

Poetry Series

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

- poems -

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Published in Anthologies, magazines and ezines: full list available

Works:

Anthology: 'where the Hazel falls' The Electric Anthology
www.electricpublications.com 2006

Jane Raeburn 'The Pagan Muse: songs and poems of ritual' Poem; Beltaine

Anthology: 'Poems of Nature' Poem 'Small Things'

Anthology 'Sacred Tree' Selection of Poems

Ezine: Prarie Poetry, Poem 'Irish Cowboys'

Ezine: Prarie Poetry, Poem 'The Homecoming'

Print Publications: Poetry Stream, poem 'Saving Sylvie'

Anthology: 'Poems of Life' Poem 'Open House/Blood Fetters'

Magazine 'Where once Stood Tribes' in Asian Geographic, No 55 Issue 5/
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Ancestor

If I should die tonight
and my bones laid in the earth
would my voice not be the wind
and the sun my smile?
I am the blood in your veins;
all the lives I have lived
have been, in this way,
transmuted to new life
flowing from your heart to mine.
I am the beat of the Bodhrán
and the touch of the line on water
I am the thought unbidden
the instinct that springs -
If you listen not to me,
then you ignore yourself,
and silence your own voice.
I am the string plucked,
the note quivering
the dream sung by voices
you remember from your cradle.
I am the silent watch of the nights
and the first breath of morning
because you carry me always in your heart

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

And the Leaves begin to turn...

Down by Ben Bulben, the leaves are turning
the russets are emerging
triumphant over green, gold
running riot, copper beeches
glowing. Orange the wayside flowers
and paler blue the sky -
September is arrived.

Down by Ben Bulben
As the road slopes to Leitrim
the Glencar lakeside boasts
colours fit to clothe a king. The crows
startle black against
the spread of the year's last finery
as the sun crowns the day
and the leaves begin to turn.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Armchair Experts

There are a race of little blighters
full of venom, full of spite
known to all who make or build
as 'youknowyouhaventdonethatright'
this strange species never make
nor build nor fix nor e'er create
their only purpose is to watch
the work of others and berate!

They see each flaw, and always think
if only they had had a say
they would have made it bigger, better
superior in every way!
They trot out all their cliched phrases
'you should have, could have, done it thus'
the worker tries to show their error
but this just leads to greater fuss

'oh you're just jealous' come the chorus
'you see that i could do it best'
the worker bows their head and sighs
and tries again to show the jest.
how they, by hours of patient work
have learnt the skill and mastered trade
the scars on hand the calloused fingers
show the price each one has paid

How to silence monkeys chattering
how to stop the wittering birds?
how to bid the 'expert' silent
when they have nothing but their words?
The worker suffers slings and arrows
shafts of venom, jealous jeers
but words fade with the last faint echo
the thing he builds outlasts the years.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

At Cluain Moccu Nois

On the first attempt by the Monastery of
Cluain Moccu Nois to 'record and correct the stories of the simple
people.'

He questioned me with eyes
burning with certainty
and a mouth closed tight like a fist
with suspicion, with distaste,
he questions me.
if the word inquisitor
had been invented
he could have worn it like an old coat
settling into the dark corners of its meaning
with comfort.
but his religion is yet young
though he was born old.

I am the old man,
marking time til death.
He has taken to this new religion
fully.
It has no corners only clarity.
Think? there is a formula for thought.
all needs prescribed, proscribed
scribed
this man calls himself a scribe

Like portable dolmens, stone circles of words
he seeks to imprison the knowledge,
my gold, the stories of my race.
he waits with the kind of careful patience
that allows torturers to wait
befre applying a second heated blade
to already burned skin.
In each stoke of quill on vellum
seeks
to pin down with weighty thoughts
the gods
whose blood still flows in these veins
seeks to cleanse them
'if they must be told, let them be told properly
with all due reverence to almighty god'

I think he means it.

Fr my part I am illiterate

92 years and in all that time
I have never yet felt the want of words or knowledge
until they brought me here and told to me that word
illiterate

I turn it over in my mouth
taste it
it is sour
like the bitter herbs my mother used for battle wounds
acid
like the spring smoke used to cleanse the calves
what price knowledge for an illiterate?
I am the sacred liar
teller of tall tales
He assures me all wilts
in the glare of his god's truth.

I had thought to have earned my place.
In my youth
a warrior
in my old age
the filí of Eriu have sat at my knee
fuelled their visions
on the back of my words, my stories
my store of treasures
The druids
now turned culdee
wearing their new religion lightly
like to see
chieftain, farmer, warrior
around the fire
like little boys again
reminded of their place in this busy world.

