

Keith Payne

*A suburban Sunday*⁵

We never talked about hunger strikes
in our house. Back home after the pub –
Sunday Times crossword done while your man
twirled around the tables with issues
of *An Phoblacht*⁶ held up to his chest;
you'd buy one, leave it on the table
and later varnish over the fact.
I'd eyes only for orange Fanta,
your cold, black pint and that unicorn.

(Publ. *P.I.R.* Winter, 2017.)

⁵ The form of this poem (9 lines x 9 syllables) is based on Paula Meehan's *Geomantic* series. Available from Dedalus Press, Ireland.

⁶ A weekly newspaper published by Sinn Féin. Translates as 'The Republic.'

John Kelly

Poem from John Kelly's recent collection, which is more colonial, than post-colonial (John grew up in Enniskillen during the Troubles and attended Queen's in the 1980s). The tongue in cheek, wry humour is typical of many of the poems in the collection, and deflects nicely the invasive reality of British Army bag and body searches that were the norm at the time.

In Lieu

My football bag was blue.
It was often searched
in case there was a bomb in it
in lieu of boots.
Or an Armalite in lieu of togs,
or gelignite in lieu of Brut,
or the names of likely targets
on some incriminating list
in lieu of Nualas and Siobhán
who might agree,
in lieu of nothing else to do,
to kissing at The Ritz.

(John Kelly, *Notions*, Dedalus Press, 2018)

Seamus Heany. Poem: Punishment

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.

Good Friday, 1998

Late afternoon, we draw the curtains.
On the eighteen inch portable in the corner
talking heads are talked out, red eyed, perhaps
relieved when we turn the volume down.

The house exhales.

You sleep in your car seat, on the floor
of a near-empty room you will soon fill.
Fifty-one days in the world, every one counted,
your fists still pegged to your ears, as if
to block out frequencies we no longer hear.
You have surpassed all our imaginings;
no miracle can wrong-foot us now.

I hold my breath as I approach.

Above you, in the mid-air of blue screen
a portion of the island hovers, other-worldly.
Your breath is even, you have not moved
though all about you has.

The Harpist

In memoriam Mary Travers

New Year's Eve.

Back North, I buy the local news.

A classmate's father is buried,
her mother photographed with her kin,
alone in a widow's grief.

She walks behind the coffin
and watches as they lower it
with the care of a mother
who placed a sleeping baby in her cot.

Six bullets his body took in nineteen eighty-four
as they left the Church that ordinary Sunday,
the day his daughter died in his place. Six bullets
kept him from her funeral, the father in intensive care,
the mother who walked behind the coffin without him,
who walks without him again, to see them lie together.

I read the short piece over and over.
It tells me nothing I want to know:
not the name of the man
whose arm supports the widow,
nor the woman on her left,
nor the boy behind them.

It tells me the names of politicians
and 'senior figures from his profession'
who attend. I watch myself as I read,
feel the familiar scepticism rise, hope
that some of them were also friends.

Ambushed by the suddenness of memory
I glimpse girls of twenty-two who talk
as arpeggios leak under the doors of music rooms
while they wait for class, remember
my stunned awkwardness at the funeral.
But now, the likeness in her mother's picture
brings old grief closer, makes a fiction of the coming year.

It is the newness of the date that feels unreal.
What's real, the years they lived without their daughter:
each one rung in, *reported*
each one counted.

31.12.09

Sunnyside

(Things you don't talk about when you're sixteen)

siren

The last one home that summer's evening,
delivered safely by her biker boyfriend,
she goes straight to the new kitten, kneels, ^Q
pushing back her long hair as she leans to scoop it up.

Then it's all glass and noise — ^{bomb thrown through}
she ducks, something
lands at her knees.
her father's voice out
out, she hesitates, looks
for the cat, ^{no}, his hand
on her back pushing
her brother still inside
fingers thick with fear
together they break the glass
shiver in the back garden
braced, pressed to the hedge
knowing what comes next
though the silence
that roars in its wake
is worse.

Finally the sirens.

A fireman tells them it was a seven-second fuse.
The TV crew interview her dazed father, film the scorched house,
someone deposits the miracle kitten on her sedated chest.

