



Bar Talk

Nessa O'Mahony



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Barfly

A good view of the to and fro-ing at the bar,
staring at the orders given,
weighing prospects for Bacardi drinkers,
divining meanings if he slips a short
before carrying the mixer down.

Glass, half-full,
mid-way on the counter
to the next empty spot.
Take a nip, check the door
at frequent intervals,
though not the watch.

The stool stays free,
light up unassisted,
eyes hazing in the smoke of Silkcut Purple,
idling with the beer mat I've already shred.

Triple Exposure

A joke told by the February sun
projects a triple image on the pane.
Three outlines which become divergent,
take on traits I've seen before.

The first shifts slightly so I glimpse her face,
not as I saw it last, waxed, chin propped
by plastic on the hospice bed,
but lit with that old mockery, her sly appraisal
as a fag glows dangling from her mouth
and she eyes her winning hand at 25,
proffering her tumbler for the umpteenth time,
always warning "Sure, don't let it dhrown."

The second comes to view, the outline harder
as she sits, limbs steeled and held erect
by a hundred years and more of making do.
Sardonic in repose her lips will soften
to recount the latest news of some relation,
small eyes grey with irony even after cataracts
have left her without sight.
She never takes a drop, tells how once
a sip of sherry robbed her of her breath.

The last one waits until I notice her.
I try to stop the details merging with my own
but cannot tell if those wry lips are hers or mine,
or who should claim that stubborn curve of chin,
the eyes that hide the hurt within their depth.
She slips away, fades into the familiar
as light changes once again, leaving
a film of dust to blur the pane.

Gallery

for Conal

You've made a pattern of your history,
selecting pieces with mosaic-maker's skill.

Each frame encapsulates a memory:
old lovers posed by lakesides,
families grouped in kitchens
or clasping arms in churchyards,
pals with unlikely haircuts
and self-conscious smiles.

Later, you point out
the gap
I'd fit into.
Dizzy with gratitude
(and the lateness of the hour)
I wish someone could take my picture,
now, at the moment that you called me friend.

Memoriam

She spent hours
with the arrangement,
straightening the pleats,
smoothing folds, the ribbon's curl
just so beneath the chin.
In fastening the bonnet,
her hand brushed for a second
against cold skin,
and she flinched,
then bustled on
amid the frills,
blaming the glare of lamps
for the stillness
beneath the christening robes.

And when, finally
she moved away
leaving the photographer
to do his best
with his quiet subject,
she was blinded
by the flash.
Or did she see
in harsh illumination
all those evenings
drawing in,
resting in her chair,
staring at the frame
upon the mantel?

Grafton Street, January 1996

in memory of Pat Tierney

No wonderland, this.
It's rained for weeks now,
setting records
and expressions of despair
on faces disappearing
into collars and downward stares.

Half-hearted vendors hawk
the remnants of their wares,
while buskers barely raise
their voices above a whisper,
huddling against shopfronts,
clutching Styrofoam
and nodding at infrequent
clinks of change.

The only colour
is your red ribboning
the lamp-posts on this street
and the yellow flowers
painted on the mug
lying broken at the feet
of the woman sleeping
in the chemist's doorway.

Five Nations

Tonight she's kitted out with extra care,
this highlight of the sporting calendar
demands attention to the finer details.
Her make-up is flawless too,
cheekbones resurface in a pool of blush,
narrow eyes arced with pencil into wide surprise.

She meets the others in a coffee bar,
(espresso's better as it doesn't smear)
to talk pack strategy, discuss formation
and the game plan, which is elegantly plain:
first quarter to identify the prey,
send off the opposition by half-time,
on final whistle, divvy up the spoils.

The pub's just down the road.
They put their shoulders to its heavy oak
and heave into a solid scrum
of backs and forwards swarming round the bar.
The ball is well in play, but she's dismayed
to quickly tot the score –
there are too many players on the pitch.

Regroup outside the door,
adjusting outfits mauled in the last ruck.
But she is not deterred,
the night's just started and the season's young,
the triple crown remains unwon
and possessing club concessions
may avert the wooden spoon ...