He has no place in that world
removes himself with fastidious care
away from the noisome press of us
his god is deaf i think
he can only hear him in silence.
I shift and sigh buying time
at my age I thought to have done with war
but now like a distant echo
sound of bone on bodhrán
faintest tone of spear on shield
in some long-disused shadow of my soul
I feel the blood stir
rise against the cool smiles and impatient patience
of these neutered men.

I reach out,
half blind, half lame
reach out across decades
I feel my stories,
how they turn in on themselves
fold, unfold, reveal by hiding
mislead and teach a
dozen lessons

I grope through them,
their secrets laid out
waiting for the words to come
words to blind
words to shine

I think suddenly
of my own grandmother
of how she would tell her favourite story
not of men, nor gods
nor heroes
but of how when she was small
she had in this world one treasure
an string of beads, a bracelet
that she found
in the river
a gift from Suir for rescuing a swan
The fear of losing it, or it being stolen
was upon her
it fretted at her
until she knew no peace
she hid it nine times
and nine times changed its place
until at last she hit upon the one
how she laughed to know
her precious gift was safe
under the muck and shite
of the pig-sty, where no sane person
would ever think to look

I face him
his middle-aged youth
with milk-blind eyes
and smile
I begin to speak and he to write
he the erudite... I,
illiterate
I have one more war to fight:
one weapon left
at stake a priceless store.

I'll hide it in the murky depths
in plain view in every twisted phrase
Let him pile on the swill
I'll match him word for word
I will,
My treaure will not tarnish
will not fade.
and someday come the people to their own
and seeking hands will grasp the buried loot
My sacred lie will outshine his tawdry
truth.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Bealtine

'Bealtine':

The fires were extinguished at dusk;
doused, dampened, across the
belly of the land.

The last inspiration of twilight,
fading with the dying rays of sun
denying the existence of hope.

The rushlights and candles
standing in brown pots
snuffed out with ruthless decision.

Breathless and wanton
She welcomes the dark
finding perfect acceptance.

A rapidness, daringness, derangement
of wood on skinfulness, sinful the way
they dance against the gathering night.

Cool breath of death
against overheated limbs
brushing against mountain ranges.

Hidden the contours of valley and hill
From the eyes of greed and envy
And on they dance still, heavy with desire

Pausing with expectations
refusing extolments of false praise

insisting on the truth of cruelty.

Til light streaks and nudity is warmed
By the rising sun, colour restored
In a land overlooked

The mid-time, the time of forgetting
The removal of knowledge
The trampling of self.

Til light steaks and reawakens
In a land unobserved, the tumultuous waters
Unaltered in course by the reappearance of light.

And the union of dark and lucid
Galvanizes the sleeping soul
of rush bordered lake and pebbled beach

And the call of the curlew opens up
The soft turf and heather of the marshy
straights, straddling the west

slight lines of silver traverse
the sleeping Eriu, the stretchmarks
of rebirth.

The Fires are relit at dawn, reborn
with tongues of merriment
sending messages across the face of god.

Rivers of silver this time,
free-flowing, pushing the days out
So that evening meets dawn.
Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Beauty at Dusk

The room is stilled
dimmed by evening light through
shuttered blinds
A perfect evening, summer spring
trees laced with early leaves
bright fields, sunlight on windowglass
an empty room
and silence

the brightness of the dusk is
blinding - more glaring than noon in dust
and the silence splinters with shrill throated birds
and distant laughter
til the laughter and the song seem silent too
part of the peace that oppresses this room

the beauty is too perfect
too real for me

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Blood Fetters - History Erased.

I have a sister
in the shadows
- she is the spider in the corner.
I have a sister
whose blood fetters me,
ties me unwilling to her madness
her lies;
her house of shames and half-perceived
sleights of hand.
She has now re-written the past,
family history
twisted
through the kaleidoscope
of her madness.
We have acquired Jewish ancestry.
The kindly Jewess neighbour of our childhood
transmogrified
without her permission
into some distant,
holocaustic
relative.
My own Jewish friends
Offended
beyond words - bad enough she
hawks their collective pain
to produce some born again credentials.
Essentially,
she is a creeping
death.
Poison pen wielded in
self aggrandizement
doggerel offered
as a palliative to gentile minds
untroubled
by depth of understanding.
Our childhood reissued in gothic form
complete with a new province,
new vitae
in a new milieu,
part of our nation's conflict,
born in semtex
and raised by armalite;
inexplicable captions from events
grisly remains
behind golden altars
insulting the old
and the new, the very
marrow of our heritage
prostituted.
I read in disbelief,
fragments
that yield her delusions

read and disbelieve
and fear.
The truth is
a distant country
divorced from her now.
She has denied us
foresworn us
betrayed us.
We are the Tuatha and
she is now
Foreign.
My life has rooted
flowered in the essence
of my reality.
hers is withering on
a dead tree
hanging.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Breaking Faith with Aengus Óg

I no longer love thee
Aengus Óg
I ll burn thee no more incense
I ll leave no meat nor mead nor gold
my faith in thee has grown
stone cold
I no longer love thee Aengus Óg.

