The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to write a poetic history of the town of Banagher. The resulting pamphlet, *A Place of Pointed Stones*, is forthcoming in 2021.

Awards include the Ireland Chair of Poetry Bursary, Hennessy New Irish Writer of the Year and the Listowel Poetry Prize. In 2016, she was named one of Poetry Ireland's Rising Generation of poets. She is joint recipient of two commission awards from the Arts Council for 2021.

She has worked as Literary Manager of the Abbey Theatre and Deputy Museum Director of EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum. She is Poet in Residence at the Yeats Society, Sligo and a Creative Fellow of UCD.

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BROADSHEET #21

A POETRY PUBLICATION OF KILKENNY COUNTY COUNCIL ARTS OFFICE

AUGUST 2021

The Whole Idea of a Swan

On the road to Cavan
when we were young
passing the lake we called
Lake Lough Derravaragh.
Of course there were swans
as we hairpinned round
its narrow end before rising up
to leave the water behind.
*Not the worst place to spend
three hundred years.*
But we never stopped—
too close to journey's end.

This morning on the walk to work
the family myth came back
as two swans on St. John's Pill
waiting, cold white as real swans,
to be transformed into green bronze,
or an extended metaphor,
or just the simple idea of a swan
that for once, might
take flight, wings pounding
against the frost blue air
and turn the whole sky brilliant white,
lasting a thousand years.

Noel Howley

Lore

Sitting in this howling cage,
a wraparound garden room
with lupine wind rapping at the windows.

Sepia spruce from last Christmas hurtles past,
unfurled from twinkling thoughts,
on-off—on-off—on-off.

Shape-shifters return from long gone
wild oak woods, wolfwalkers conjured up
in animation run across the screen.

Real-time news plagues the airways,
reminds us of eye-witnessed writings
handed down by Friar John Clyn.

And, mewing in the sky, shaping wheelies,
a kettle of raptors ride the rising thermals
on their way to a wake.

Breda Barrett

Midsummer Waning

Shivering in the chill of an open window,
we're driving too fast at a late hour,
on the wrong night of the week,
towards the orange glow
of the city.

Smoky clouds breathe
into the turquoise dome
building far off mountains,
heavy hooves rearing
from their slopes.

This is our first night-journey
into an unfamiliar plain,
the horses we galloped
through our youth
have pulled up lame.

The night ahead is a new country,
a world unknown -
its jagged peaks rise,
its dark horses loom,
crashing down.

Anne Mac Darby Beck

Spoon

I've found a teaspoon.

Off lauded, seldom seen—
never to hand when one's in need.
I know a place I can get ten for two;

but, once home, they just vanish.
Sometimes I wonder if they organise,
gathered somewhere in silent battalions,

ready to revolt against my quick dash to the shops?
Are they angry, perhaps, at my blatant disregard
for their long lineage?

Down the back of my couch,
an old sterling silver spoon
(bent-headed after an attempt at frozen ice-cream)

whispers quietly to a brightly coloured version of
herself
from a toddler's tea set. She tells of the spoons
proudly displayed to catch the eye

on dressers, over centuries.
Silver spoons from the Big House,
with fig-shaped bowls so full of design

they could hardly hold anything else.
Women polishing iron spoons with rough bath
brick,
tainting food with the taste,

but shining them to a new pin.
And, finally, of the Irish horn spoon —
fashioned by a craft long dead,

translucent as the membrane of a freshly laid egg,
the colour of amber warmed by skin,
and, most importantly,

smooth against the lips.

Lori Moriarty

Social Smokers

You know winter overfed us.
Four ashen walls stippled with pine
and living things
and social smokers softened the air —
warm like Irish cream.

Little lights like a log cabin —
lost on the way to Times Square,
we are playing checkers with dice and candles.

You know she holds your cigarette like she gripped her father's thumb —
padding behind, blinking up at the misted red lights,
inhaling so she can close her eyes —
and you steady her like you keep a bag of chips warm in your coat.

All the way home, I can taste the hearth.
Our decanting hours,
a rich rind scraped into little flames -
nothing, or little, left to laugh about
but still here, simple petals in grey morning
all asleep on orange straw.

You know I'll gather up every piece,
trade a minute for the thaw.