They get the all-clear from A&E, will be rehoused ^{Accident}
but not tonight. So they lie awake in the back bedroom, ^{E1}
wardrobe pushed against the door, no lights;
in the morning their hair and skin smell of smoke.

The wound made by broken glass still marks her hand.
After thirty-two years, she says, the hardest part
is knowing they waited until everyone was home.

THE BIG HOUSE

What will they do without their asparagus?
What will they do without calabrese?
Their summer berries minded from the wasps,
Sweet in constant Mayo rain, in shafts
Of sunlight husbanded by the wall.
The roof is fallen into the hall.
No-one anymore looks in catalogues for seed,
Farther than London they've gone, to oblivion.

Not even ghosts can dine on trees.
The roof is fallen into the hall,
The house gapes like the vacant eyes
Of a gassed soldier in the great war.
Down the basement passage to the stables
Where a lad so lately creaked in silks and leather
To run that race that must be and was won,
Drips echo from cracks in the rent stone.
Cook's warm domain stinks like a dungeon.

Brief as the lilac flowers, delicate
As the young pod of a green pea, the vast
Kitchen garden bloomed before the trees,
Cut down, began to grow again. Bounded by the
Wall, raised brick on tawny brick by souls
Potato-fed for luncheon and for breakfast too
To guard the tender leaf and fruit,
As ascendant forest climbs the sky.
The roof is fallen into the hall.

No hoe nor spade disturbs the earth,
Vendettas always reek of death and
These doomy trees avenge Kilcash.
The roof is fallen into the hall.

OMAGH

In town, a transcendent mid-August noon,
Its mood somehow not averagely mundane.

A day condensing a shadowy lost summer,
The toss of shimmering trees already ephemeral.

Intensity of sun, cloud and wind all together,
A day the dead might wistfully remember.

An Mhurúch san Ospidéal

Dhúisigh sí
agus ní raibh a heireaball éisc ann
níos mó
ach istigh sa leaba léi
bhí an dá rud fada fuar seo.
Ba dhóigh leat gur gaid mhara iad
nó slaimicí feola.

'Mar mhagadh atá siad
ní foláir,
Oíche na Coda Móire.
Tá leath na foirne as a meabhair
le deoch
is an leath eile acu
róthugtha do *jokeanna*.
Mar sin féin is leor an méid seo,
is do chaith sí an dá rud
amach as an seomra.

Ach seo í an chuid
ná tuigeann sí —
conas a thit sí féin ina ndiaidh
'cocs-um-bo-head'.
Cén bhaint a bhí
ag an dá rud léi
nó céin bhaint a bhí aici
leosan?

An bhanaltra a thug an nod di
is a chuir í i dtreo an eolais —
'Cos í seo atá ceangailte díot
agus ceann eile acu anseo thíos fút.
Cos, cos eile,
a haon, a dó.

Caithfidh tú foghlaim
conas siúl leo.'

Ins na míosa fada
a lean
n'fheadar ar thit a croí
de réir mar a thit
trácht na coise uirthi,
a háirsí?

The Mermaid in the Hospital

She awoke
to find her fishtail
clean gone
but in the bed with her
were two long, cold thingammies.
You'd have thought they were tangles of kelp
or collops of ham.

'They're no doubt
taking the piss,
it being New Year's Eve.
Half the staff legless
with drink
and the other half
playing pranks.
Still, this is taking it
a bit far.'
And with that she hurled
the two thingammies out of the room.

But here's the thing
she still doesn't get —
why she tumbled out after them
arse-over-tip . . .
How she was connected
to those two thingammies
and how they were connected
to her.

It was the sister who gave her the wink
and let her know what was what.
'You have one leg attached to you there
and another one underneath that.
One leg, two legs . . .
A-one and a-two . . .

Now you have to learn
what they can do.'

In the long months
that followed
I wonder if her heart fell
the way her arches fell,
her instep arches.

Bunmhiotas na Murúch

A mórfhormhór
níl an luide is lú de chuimhne acu níos mó.
ar cad sa díabhal a thug in airde ar an dtalamh iad
an chéad lá.