Too many tears and
sleepless nights
too many phone calls unreturned
My heart has burned and froze and crack'd
and ached for every lover
lacked
I cannot longer stand the rack

Too many faithless fickle
men
with cruel intent and wand'ring eye
with hand and mind and deed have broke
my soul and put it to
the Yoke
and made me, but their secret joke.

No, no longer will I love and lose,
nor wait until another choose:
I no longer love thee
Aengus Óg
I'll burn thee no more
Incense.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Cliona by the Shore

I let myself in
with the key of the kings and
wrapped red ribbons
around my poor head.
'I thought you were dead' said
my mother.

I fired up at this and she waved me aside
'I merely remark' was her only reply

I heard on the news that the Temple had
fallen.
I am aghast at their simple faith
And men search their words
For slivers of meanings
shards and remnants
of a truth they will hate
'you came home too late', says my mother

The debt I repaid is burning a hole in my pocket
For the cruelty of martyrs is mercy.

The wet grass smelt sweetly
Giving me courage
I willfully left there
and drove to the ocean
but none of the fishermen
put out to sea.
'Are you leaving me?' asks my mother

I smiled in return and released her to fade.
For I am the prophet of beauty decayed.

We dwell by the shore now
And bless the white thimble
The rue grows around us
like weeds on a grave and the favour still warms us
in cottage or cave
'We'll save the world later', my wise mother says.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Comfort

Sunshine now,

would be a betrayal;

How kind you are, Aine
to bring gentle rain
How sympathetic, Lugh
to hide your face
Thank the Wind
for surrogate howls
and the Breeze for sighing
when I cannot.

I will welcome the sun again
someday in a moment of summer
but meanwhile the sky is grey
and shields my eyes from pain
and gentle sacred hands
are cooling on my brow.
How comforting now.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Crossings

Some roads
lead to highlands, mountains
grand vistas
and some from one side of mystery
to another.
Some show you continents
but many
simply the choice between
open field and safe
dark
forest.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Death of the Hero

One note rising on the wind:
piper play, the lament is called for:
lower him down and softly keen
Cu Chulainn's going to his rest.

Lady Emer cry farewell
the man is bruised and broken
no token of your love will now
redeem Cu Chulainn from the grave.

hang your heads, o noble beasts
hounds of Ulster ye are bereft
no master now, for he is slain
there's is no more Cu Chulainn

men of Ulster faint and ill
bestir your voices in his name
his fame should raise you from your cots
Cu Chulainn cannot from the grave.

O grey world, no music now
no gay troop, no feasts or feis
dash the cup from kingly hands
Cu Chulainn cannot longer drink

You could not face the man in life
you feared to face him as he lied
O men of munster hang your head
Cu Chulainn beat you all at last

Stand back, hang back and let
the birds of war attend his grave
only they can follow now
Cu Chulainn the hero as he goes.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Don Miguel Da Capo

He plays guitar.

Strumming chords, and humming to himself.
And when he wants to seduce,
draws out a few bars in the classical style,
and thinks he sounds like a Grandee
of the court of Philip of Spain.

He stretches out his legs
in faded jeans, and hikes the collar of his fleece
He is Don Miguel da Capo, brave and suave
and above all,
Tall.
and no woman as yet
has managed to resist his charm.

He plays guitar.

Half hidden in the corner of a room:
A fixture at our parties.
He never plays loud enough to hear
His humming is a strangled whisper
And no women to my knowledge yet has swooned
Or begged our Mick to play her one more encore.

Yet he remains sanguine,
For he is Don Miguel da Capo,
and all must see the grandeur of this man.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Down in the Hollow

There is a hollow
near the river, half in the meadow
half in the woods.
I do not go there
in the daylight, nor the twilight
nor the dusk
I will not walk there
in the moonlight, or the dawn
or full of day
For there is no time
bright or dimming, when the angels
there hold sway.