She takes a taxi, ignores the driver,
then responds with grunts as she replays
the evening's highlights in her head:
a pass, one fumble of the ball,
a perfect setdown by the public phone,
three tries and one conversion
and a rematch, next time home.

Pauline's Pilgrimage

for Pauline Farrell Hughes

I had more doubts than Thomas
on the day that followed resurrection
although the sun had read the script,
dancing its two-step in the painted sky
and day-old lambs knew the routine,
skipping their choreographed beat
through neatly-mown fields.

The concrete seats of Firhouse and Knocklyon
only minutes down the mountain
from this bible back-drop,
where lime-washed houses nestled into hills
and roads curved wide to oblige
a stream's meandering.

Landmark by landmark passed
as your topography took shape.
There was the reservoir at Glenasmole,
the bridge your grandpa strode across
when Farrells were the lords in Castlekelly
and Liverpool a place you'd hear about
in pubs or at the back of Mass.

Here was the house, squat and low-roofed,
tiny windows squeezing in the light,
brown-stained walls and Guinness adverts,
straw adding texture to the flags
where sheep-dogs skulked for scraps.

We sat for tea around the kitchen table,
a ceremony of figrolls and buttered bread.
The farmer had read the stage directions,
knowing more about your family
than all your Aunties' memories put together.

I watched your face, envied the spark
that had ignited when we'd reached this valley,
and now shone brightly as you listened,
matching names and recollections, filling in the gaps.
And cursed my sneers, my curt dismissal
of your quest as I assessed
the likely mileage of a journey to my past.

Waterbaby

Annaghmakerrig, June 1998

Your call this godforsaken hour
has roused me from a stubborn curl
of tossed sheets.
You're off to take a dip –
a lake that large
has to be good for something.

Your voice sounds strained,
excitement reined in as you hint
of complications.
But it's a public phone
so I must wait to hear the details
which I'll pick over with the wine
and cottage cheese I muster
to welcome you home.

I see you, hair piled high
as you move in slowtime,
draped in an African throw
like some tropical bird
off course in Monaghan.

You blend into the water,
your languid stroke so smooth
no ripples break the surface
as you flow
where I can't follow
to the centre of the lake.

Flute-fixing In McNeills Of Capel Street

I would have passed it by –
secreted between pound shops,
purveyors of pine
or fifty types of trainer.
But you knew the way,
easing the heavy door,
leading me in.

Time was suspended
with the motes
as light slipped in
through timbered slats
and varnish teased our noses
till our breath
was pure mahogany.

The job was not yet done.
He twined the hemp, unwound
and twined again around
the bevilled shaft, retouched
with beeswax so the cord
stayed moist and pliant
as he talked of sessions,
of bodhrans played in the Sligo style.

As he worked you browsed
from shelf to shelf, ear cocked
to some internal tune
among the lutes and mandolins
till a bouzouki's soundboard
curved to swell a song
you promised I might one day sing.

Set 'Em Up Joe

I shouldn't try to smoke.
The fumes get in my eyes, upset my pose
just long enough to lose the thread
and though I know that I should memorise
the words he's said,
a woman's laughter loud across the bar,
the strains of banjo or a mandolin,
the liquid misting in my spirit glass,
all distract me from the tact
with which he spins his line.

So I nod at suitable intervals,
arrange my rictus in a practised grin,
three parts wryness to one part gin
will ease the regret.

But I won't bemoan the loss
of what was never there,
and blame the knot
that's bothered me for weeks
on some food past its sell-by date.
Those sleepless nights just mean
I need to get more exercise,
and if I play Sinatra once or twice,
well, what of that?

If I slow down while driving past his flat,
the traffic's heavier in that part of town,
and should I turn and scan the bar
for a familiar frown,
it's a habit I'll disown if challenged.
And when I remember how he felt
brushing my earlobes with a fleeting kiss,
I'll raise my collar tight around my throat,
and hail the barman for another shot.