Bhíodar ag teitheadh ó rud éigin; sin an méid is léir dóibh.
Tá miotas acu ina thaobh fiú; ins an scéal
bhí taoiseach orthu a fuair ordú ó Dhia:
'Ardaigh do shlat is sín amach do láimh
os cionn na farraige is deighil ó chéile í,'
is ea a dúradh leis. Do dhein sé amhlaidh.
Do shéid an ghaoth as polláire sróine an dé
a dhein cnocáin des na huiscí is clathacha tiorma de thonnta.
Dheighil na huiscí óna chéile is chuaigh a mhuintir féin
ar chosán trí lár na farraige ar thalamh thirim
is na huiscí ina mballaí ar dheis is ar chlé acu.

Ansan do shín sé a láimh arís
is d'iaigh an fharraige.
An dream a bhí sa tóir orthu
do bád gach éinne díobh, níor fhan fear inste scéil
nó anacail anama.
Dhein cior thuathail ghlan díobh is chuadar go tóin poill
mar a dhéanadh ualach cloch nó lasta luaidhe.
Shlog an fharraige iad scun scan
is deineadh ciota fogha díobh
i mbroinn na bóchna. Fiú cér dhíobh iad
nó cad ba shloinne dhóibh anois ní feasach d'éinne
nó cad ba chúis in aon chor leis an tóir.

Labhrann siad leis i dtaobh colúin thine is néil,
rud a chuireann ar scoláirí áirithe a chur i gcás
gur leis an gCríostaíocht a tháinig an scéal seo go léir
isteach, is gur bunaithe ar *Exodus* atá sé.

Tá dream eile acu a deir a mhalairt —
gurb ann a bhí scéal dá shaghas, a bheag nó a mhór, i gcónaí
ann
is nár dhein an Chríostaíocht ach craiceann breise
a chur air.

N'fheadar-sa féin cioca.
Ar leibhéal éigin,
ní chreidim ann, ach mar sin féin, ar chuma mhórán iontas
eile
a bhaineas leo, ní bhréagnaím é.
Ní foláir ar deireadh nó tá bonn éigin leis
murab ionann is cuid des na scéalta eile a insíonn siad.

Founding Myth

Most of the merfolk
haven't the first idea
of what on earth brought them to dry land
in the first place.

They were in flight from something. That's as much as they
remember.

They have a myth about being on the run
in which their leader was given an order by God:
'Raise on high your rod, and stretch forth your hand
over the waters and divide them one from the other,'
was what was said to him. He did the very same.
A wind blew from the nostrils of the god
that made hills out of the waters and dry banks of the waves.
The waters divided from each other and he and his people
walked on dry land through the sea
with walls of water to right and left.

The god stretched out his hand again
and the waters closed again.
The crowd that were in pursuit of them
were drowned to a man, not one of them living to tell the tale
or plead for his soul to be saved.
The sea swallowed them whole,
and they were dashed to bits
on the bosom of the ocean. The identity of the pursuers
is now completely lost
along with the reason for the pursuit.

They also speak of a pillar of fire and smoke which preceded
them
which has led some scholars to posit
that this entire myth coincided with their conversion to
Christianity
and that it's drawn mostly from *Exodus*.

Others take the opposite view —
that founding myths pretty much the same as this have
existed forever
and all that Christianity did
was to give it a veneer.

I don't give a hoot one way or the other.
At some level,
I don't believe it, though at the same time, like so many
other miracles
having to do with the merfolk, I don't *not* believe it.
It seems there might be a factual basis for the story,
which is more than can be said of some of the other yarns
they spin.

Easpa Comhbhróin

Bhí cuid des na murúcha agus do tháingadar i dtír
in oileáinín sceirdiúil, áit a raibh failltreacha diamhaire.
Bhí eagla a gcroí orthu go dtitfeadh a leanaí
leis an bhfaobhar, Rud a tharla leis minic go leor.
Is toisc gan na sceolbhaigh a bheith ag obair níos mó
bháití iad, nuair ná deintí mionrabhí dóibh ar na clocha géara.

Is dála an mhéid a tharla do Pheig Sayers ar an Oileáin
nuair a thit a mac féin le faill
d'fhan muintir na hinise amach go maith uathu
is níor tháingadar ina slóite ar an dtórramh
nó fiú ag déanamh comhbhróin leothu.