Cold the Hollow
Damp and gloomy, smelling of the
Secret grave
Musk pervades it
Death invades it: stench and rot
In rising wave
Chokes the spirit,
Weakens limbs, shakes the heart
And makes men faint
'Til all around it
Who can, avoid it: anxious to
Escape its taint.

Lucy smith and
Mary Curley, heeded not the
Solemn tales
Took a dare
And merry were they, setting off
Across the dales.
Where are they now
Those pretty lasses? Never more
The girls were seen
Except by lone
and forlorn travelers: on wild nights
in haunting dreams

I will not walk there
I would not tarry, not for gold nor
Fame nor Glory
Of all the tales they
Tell to scare you, doubt not the truth
Of the Hollow story.
Do not leave the
wide smooth road, nor follow sounds
that tempt the ear
Young girls laughter
Children's singing, tempt the stranger
to draw near

Once only went I
To The Hollow, once only crossed its
Crawling floor.
The night that Lucy
Smith went missing, my mind was lost
My heart was sore
We searched the dales
We searched the woods, the riverbed
And flowing streams.
Sometimes caught we
distant laughter, but more often did it
sound like screams.

As dawn broke dark,
The others failing, I screwed my courage
To the bone.
I pushed my way
In blind despair, into the Hollow
All alone.
Ask me not
Why I am trembling, ask not why
My tears do fall
But if you must
Pass by the Hollow, answer not
Its evil call

Nay stop your ears
And close your eyes, from sights you
Should not see
And never stray
Or wander off, no matter who calls
Out for thee.
And when you're past
And safe away, stop and say a
Prayer or two
And thank the gods
That the fate of others, came not this day
Or night, for you.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Dowsing

Twitch! I think.
Twitch, I beg.
Stumbling over uneven ground
trying to feel with rods,
and see
without looking
and walk without falling face down
in a cow pat.

I am a source of unlimited
amusement
to the man who can dowse.
He was introduced in a flurry
of West Cork accents
and I am still not sure
if he is Pat, or Aloysius or Maurice
But he is one of these three
and his two brothers also watch
ancient sprites with gleeful malice
the Dublin bint in her dowsing infancy.

I am not getting anywhere.
My Mother can dowse without effort
my own hands are clumsy
they can feel the note in a cello string
but they are not open to the music
that is water or energy.
i feel the anger of failure
i am not a good loser.
I consider faking it
but something tells me they would not
be even slightly convinced.

I am not good at this.
I listen humbly while Pat
or Maurice or Aloysius
tells me to relax, to practice
to hold, to loosen, to be more aware
to be less self conscious.
I vow to go home and walk
the length and breadth of the park
clutching these infernal rods
of course I don't-
they sit as I write
reproaching me from the sideboard.
I may be destined never to unlock
their elusive secrets.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Echoes

This is not about my mother per se: but about the inevitability of inheritance, both from our families and from society.

I hear her. Everywhere.

I deny it. You would too.

Her voice surprised me the other day
sharp and shrill, and full
of outraged morality and salacious glee

It was the sound I hated most from her
the sound of middle age and bourgeoisie
and it was such a shock to me, to hear it again

And her eyes, those lines and that nose
I see them in the most unexpected places
traces of her hard set jaw, stockaded against surprises

I feel she's stalking me through the years
My eyes. My voice. My shock at growing old.
I need only look in the mirror to see
slyly peering, dryly watching,
my mothers final joke on me.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Encounter

light and dark at play
cross the dappled water
I hear the frost break
underfoot, like glass

Horned and hooved, pawing
at the frozen ground, antlered.
Lowering crown, challenging,
playfully I think. A forest Pan.

Breath suspended in tendrils on
icy air; we stare transfixed.

Reluctantly, you turn from me
relinquish me, to the gathering dusk.
Darkened skies pass across the plains
and rain turns to snow in the forests.

All trace gone except in my minds eye
and the grand look of your own.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Firenne

I have seen
the best of my warband
struck by arrows
from treacherous hands
and yet they stand.

They are wrongly accused,
harrassed by shrill jackals
whose minds are unshackled
by any standard of honour;
and yet they stand.

When you adopt
the cloak of lies,
how threadbare your clothes!
How ragged you are
how unfit to be seen.

When you bully,
crawl on your bellies
in filth, for the prize
of fool's gold -
you become lower than dust.

The people of honour
will not stand with you
nor breathe the same air
nor eat from your plate
for you are poison to them

The land will not hold you
the very stones turn from you
how polluted you are
how tainted the blood
spilt from your veins.