Time Passing On The 2.15

You'll never see the man again
who sat across from you,
shifting cheek to cheek for a half hour
as he sighed himself to sleep
against the window,
sweater balled into a pillow.

If alone, your gaze fixed longer
than you meant on the couple of there,
his fingers keeping table beat
to the rhythm of her caress,
their eyes downcast on Sunday supplements,
better to look away, take stock,
inventories of luggage, sleeping bags,
the floral over-nighter.

By day you trace the shift in landscape,
watch the city eke away, not bothered
to take up the chase as field gives way to field
and sea keeps up a sideline commentary,
ragged resorts echoing the off season.
But night-time's something else,
windows loath to yield more than your reflection.
You catch your eye, look guiltily away.

You know you're near
before the tannoy cuts the murmurs
by the rustling of trophies
bagged at the weekend,
the gathering of coats,
rearrangement of expressions
by the onward bound.

I Amn't Getting Old ...

This aching thumb is just
an aberration,
pain lingering for the summer
because it had no place to go;
innocent, I'm sure,
of arthritic design.

It's just another confirmation
that I am my mother's daughter,
like the way my mouth
sets tight and crooked
when I have to back the car,
or how I pour for strangers
with a dedicated air.
Why I can't stand concrete
and would go for miles
to see a bit of green.

Although it's only natural
that I've learned my mother's habits,
I wonder if free will must always fail
to pass the genetic test.

The Queen of Number 63¹

You've lived here longer than the longest memory,
more fixed in Number 63 than the elk-head
glowering its bony greeting in the hall,
carved deeper in the Georgian stone
than sheelaghs gaping Christian warnings
on the slabs lining the meeting room above.

You spent a childhood here, invisible,
hiding behind doors or peering through the stairs
at worthies in their furs and feathers gliding
unaware they were spied upon by a stowaway.
As you grew you slipped into the routine,
learning to pour for forty at a time, not a drop spilt.

You hadn't lost that skill when I worked there,
though 50 years had passed; no one, not even you,
was sure of the true chronology. Furs and feathers
had been replaced by cords and denim
worn by a newer breed of Antiquarian,
though they still liked biscuits with their learning.

Your visits were the high points of our mornings,
arrival always heralded by a scratching on the door,
a flurry of small dogs, oblivious as you spoke
about the weather, to the frowns of sepia faces on the walls.
Later we watched your progress from the window,
hailed with terrier toughness down Merrion Square.

In the afternoons, with sunlight floating motes
and picking out gilt titles on the shelves,
your blue housecoat caught my eye
through the warped glass, as you cut grass
or crouched amid the marigolds,
gathering up the seeds with mother's care.

It's years since I last pulled the door behind me,
heard its muffled thunder echoing in the hall.
But when we meet, halted
in my tracks by the twinkle in your eye,
you read my lips and I am lost
in all that laughter following in your train.

¹ 63 Merrion Square, home of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland and of Mrs Christina Behan, its housekeeper for over 50 years.

Going Home

She always came this way,
knew the short cuts
like the back of her hand,
charted her steps
by the accuracy of a bent twig,
trusting directions from a fallen leaf.

She came here in all seasons,
was the first to see the promise
of another spring
in shoots forcing their way
through a burial of leaves.
At their descent she'd been the chief mourner.

In summer, when the shadows
deepened green,
she filled nostrils
with the scent of remember pleasures.
had always anticipated
that there would be others.

What was there to fear
in that wood where darkness
was just a trick of the light?
Why should she have paused
on such a mundane course
from bus to house?

Language Lessons In A Rathfarnham Chipper

The door swings wide for him,
sixtyish and slight, green overalls,
a whiff of compost following
as he hands the fiver
to the man behind the counter.
“*Una bella giornata, Luigi*”,
pronounced in best Rathfarnhamese.

He states his order, than they chew
the fat and Luigi stirs. I catch
odd syllables, guess prospects
for a better day *domani*
and the season’s flower crop,
nod tacit agreement
primavera’s in the air.

One last *salute*, thumb
and fingers prised
before he leaves.
I meet Luigi’s eye.
“You speak Italian?”
Ah, that is a pity.
Mick the florist, he say
it is the language of love.”