Bhíodar lán de phiseoga,
á rá, má lean an méid sin den mí-ádh nó den drochrath iad
nach foláir nó bhí sé tuillte acu.
B'in a bhfuairadar de láchas
ós na daoine gur chuadar ina measc.

Lack of Sympathy

There were some of the merfolk who came up on land
on one particularly blasted and bleak island, surrounded by
precipitous cliffs.
They were always heart-afraid their youngsters
would fall over the edge. Something that happened often
enough.

Since their gills had ceased to function
they drowned, when they weren't smashed to smithereens on
the razor-rocks.

Such was the case with Peig Sayers on the Great Blasket
Island

when her own son fell from a cliff
and the islanders gave them a very wide berth,
not showing up in their usual droves for the wake
or even dropping by to say they were sorry for their trouble.

They were so full of superstition
they said that anyone with so much bad luck and misfortune
following them

must have done something to deserve it.
That's as much kindness as the merfolk ever saw
from the people among whom they'd fetched up.

An Mhurúch agus Focail Áirithe

Ná luaigh an focal 'uisce' léi
nó aon ní a bhaineann le cúrsaí farraige —
'tonn', 'taoide', 'bóchna', 'muir' nó 'sáile'.
Ní lú léi an sioc samhraidh ná trácht a chlos
ar iascach, báid, saighní trá nó traimile, potaí gliomach.
Tá's aici go maith go bhfuil a leithéidí ann
is go mbíonn giotáil éigin a bhaineas leo
ar siúl ag daoine eile.

Ceapann sí má dhúnann sí a cluasa is má chasann a ceann
go mbeidh sí saor orthu
is ná cloisfidh sí búir dhúr an eich uisce
ag fógairt gaoil shíoraí léi go doimhin san oíche,
ag cur gráinníní ar a craiceann is brat allais
amach trí lár a codladh uirthi.

Níl aon namhaid eile aici
ach an saol fó-thoinn a chleacht sí
sara iontaigh sí ar a hathshaol ar an mintír
a chur i gcumhne dhi. Séanann sí ó bhonn
go raibh oiread is cac snioga de bhaint aici leis
aon am. 'Ní raibh aon tsuim riamh agam
sna piseoga sin, nó in aon sórt seanaimsearachta.
Aer, eolas, solas gléineach na heolaíochta
is ea a shantaíos-sa.'

Ba chuma liom ach go bhfuairesas-sa amach
san éitheach í.

Istigh sa Roinn le Béaloideas Éireann,
tá lámhscríbhinn iomlán de Bhailiúchán na Scol
breactha óna láimh,
scríte in uisce, le clipe de sciathán rotha,
ar scothóg feamainne mar phár.

Tá trí cinn déag de scéalta fada
agus smutaíocha de chinn eile, i dteannta le
hortaí, seanphaidreacha, tomhaiseanna agus aroile
le tabhairt faoi ndeara ann.
Óna hathair is óna máthar chríonna is mó
a thóg sí síos iad.

Diúltaíonn sí glan dó — 'An máistir
a thug mar obair bhaile dhúinn é fadó
thiar sa bhunscoil. Chaitheamair é a dhéanamh.
Ní raibh aon dul as againn.'
Cháithfeadh sí fuil shróine
sara mbeadh sí riamh admhálach ina thionscnamh.

The Mermaid and Certain Words

Whatever you do don't ever mention the word 'water'
or anything else that smacks of the sea —
'wave', 'tide', 'ocean', 'the raging main', 'the briny'.
She'd as soon contemplate the arrival of frost in the middle
of summer
than hear tell of fishing, boats, seine or trammel nets, lobster
pots.
She knows that such things exist, of course,
and that other people
have truck with them.

She thinks that if she covers over her ears and turns away
her head
she'll be free of them
and she'll never hear again the loud neighing of the kelpie or
water horse
claiming its blood relation with her at the darkest hour of
night,
causing her to break out in goose pimples and having sweat
lashing off her
while she's fast asleep.

She hates nothing so much
as being reminded of the underwater life that she led
before she turned over a new leaf on dry land. She totally
denies
that she had the slightest connection with it
at any time. 'I never had any interest
in those old superstitions, or any of the old traditions.
Fresh air, knowledge, the shining brightness of science
are all I ever hankered after.'

I wouldn't mind one way or the other but I myself have
found her out
in the deception.