The crows turn from you
the worms cannot feast
your bones are not part of us
you speak not our tongue
alone and unmourned are you.

I have seen
honest hearts pierced
truthful mouths stopped
loving hands bound
these are abominations.

I have seen Firenne
dishonoured
but i have been comforted
for the penalties are great

and they are inexorable.

No man need lift hand
Firenze brought down the ramparts
at royal tara on the breath
of a single word.
so too will it tumble you.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Firewall

I was not well that day.

Two weeks of late nights and countless
vodkas
thirty cigarettes a day
and artificial light;
I was not looking my best.
I had a tenuous hold on my temper.
I was spoiling for a fight.

I read of my love's infidelity
on the back of a toilet door
scrawled in the illiterate hand
of a twenty-five year old hairdresser's assistant
twenty-five and an assistant.
I ask you. I re-read it. I re-read it aloud.
And I wondered if it was true, while
picturing them together. Her bleach bloneness
against the golden skin of his arm nestled;
while he strokes her neck.
And through the sound of taps and basins and
vanity
I heard the sound of my heart fracturing
A stress line like a hairline crack.

Tired eyes stared back at me, from
a stained mirror under fluorescent lights
and I held it against you that I had to be here
That I saw her cheap boast at all
that you had so little taste
that I was so easy to fool.

There was a wall of fire outside
the roar of a thousand overheated voices
desperate to connect. Just connect, man. I
remembered the cold sweetness of the morning
the incomparable freshness of a November dawn
and I was overwhelmed
with the need to escape
and I planned.

I could sit on my balcony and breath the
first breath of a new day
safe and unsoiled. I could run home
through the street and wash in the frost.
I could leave now and leave you,
all that stood between us was a step
and the mystery of love. I wanted.
I yearned. I saw myself standing high above the street
Pure and alone.

The crowd parted before me,

People looked and turned away.
Not too many women striding through a club,
Tears running in black lines around their eyes,
Fists clenched
while smiling.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

From the Secret Diary of a Capitalist

The girl on the bus
looked normal
'til she fixed her eyes on mine
and solemnly assured me
that the end was nigh. So
with a sigh and a
muttered excuse
I once again changed seats.

This is why I drive. The
much maligned isolation
the experts beg us all to overcome -
within my jaundiced heart I find it a
sweet boon and comfort.
Why throw myself upon the mercy
of the world
or seek comfort in the kindness of
strangeness?

Yes, strangeness. It's odd to want to climb across
the seats,
reach out clammy hands to touch the
hearts
of others. Daytime pundits of a warped
charity, back off, you living dead.
Armed with every half baked theory of Armageddon
and the reason why
Aliens want sex with earth women.
News flash, kids, I don't care.

I want my car back. I want
to sink into cushioned seats
and listen to my radio
and change gears with reckless
glee - and pass these sad people
at bus stops on rainy days-
oh, and guzzle petrol and emit
fumes,
and generally be me.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Gods seen through splinters

Aongus Og is a wisp of red silk
on a tablecloth of crocheted lace
with sparkling champagne in elegant flutes

Morrigan is a stain of Rowanberries
crushed blood-red into virgin snow
by the outspread wing of a fallen crow

Aine is the burnished glow
of a golden vessel on a marble hearth
reflecting the embered glow of the fire

Cliona is the the taste of salt
on a breeze that whips up from the west
at twilight on a summers eve

Chrom dubh is the rocky outcrop
on the hill above Lough Dan
where froaghaon berries grow late under a pale blue sky

Dagda is the Waterfall
the silent noise of power
the inexorable progress of gravity

Dana is the soft springy moss
between children's toes on a turf-grown plain
bog-cotton gaily growing amid rough grasses

Mannanan is the slice of reeds on sanddunes
unexpected sharpness against the bleached white
of shells and bones and smooth rounds stones.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Green Party On

I walked Tara as a child
on ramparts ancient paused,
while parents stared at vistas far beyond
our youthful minds.

They were from a generation
far different from our own;
not for them the instant or the undeserved,
unearned reward.

Now matrons move their children
to the sticks, to mix with others
in suburban bliss, sans roads and schools
and infrastructure.

The chattering classes sit on
their ass and talk about recycling;
while sympathizing with those who would
bulldoze Tara.

The Green voter pledged to Save
Tara, til they smelt power and
in that moment turned to establishment
and economics.

Converted to Mamon
and to Progress, our most devoutly
praised god in modern Ireland, sans Heritage
or pride.

Party On Green Men. Pary
while they destroy six thousand
years of dreams and literature and history
and sanctity.