I spot him as I head back to the car.
He sorts the long stem flowers,
mouthing the latest phrase:
La bella luna.
And all the while
Luigi ladles oil,
savouring the words:
Daphne, Dianthus, Centaurea,
Cleome, Muscari, Primula,
Rosa.

Smithfield Saturday

for my father

He only took this route in early mornings,
haring through green lights and the occasional red
as if we owned the paper-strewn streets.
But when we crossed the bridge
our car gave way to rumbling juggernauts.
Forklifts turned laden pallets on a penny
through plastic-ribboned doors.

Following at a distance, we clutched hands,
obeyed his curt commands over roaring engines
and the baritone of traders.
Nearer, burning rubber and diesel fumes
were laced with citrus
mixed with the sweet breath of ripe bananas,
the damp-earth odour of potato sacks.

Inside, we ranged from stall to stall,
Aladdins counting out the loot,
hovering once the choice was made,
the crate jemmied to reveal
its crinkle-papered hoard.
Our father, transformed to haggler,
picked up the fruit and sniffed each expertly,
his voice in muted undertone for the transaction.

He always knew his man, exchanging racing tips
before the spit and handshake polished off the deal.
Back past rows of exotica we never tasted,
past straw-filled crates showing labels garish
with palm-trees and pyramids,
arguing the toss on whether Jaffa
was the place or just a trader's name.

Inis Maan At Noon

A sparrow taking flight
makes head turn
as its whirr of wings
sends ripples through the stillness.
A lazy wave,
foam breaking upon shingle
on a distant beach,
sounds close enough to feel
the mist of spray upon my face.
A single tractor throbbing into life
starts a chain of sound
across this place:
the donkey's throaty bray,
the knife-sharp sea-bird caoin,
the transistor-tinny peal of angelus.

Keepsake

After this is over
I'll sift the leavings,
searching through the butts,
the ash and dried-out lemon rinds
for something more than hangovers
and inscribed books
to remember you by.

If I find a nugget in the silt,
its gleam a pale reflection
of the light of raindrops
on that busker's plate
the day we followed sounds
down alleyways,

I'll handle it with care,
smoothing and polishing
till it shines brighter
than the memories that made it,
and it fits the vacant setting
in the chain around my neck.

After

Calling it was the easy thing ...

Naming the ways
we had derailed ourselves,
words filling up the gap
when gestures faltered,
projecting futures
where we'd meet
like people who had
known each other once.

At the Waterfall ...

Did you know as we stood in the deepest spot,
looked at the steep rush of water over rock
that each second staggered
with the weight of what could not be said,
that a hand-touch threatened our wary truce
till the cold stone we leant against
forced me to unwonted nimbleness.
Better to clamber and to slip
than wait to hear your breathing,
pace your rhythms once again.

A room of one's own ...

A day can pass here
recording small events,
a robin threading worms,
a leaf buffeted by a breeze's whim,
dusk gathering it in
with others.

Silly Me ...

to think the beech would shiver differently today.
It's felt the breeze for aeons though the leaves
still tremble to that touch.

Why expect another shade of blue
behind those tossed-sheet clouds?

Imagine thinking that the sun might dance
or my face would give the game away.

If I remember not to smile.

Some Day ...

*And waking
just the same,
finishing
the phrase
that I'd
dozed off to.*

Some day
this time
will seem
fleeting.
I'll marvel
once again
how short
the hours,
forget,
consign
to phase
the ticking
into days,
weeks,
the quiet
listening
to me
breathe.

Staring
at the shelves,
rearranging
pieces
for the
umpteenth.
Resolving
once again,
swearing
every day
I'll wake
renewed,
thoughts
washed
clean ...

Sancreed Well

A mouth into the earth,
a gape of flags
beside the rubble
of the early church.
No other sign,
no fragment cloths
tied to twigs with faith.
Just steps deep down,
worn slippy by the weight
of pilgrim hopes
and the steady drip,
the water-carried beat
of prayer.
In the clammy air
nowhere to look
but down, deep down
into the blackened pool,
and in the moss-lined font
nothing to see
but your own face,
staring your rippled question
back at you.