In the Department of Irish Folklore in University College,
Dublin,
there is a whole manuscript in the Schools' Collection
that was set down by her,
written in water, with the fin of a ray for a pen,
on a long scroll of kelp.

In it can be found thirteen long tales
and odds and ends of other ones, together with
charms, old prayers, riddles and such.
From her father and her grandmother she mostly
took them down.

She refuses to accept its existence, and when she does,
'It was the master
who gave it to us as homework, way back in the National
School. We had to do it.
There was no getting out of it.'
She would prefer to suffer a heavy nosebleed
rather than admit she ever had a hand in its composition.

Admháil Shuaithinseach

Aon uair amháin riamh i mo shaol
a fuaireas oiread is an leide is lú ó bhéal
aon duine acu
go raibh saghas éigin cineghlanadh gafa tríd acu
is gur ó áit éigin eile ar fad, i bhfad i gcéin
a tháingadar.

A sé déag nó mar sin a bhíos nuair a tharla sé seo.
Mé ag foghlaim bitheolaíochta
is teoiricí ceimice.
Bhíos faoi dhraíocht ag fiseolaíocht agus sláinteachas
is mé lán suas
de théarmaí staidéir gnó is ríomhaireachta.

Tháingas de shiúl cos lá trasna an Náth
mo threabhsar fillte suas go dtí mo chromáin
is smut de bhrúscar cladaigh á tharrac i mo dhiaidh agam.
Bhíos fiosrach faoi.
'Cén sórt bric í seo agam, a Thomáis?
Gadhar, ab ea?'

Do leag an seandúine uaidh a rámhainn ar an dtráigh
mar a raibh na luganna á mbaint aige.
Buí, dubhghlas is crón is ea do ghlioscadar
ag snámharnach de shíor sa chróca romhainn.
'Ní haon ghadhar é sin atá agat,' ar sé,
'ach cat. Cat ceannann.'
Do stop sé, thug catshúil thapaidh deas is clé
is chuir cogar-i-leith-chugham.

'Níl aon ainmhí dá bhfuil ar an muintir,' ar sé,
'nach bhfuil a chomh-mhaith d'ainmhí
sa bhfarraige. An cat, an madra, an bhó, an mhuc,

tá siad go léir ann.
Go dtí an duine féin, agus tá sé sin ann leis.
'Sé ainm atá air siúd ná an mhurúch.'

Ghluais scamall dorcha thar a shúile ar dhath na dtonn
a dhein tiompáin mhara dhíobh.
N'fheadar cad a shnámhaigh anall is anonn
sna duibheagáin doimhne sin
mar sara raibh am agam i gceart
é a bhodhradh le mo chuid cleatrála is le mo chaint
ar cheimic, fisic, is ar fhiosrúcháin mhuireolaíochta
do chas sé ar a shál is d'imigh uaim.

D'fhág sé ar snámh mé idir dhá uisce.

A Remarkable Admission

Only one time ever in my life
did I get as much as the slightest inkling
from one of them
that they had gone through some sort of ethnic cleansing
and that it was to some other place altogether, far, far away,
they really belonged.

I was sixteen or so when it happened.
I was deeply into biology
and chemical equations.
I was enthralled by physiology and hygiene,
up to the eyeballs
in accountancy and computing skills.

I was wading across the Nath one day,
my jeans-legs turned up to my thighs,
trailing a bit of something I'd found on the beach.
I was curious about it.
'What class of a fish is this I have here, Thomas?' I asked,
'Is it a dogfish?'

The old man laid his spade down on the strand
where he had been digging lug worms.
I remember they sparkled yellow, blackish-green and brown
as they slithered
and seethed in the jam-jar.
'That's no dogfish you have there,' says he,
'but a catfish. A white-faced catfish.'
Then he lowered his voice, glanced left and right
and continued in a whisper.

'There's not a single animal up on dry land
that doesn't have its equivalent
in the sea. The cat, the dog, the cow, the pig.

They're all there.
Right up to the human being himself, and he's there too.
The name they call him is the sea-person.'

A dark cloud passed over his sea-green eyes
that made them look like marine trenches.
I'll never know what strange creatures swam around
in their great depths
because, just when I was about to launch into him
and bend his ear
about chemistry, physics and the latest underwater
explorations
he turned on his heel and disappeared.