Move to Meath, with your SUVs
and flood the rural scene with stress,
you'll be unmolested by men of conscience, not
in Ireland.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

He

I used to think You mocked me
from the eyes of faithless men:
it was an injustice.
I saw You as stern and cold
mistook your reserve
Blamed You for the all-too-human errors
of mortal souls

Then I met You
saw Strength
cool appraisal in danger
sharp eyes, strong hands
Fearlessness
Tenderness
Patience

You'll have to forgive me
I was told lies about You
told You hated women
saw us as lesser
wanted us in a kitchen
sans shoes, plus babies
until You told me
You preferred our company
admired our abilities
wanted to see us run empires
or run laughing in fields of tall wheat
amidst poppies.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

In Morning Mist

In morning mist
and just before the day
awakens fully to the noise of man
stand on the brink
of some windswept shore
and think of me.

Stand and whisper
the name you called me
when you and I were heavy with sleep
and sated, in our bed
and in that moment
call me to you.

I will come,
in the kiss of wind
or the sudden flight of gull
I will never refuse to answer your summons
if I have to fly
from the world beyond

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Irish Cowboys

The wild west for us
was never the stone walls
and fragments of land between them
the ragged, wild, bog-spawned
west of Ireland
It was a topography, a dialect, a code
as familiar as our parents
or our national tongue
gleaned from Television, old movies
dog-eared paperbacks.
We were born in Dublin
but we all, each one,
roamed the wild praries
hunting buffalo in our souls
spat tobacco and smoked Marlborough
walked bowlegged - howdy pardner -
or grim and gimlet-eyed, we eyed the
scorching sun
talking in monosyllabic knowing exchanges
about drought, and cattle dying, and crops failing
thwarted in our childish hearts by
near incessant rain
and insolent verdant green.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

January is Freezing

Cold light seeped in, through misted frames
Casting a golden glow over smoke rising
from the cigarette in my hand and hanging over the grill;
tobacco and bacon and fried eggs.
The smell of a Sunday afternoon.
I lean elbows on a crumb-laden table
and watch a sullen shadow cross the mahogany,
cast by a bottle, like an alcoholic sun dial;
and it is strange to have you sitting here again,
your shoulder touching mine, your cup warm against my hand.
The scattered cartons of a late-night ill-advised meal
one lone rice grain welded to a fork,
careless reminders of a moment of mad abandon.
Shivering gratefully and huddled against the draught
I try to normal out, without the pain.
In the enervation of a Sunday hangover, still
sourly tasting the delights of the night before
I cannot ask you where have you been,
I can only watch the pearls of rain,
mingling with the icy glass and sigh.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Lament for Setanta

Setanta! hard syllables of boyhood
matured into Cú Chulainn, soft vowels
sinister in their promise
of war; lovely in their pledge of honour.

Setanta, young man of flawed ability
ran with hounds and stepped lightly
over the heather. Now how the ground
trembles at the approach of the man!

Setanta, did your friends ever mourn you?
regret the impulsive youth, the boy
or were they all too dazzled by the warrior
Cú Chulainn Champion of Ulster?

Setanta, I will shed a tear for you, torn
from the bosom of your family to run across
foreign hills, losing in the chase the lad;
to forge in his stead, the legend.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Lament, of Change

I do not embrace change.
At this stage in my life,
ebbing away inexorably
from girlhood to middle-age
avoiding much of womanhood between;
no, I do not embrace change
I remain a constant, both dull and loyal
the rock from which is launched
other people's dreams.

I would embroider me one of those samplers;
Victoriana in its purest form -
I am lost and found, unclaimed property
and I cannot find a place like home.
I would place a candle in the window
if you had not made it clear
your journeying is not done and I
cannot follow nor expect your return.
Friendship it seems, has its limits.

Glass and paste and glitter -
I thought it was a long and fruitful path
but barren fields surround me
and I am not accepting of this failure.
My refusal to make merry at this wake
has sealed my fate, in your eyes I have become
a burden. I would be light-hearted if I could
but I cannot play that role.
You sliced deep, you struck home.