At Bandelier, New Mexico

600 years late we keep their path,
climb to their caves,
skirt the red stone
dimpled and carved
with flat-eyed petroglyphs,
wondering at the ceremonies
woven in kevas.²

Cliffs rise to scrub,
overlook the canyon
where a stream fissures life.
A rustle in the bush,
a deer, gaze casual,
shows who's intruder here.

Did they dream us in their loom,
scratch our outline
with the watersnakes?

² A ceremonial chamber used for Anastasi Indian weaving rituals

I Looked At You Today

I looked at you today.
Something about the way you sat
prolonged my stare beyond
the hasty glance we keep
for those we love.

Those crisscross lines
that stretch from neck to cheek
were not there yesterday, I'd swear.
When did you take the colour from your hair?
What happened to your hands?

I looked at you today, I really looked.
And in the course of all our chat
an ache began and grew and swelled
until it was all that I could do
to hid behind my disbelieving eyes.

Portrait Of The Artist's Mother

A glance says she's asleep, but closer viewing
shows the gaping mouth, the awkward angle
of the pillowed head, the pain-carved lines,
the near suspension of the final breath.

Caught by charcoal to while away the hours
by the hospital bed, and afterwards
he neatly framed and hung it where the light
would catch those tidy coal-strokes of the dead.

Only Silence

I search for words:
to tell how leaves must cede
their greenness to a harder brown,
before crumbling into next year's growth.

How countless insects know
there is a time to mummify,
then wait to split about their shrouds
and emerge fluttering.

How the moon's sickle cannot hide
the ghostly outline of its fuller self.
How waves that edge high-water mark
will soon retreat, leaving the stone bare.

I search for words,
trawling for metaphors
to package up your grief
in neat parcels.

But I owe you more,
so all I offer is my silence,
leave the soothing
to the crawl of time.

Margaret's Bar

We keep a nice place here.
So clean you could eat
a sandwich off the counter.
As many do who call,
the times I've run my cloth
across it, catching crumbs
before they fall.

We get a grand crowd in.
Plain, ordinary, no airs
or graces, liking a quiet pint,
the odd tune when Johnny's
in the corner. No riffraff
and no city crowd, demanding
service like they own the house.

They come bank holidays,
lads who've had their fill,
young ones hanging off them.
They've no respect, those girls,
if their mothers knew
what they got up to at my bar,
the times I've shamed them.

One pair I mind well –
it was the August festival
and the rain swelled the crowd
jostling for stools.
The two of them at it,
could have been anywhere
for all they cared, *'ating* each other.

And Mickey B. going redder
than the lemonade I poured
into his Jameson. I knew the score,
aiming a swift hit with the Taylor Keith
on their arms and heads,
watching them jerk apart.
“Not in *my* bar”, says I.

But what I like best is calling time,
seeing the last man out,
bolting the doors,
restoring quiet till I make the tea,
kettle whistling,
wireless crackling on

to other night-times.

Old Maids' Tales

It happened
to other people.
She'd see
the first stirrings
on a friend's face,
familiar features shift
to strangeness,
private, inaccessible
to third parties.

*It only happens
when you aren't looking*

She'd trace
her own shape,
search for
answers
in a curve of lip
(too small, too straight)
the carriage
of her back.

*Boys don't like
bright girls.*

As she grew
it settled on her,
comfortable
as a shapeless frock,
her fate
as watcher,
minder of bags
and pints,
organiser
of groups
she'd view
maternally.

*You have so many
friends*

Abandoning
the search
so nobody
might confuse
independence
for something else.

Her smile fixed,
secure
she had it
sussed.

*What's for you
won't pass you*

she said.

The Carer

After, when we'd shaken off the clay,
though chill remained to spite the late spring day,
I climbed once more the steep and narrow stairs
to your room.

Perfume, proudly displayed, unopened,
a gift from the niece in London.
Abba records I never heard you play.
Your picture of Padre Pio.