He left me hanging there,
like a drowned man between two seams of water.

An Mhurúch Seo 'gainne fó Thoinn Arís

Ba chuma liom
nuair a d'fhill thar n-ais ar an dTír-fó-Thoinn
dá mbeadh sí sona a dóthain ann.

Ach ní raibh ná í.
Bean nár labhair puinn riamh
amach ós ard i measc an phobail i rith a saoil,
is nár dhein, le mo chuimhne-se ar a laghad,
ach trí gháire riamh faid is a bhí sí ar an míntír
is gach ceann acu ina gháire dóite —

lá gur gháir sí agus í ag gabháilt thar dhuine ins an tsráid
a bhí ag tabhairt amach i dtaobh na mbróga nua
a bhí ceannaithe aige — go raibh na sala orthu i bhfad
ró-thanaí.
Gháir sí sa phus air, á rá go mbeidís reamhar go leor dá
chúram.
Is ann a bhí a fhios aici go mbeadh sé caillte curtha i gceann
trí lá.

Ansan lá eile gur ghaibh sí thar fhear eile i lár an bhóthair
a bhí ag mallachtú dubh domhain is ó thalamh
ar chloch go raibh sé tar éis ordóg mór a choise clé
a ghortú ina coinne. Níor thug sí aon phioc eolais dó-san
ach dúirt liomsa ina dhiaidh sin dá mb'áil leis féin é
thógaint bog
is an chloch a thaighde, go bhfaigheadh sé órchiste ag
fanacht do
ar an dtaobh eile.

Is an tríú gáire — bhuel, ní cuimhin liom é a thuilleadh.
Ach seo anois í is chloisfeá ó cheann ceann an tí altranaís í.
Ag gabháil fhoinn de shíor nach bhfuil aon fhocail leis.
Níl ann ach 'ech, ech, ech, ech' gach uair den lá
is den oíche, ag líonadh is ag dul i dtrá

de réir mar a bhuaileann na tonnaíocha líonrith is anbhá
i gcoinne a hintinne, is go mbraitheann sí céim níos cóngaraí
do chiumhais an duibheagáin.

Níl sí anseo nó ansúd.
Ní hiasc is ní feoil í.
Uaireanta searann sí polláirí a sróine
i slí is go dtuigfeá go b'ann a bhíonn sí
a bá san aer
faoi mar a bheadh breac go mbeirfeá air le slat
is go leagfá aniar ar an bport é.

Ar a shon san, níl sí sásta bheith faoi loch.
Anois, nuair a thagann na focail chúiche in aon chor
is 'olagón ó' a síorphort.

Our Mermaid Goes Under Again

I wouldn't mind so much
had she returned to the Land-Under-Wave
and found her share of happiness.

But she didn't.
Here was a woman who hardly ever
spoke out in her natural life
and who laughed, so far as I can remember,
three times only when she was on dry land,
each of those a somewhat uneasy laugh.

One day she laughed as she passed a man in the street
who was giving out about the shoes
he'd just bought, how the soles on them were too thin.
She laughed right in his face, saying they'd be thick enough
for his needs.
She knew rightly he'd be dead and buried within three days.

Another time she laughed when she passed a man in the
middle of the road
who was cursing and swearing
at a stone on which he'd stubbed the big toe of his left foot.
She didn't give this one any information
but later on told me that if he'd only got a grip on himself
and dug up that stone he'd find a pot of gold waiting for him
underneath it.

As for the third laugh, I can't remember it anymore.
But now there's this woman whom you can hear throughout
the hospice.
She's forever singing, but singing a song that has no words.
There's this perpetual 'ech, ech, ech, ech' throughout the day
and the night as well, coming and going

with the great waves of panic and consternation
breaking against her mind as she feels herself draw closer
to the edge of the abyss.

She's neither here nor there.
She's neither fish nor flesh.
Sometimes she has a sharp intake of breath through her
nostrils
that would make you think she's
drowning in air,
like a trout you'd caught with a rod
and taken to the bank.

All the same, she's not happy to be in this submerged state.
Now, the odd time she does have anything to say,
you can take it to the bank it's some version of 'Woe is me'.