Nor will I play the part you wrote for me,
of spinster friend, empty of hope
pulling you back. Or have I already
unconsciously adopted this disguise?
What a thought! Tainting every memory
of companionship. Breeding insecurity
all too easy as a single woman of uncertain age
Ah, one cannot write a friendship while alive.
It needs death to sanctify it.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Lower Me Not

Lower me not,
into a crimson mouthed coffin
under mahogany covers
a secret tucked away
Lower me not
into damp clay
weighted down
by marble grey

Set me ablaze
set me free
set me flying
like a dying comet.
Across the sky>
fling me, swing me,
let the wind kiss me
set me spiralling in flaming arcs.

float me away
a petalled offering
on a river of spices
through red dusty land
or rip me, espose me
the bare bones of me
speadeagled on a table rock
part of the raven, or the wolf

Lower me not,
leave me not
forget me not
let me leave you
let me depart
let me be freedom
and new life
and new dawns.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Manannán Mac Lir

Manannan Mac Lir

Manannán Mac Lir
King of the Western Wave
Quick to anger and brave
driving the Wave sweeper
Fand by his side,
Even now, she dreams of the great warrior
The love she sacrificed for Mannanán Mac Lir

These mortals do plague him
Fascinate and madden him
Mongan the sweet fruit of Caintigerna
His prize beyond words
And with indulgence he can contemplate
The strange ways of these children
As the mirror of his son

He is the slant of the setting sun
Across the cliff-tops of Clare
The wild call of the gulls in the storm
Fand reaches out to him with a smile
And points to the rise of the Beara peaks
And the touches of gold in his beard and hair
Are the colour of the world at dawn.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Night Chorus

Across the last plains
under leaden skies,
the ground peat-brown beneath;
Turf cutters pausing to point
at the summers last black-breasted flight,
across the dark eddies and whirlpools,
the silver line of the river beneath;
Over the wild heathers of the stone hills
from the Cairns of the west
to the graves of the silent east.
A black sunset, the death of a new day remarked.

Shrill and defiant in calling
the passage of the long evening mourned.
The gravel paths of the interlopers,
darkened by the cloud of dark wings,
stirred by the shadow of the future.
The reminder that death precedes life,
The smoke of the fires rising slowly;
the wheel of the wing on the turn.
The veil drawing over the midlands,
the song of the night slowly silenced,
the call of the dusk borne away.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

No More Rebel Songs

No more rebel songs my boys
Put down yer pipes and weep
No more songs of heroes past
The fines will be too steep!
No more of yer folk songs, boys
No songs of battle, nor of war
No songs of Victor nor of Vanquished
No, sing those songs no more!

No more plays of love and loss
Clear the actors from the stage
For Bianca was a Jezebel
and Juliet was not of age!
Romeo should be arrested
Othello is a racist tale
Ban the Bard and burn the scripts
Unless you want your child to fail?

No more books from times long past
Lest the Femi-nazis hear
Dickens may have saved the poor
But his heroines had no career.
No more Austen, too much marriage
No more Lawrence, he mentions class
Lay down your novels, with a sigh
Great thought is gone, the law's an ass.

You think I jest, I beg your pardon!
Rebel songs and jokes are banned
Plays and tunes of warlike glory
All these things have just been canned
Soon the books and films follow
What next will make the fall from grace?
So enjoy it while you can!
Before the past is laid to waste.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Old Enemies die hard

we love to hate our neighbours
we bitch, they moan
but we are comfortable with them
they are the scratchy blanket
or the leaking tap: the ongoing
soundtrack to our lives

burn my neighbour's home
and I forget
that he borrowed my lawnmower
or she poisoned my roses
with her careless use of weedkiller
or the two inch boundary dispute

and I become defensive
noone but I can fight them
noone but I understand them
enough to say they are enemies
who are these blow-ins with their
talk of greivances?

I will put out the fire
and give them board and food
and help them rebuild and
furnish them with my own belongings
so that come a new day
we can stand on either side of our fence
and call each other names, as it was meant!

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

On a Long Road in Summer

In essence,
breath and bone;
light fingers tracing
gray stone;
lichen like a soft dream
in a parched barren land.
And on my hand, one gentle
rainbowed droplet forms.

Against impossible blues
and the bordered quilting
of a consecrated earth,
made for the hard word and
the curlew's call; all gaiety
slipping into wild abandon -
voice on voice and note
layered on tone.

Wander from the ribboned road
stand on peaks to see
the sudden death of land
and sea, on cliff.
Hold the western sun,
in prised light reflected
detected in the last twist of
the homeward path.

Taunting, flaunting,
reciprocal desires.
Denying and blessing
the latitude extended.
Leasing a green plot
For the red lantern -
A small detail lost
Among wild roses.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

On a Midsummer's Day

Pale Dawn Blushes
As a raven flies
a black speck against
the morning skies
Wonder! at his audacious flight
this last remaining trace of night.

Anxious eyes then
note its span
straining as hard
as ere they can
everyman with his secret fear
will the raven bring it near?