And dolls.
Stiff-backed and glassy-eyed,
dressed in costume of countries
you never got to see.
Never expected to.

A layer of dust
the only sign of absence.
Personal effects laid out
under the gaze of mourners.

Bedtime in Commons Road

The last step
was the hardest.
You would build momentum
on the earlier ones,
body crouched
for the ascent
as if defying gravity
by will alone.
Metal handles placed
above each stair
became the irons
in this Everest climb.
Fingers, purple
under flaking parchment,
hooked each grip
with improbable strength.
Legs, in crumpled nylon
(heels half-out of slippers)
obeyed your imperative
with every lift.
The landing plateaued
into promised rest,
but one last heave
was needed.

You'd pause,
muttered imprecations
growing strong:
Oh God,
God help me.
Now, before the final swing
of back and porous hips
brought safety

for another night.

Kelp

at the bathhouse in Enniscrone

Gasping I take the first step,
hesitant before the green
I must immerse in,
toeing my way through fronds
as I settle in deeper, feeling
the fringes insinuate, caress

me till I respond, lowering
myself further, weaving
a seaweed skin around
arms and legs, between,
inhaling the salty breath,
then tonguing it in.

Lying back, I drift
to the last time I was here,
the final family holiday
before we gave up
togetherness
and picnics on the beach.

It rained two days in every three
of that grey fortnight,
filling the old Austin
with a fog of mutiny,
steamed up windows
keeping the scenery out.

Back to the bar of the hotel,
to the thrill of deep-fried chips
and ketchup in metal bowls
and all the Fanta orange
we could drink till our blood froze
with the first drone of the accordion.

And the adults perking up,
pushing us onto the floor,
“Go on there, strut your stuff,
show them what Jackeens can do,”
our limbs petrified with shyness
jerking us towards the door.

But there could be no escape
from the spotty boys cross the hall
who dragged us round the room

to the “Walls of Limerick”
till we were redder than the velvet
curtains keeping the starlight in.

The baths weren’t opened then.
We found our seaweed on the strand,
kicked it idly on the sea’s edge,
watched its oil bubble on the sand.

Aran Wedding

The clocks went back the morning afterwards.
The island slept it off, turning over with a sigh
of wind easing after last night's gales
while clouds, blanketing the sun in dormant grey,
prolonged the slumber for another hour.
A sheepdog sentry dozed on limestone wall.
Oyster catchers, posed in piebald flocks,
cocked eyes seaward for approaching boats
but nothing flecked the blur of sea and sky
stretching unfocussed to the Galway coast.

The Mourners

One summer, your ragged gang
of sisters and brothers
leaned every day for weeks
across the moss-flecked stone
bridging the river
to watch the bloating body
of the family pet
slowly progress
through slime-scurfed water.

Sometimes you stretched immobile
on the sun-warmed stone,
as if afraid your motion
might displace the air
and wake the sleeping beast.
More often you were armed
with sticks and rocks,
vying with one another
to nudge the dog
another inch along
its solemn procession.

Each day a little further
down the river
till boredom stiffened limbs
and pulled you back
to football fields
and shrill-pitched
games of tag.
But next morning
you'd resume your avid viewing,
as if you already knew,
there would be other vigils.

Remembering Jack

1964-1997

Jack's dead.
What more to say,
break bread,
sip Evian and scan
the menu of our lives,
comparing notes
on mobile phones
and bank imbalances.

But if memories are thrust at us
like coins on tabletops,
let it be of lengthy lunches,
sunny afternoons,
deadlines missed,
the gold you wore,
your khaki grace
gliding across the office floor
to pin-striped whispers.

Anything but your age,
the child left,
the plans unmade.

No, just muse
on possibilities,
good eateries,
some ruse to beat ennui,
recharge the batteries,
just chill.

Lament For A Shy Man

He would have hated this,
the man who turned his face
to hedgerows rather than risk
a greeting on a country road.
It would be another death
to know the details
of his life were being discussed
over breakfast, at church gates,
in hazy snugs as far as
Moate and Mullingar.