Maeve Moran

Teenage Morphosis

A
n
o
t
h
e
r
storm.
You slither
off. At your throat:
Adam's Apple, ripening. On
the floor: The Scales. I lick my
fingertip, stick to it
your skin chip.
Sacred papyrus,
fragmented,
etched with
teenage
code.
*the clint and gryke
the ups and downs
of life, have mapped you,
have marked you; I lost you
then I found you. Shall I call
you Rumpelstiltskin?*
Mouth gapes/eyes roll/
fangs spit/tongue splits —
time to retreat back under
my stone, your peristaltic shuffle
goes on, dancing through
the night, slim-hipped
and long. Your Kundalini
rising. *Why does it
have to be so hard, Ma?*
—Lean into it, Son!
Your darling mouth
hungers for pyjamas
toast and tea, upon the
couch with me. Your armour
begins to chip. No return
to this! The crusty sheath
lies on the floor, emptied
of you—minus, all the other
nonsense. Leaving you
this glorious hide. As
slither becomes
g
l
i
d
e

Janis Woodgate

*Besom Time

You carry an armful
of snowdrop twigs,
and lay them on the flag floor -
then lift a bundle
the size of your closed hand,
interlock them around
a four-foot hazel stick -
Are you watching me?
*Gather a few now,
it's time you learned.*

We try.
It's not easy.

You clip the ends with a scissors,
till bits of twigs and snowdrops
circle your feet.
That one is done.
You test it in the crevices of the flags,
dust rising to the rafters.

*Pick up those bits
and throw them on the fire.
Bring in an armful of dry sticks,
and draw a bucket of water:
I'll heat the bake-pot
and make a bit of bread,
then we'll dance a batch of culm
and make the bumbs.*
We'll have our tea,
and we can read together
after the rosary:*

*Besom: household broom made of twigs
*Bumbs: made from a mix of coal dust,
yellow clay and water (culm)

Willie-Joe Meally

Soul Soil Sister

In dreams they came,
these clues in curls of incense.
these whispers of magic in matter, in food, in land;
In the dream, all was moonlit,
cupped hands held cut herbs while a
voice hummed over and over —
*"This is the new magic, this old magic;
This is the new magic, this old magic"* —
To which we, you and me,
offered our secret
prayers, which spun
a hundred webs over our heads.
We prayed, and we sang, and I woke with the night
ecstatic inside me, alone in my morning-lit bed.
So I flew to the garden where you were,
in flesh, in soiled radiance, in clay-colored reverence.
You gave me a knife, promised me wisdom, and
took me to the silverbeet —
"See how he pulls up the darkness?" you said,
"See how he draws up the core of the earth to
the crown of his head, aspiring to flower?"
My crown tingles — that's a will I'd devour.
Bowing, I wonder, is there nothing I can't learn from ordinary chard?
Will I ever paint the music of the
spheres as well as
an onion in full bloom?
Is nature not the sagest bard?
And through you, my soil sister,
I unearth a teacher of the dark
in this ordinary matter,
providing the ark
with this old magic
this new magic.

Laura O' Neill

hive mind

The bees died on the most humid day of summer.
Sweat dripped, rolled, clung
to our soft temples,
salty as tears we wouldn't shed.

Again, failure.

They had been joyful—
covered in powdered white
(sugar, to keep away varroa mite)
like frenzied clouds,
cumulus with bite
stratus with oppressive humming.

For us, their loss holds the weight
of all promised and not received.

Little wisps of nothing.
Little wilted clouds, remain below.

Katelyn O' Neill

Winter evening i.m. Jean Valentine

River boundary the whole width of the fields,
brown and rapid, noisy
the rooks to their rookery,
some still bathing in chance winter pools in the
meadow
their wings arcing water in the last light.

A narrow waterfall
over a rock face that carries the scars of crowbars.
The rock was broken to build this road.

Lichen on the ground is a small fallen sun.
Across the road, not to be expected,
one sequoia sempervirens,
its needle leaves on slender branchlets
belie a connection to its bulk.

I think I am noticing because she would.
Though not written
it would be held somewhere in the heart.

Carmel Cummins

Unframed

In a blurred photograph, my communion dress
is stiff with *Robin Starch*. My mother insists
I keep it white; the photographer demands I stand still.
But meadow grasses tickle my legs and I look down
to where a ladybird stalks a blade of grass.

Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home...

A WhatsApp comes today, my daughter's eyes
unflinching behind a pair of broken-rimmed
glasses. Her dress, vintage, distinct
in muted tones of grey and sombre black.

Her older sister in flowing red skirts,
in a vineyard no less. A broad sunhat
shades her confident gaze
beyond the screen of my mobile phone.

*Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home,
your house is on fire, and your children have gone...*

Breda Joyce

Snagcheol

Is cuimhin liom ár gcuaire ar New Orleans,
an chomhairle ghéar a chuireadh orainn:
*Caithefidh sibh dul chuig an gceolchoirm,
saorchead isteach.*

Na daoine ag teacht le chéile, diaidh ar ndiaidh
le rún daingean thar Páirc Louis Armstrong,
agus ansin ar a sáimhín só timpeall a dhealbh
nó os comhair an stáite.

Siar sa tráthnóna go luí na gréine agus níos déanaí,
ceol mar chomhrá líofa timpeall orainn,
i dteanga nár bhádh i ndeora an Atlantaigh
agus í ar a dtóil acu uile.

Carmel Cummins