Wicklow Gap, Easter 1998

On we drive,
silence punctured
by staccato chat,
internal monologues
filling the car.

We'd posed, earlier,
found the Pipers' Stones
in Easter sunshine,
breathed the ice-tinged air,
caressed stray fleece
on blackthorn.

You'd stretched your arm,
folding me in again
to your warm centre, holding me
as my hands homed in
with old instinct
to your stomach's swell.

We drive where clouds
detach from hills
and snowdrops glint
in fractal light
until we start
our journey back
wordless.

Slipping Skin

I prefer the snake's routine.
She has enough
of one scene or another
so she gives a shrug
and shimmies out of skin,
discards a dried out sheath
coiled in the mark of a question
she's not bothered answering.

Death of a Walnut Tree

Long before we came
you stood majestic against the winter sky,
summer skin peeled back
to show the vein-intricate hardness
of a thousand branches.

We thought it would last forever,
named our houses after you,
grew complacent that the view
would always be enjoyed.

It could have been a lightning bolt
that hollowed the ancient wood,
cleaving deep until all life
had been burnt out
and arms fell sideways
in unstoppable embrace of earth.

Or else it was fatigue that split your centre,
a shrugging off of birth, growth, death,
all those cycles.
Perhaps the guilt was ours.
Putting down our roots
did we cut off the nutrients
that kept you fed?

But I have lost my pole-star,
the point my eyes would turn to
in the Sunday morning sun,
or on moonlit week-nights
when your shadow dwarfed
my weary coming home.
Now all that's left is vacant sky
and rooks, picking through the rubble
of their quake-hit lives.

Good Friday Gift

A different silence,
this three o'clock quiet
that descends on streets
emptied by annual devotions.
The only rumble a pilgrim straggler,
later for stations or the journey
south or west.

Today I have no destination,
no beauty spots to visit
and no prayers to say,
but in this noiseless room
I trace my ley-lines
on a wooden cup,
finger-tip embrace
the wax-buffed offering
of a turner's lathe.

From my window
I can see the spot
the tree once stood,
filtering the light
that now shines brightly
on the sheen of walnut.

An unexpected gift,
this chalice for Good Friday.
Yet I do not dare
to pour into the vessel,
for fear my profane brew
would stain blood-red
the bond timber.

But this cup gives proof
of other resurrections:
nothing that is lost
cannot be found.

Just Another Saturday

Nothing strange,
no change of order in the routine
of rising, showering awake,
newspaper browsing,
the alchemy of the coffee machine,
choosing CDs to ease me through
the drift to early afternoon.
The sunlight gives no clues.
I've tossed aside
the supplement before I realise
I haven't thought of you.

Bar Talk

The wood was soft beneath by touch,
that chipped mahogany we leant against
for hours, until the clock outpaced
our talk and blinked last orders
and the persistent drone of “time now”
wove into the background hum of shadows
fading in and out of the surrounding smoke.

For all that haze there was a glow,
brighter than the brassy sheen of bar-rails
or the honeyed gold that lined the glasses
we caressed upon the counter.
And there was an ease about you,
lightly resting weight on elbows,
back curved outwards in that miracle of space.

And I would have stayed there,
though I had other haunts to visit,
other arguments to settle, other brands to try.
A chill crept in as crowds pushed out
and the barman’s till rang up its final toll.

Biography

Nessa O'Mahony was born in Dublin. Her poetry has appeared in a number of Irish, UK, and North American periodicals, has been translated into several European languages, and has been broadcast by RTÉ radio. She won the National Women's Poetry Competition in 1997 and was shortlisted for the Patrick Kavanagh Prize and Hennessy Literature Awards. Her first poetry collection, "*Bar Talk*", was first published by *iTaLiCs Press* in Dublin in 1999. Her second, "*Trapping a Ghost*", was published by bluechrome publishing in Spring 2005. She was awarded an Irish Arts Council literature bursary in 2004. She is Assistant Editor of UK literary journal *Orbis*, she edits the online literary journal, *Electric Acorn* and teaches creative writing at the University of Wales, Bangor.

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