A white Hare runs
breaking cover
a surefire omen
of a jealous lover
each woman feels her heart astir
is he sick for love of her?

Do the flowers bloom
too late or too soon?
Does Midsummer fall
on a full moon?
Do you have a dream to tell -
is all Ill or is all Well?

Did you meet a
Darkhaired Lass
Or trudge behind
a Beggar's Ass?
Did a black cat cross your way
as you came to greet the day?

Note each omen
every one
that marks the season
of the sun
and you'll be blessed with happy days
and long hot nights (in many ways!)

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

On the South Side of the Lake

Low cries of heron; curlew calls and circles.
In the chill air
I shiver, stamp the cold earth, hug goose-fleshed arms against
the damp
and smell the evening air of grass and turf
and just a little, smoke.

There are echoes on the air, faint calls from the other side; carried by
the still lake water,
and whispered back and forwards through the reeds.
Above the lapping water of the south shore, is heard
The easy good humour of parents, bringing in the young to tea
And as they fade away I listen to the distant lowing of the herds
and the goodnight calls of the homebound rooks.

The day has been mild, late September's warmth and damp, with darkly swaying trees
poised on the brink of Autumn, hinting at the pageantry to come.
Now at dusk the swallows flirt in twilight, swoop and fall against the blue-black
rain-clouds: by morning, there will be pools among the rocks:
lakes in miniature, with waterfalls and estuaries and sailing boats
of bark and leaf.
I cast a line and light a filter-tip, the first of some thirty-odd
and huddle over the glowing end as though it were the campfire.
Perverse it may seem, but I feel warmer. Brave again, I cast again;
I watch each ripple and hope.

How dark the water now, like mirrored glass, polished to an onyx-like gleam.
The evening speeds away towards the night, bringing with it all the hunted rustles
and sudden starts, the death and lust of dark, and the agitated rising of the prey
against the thrust and dart of feathered fly, the tautened line and I, with racing heart
and quickened breath, measure out the seconds of the fight and stumble, crash and
shake
'til at last I see, a silvered panting form against the net. I sit and smoke and proudly
guess
the weight and length and is it not the king of trout, to be landed by a woman's hand?

There are no witnesses on the south shore of the lake.
What humankind there is, is sitting on the sandy shore of the north, warmed and
excited in a bonfire's light and have no notion
nor do they care, for the heroic victory of the lonely angler.
I share a moment's wild excitement with my prize and then, with a whispered prayer,
gently free him from the net and ease him, with my love,
back into the waiting embrace of the lake.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Open House/Blood Fetters

Open House: the first

"My sister, flesh of my flesh
Is returning.
Yanked back at the end of her chain
like the well trained dog she is.
Snarling, and yapping at the hand that fed her."

I hear
darkness and smell rain.
No ritual of disbelief will stave off
The sudden remembrance of you,
The turning of a thousand atoms
In shared blood.

I hold some small piece of you
And the view engulfs me. No
Fever could burn as this.
I am consumed and lost
In the same spasm.

I left hatred behind, burned
Out of my bones,
Along with romance and illusion
But fused in the ashes
Are the last words of your letter.

Will I disappoint you;
Is the memory of me brighter than I deserve?
I count days and squander hours in
Pointless reminiscence; carried on in honour
Of your return. Sharpening weapons
I will never use.

My house is your house;
I will have to resort to hospitality
In the end. I cannot withstand them,
And must concede defeat in the eyes of the world.
I cannot slam that last door.
I must stand in welcome.

I would choke on the bile of my hypocrisy.
I would rend that flesh, my flesh,
down to the shared marrow of our bones
rip aside the decencies and shred the manners
of our generation,
until I emptied my house of you.

Open House/Blood Fetters: The second

Sly slipstream of half thought
sweetened by revengeful dreams-

almost, nearly, just about.
Under siege in the open house.

Haiku of such barbed proportion
should be tattooed on the wall;
call the hounds of war and weave
Havoc from distorted laws.

Hatreds old and new resumed
blood-ties buried like the axe
Toll the knell and seal the mouth;
night is fallen on the open house.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Overheard

'I gave her my old phone, she was stone delighted, '
the Navan man said:
while his Cork culchie brethren
blew hot and cold into the headpiece
all bluetooth and shiny smile
schmoozing on the street.
'He said he didn't but what do you think? '
a brunette pushes past me angrily
'That little huir, I hope she's happy now-'
she moves too far away
I am tempted to follow, I want to know
what did he do? and if it's likely, his guilt,
and who is the rival woman?
'I can't, ' the teenager wails,
chewing the fingernails of one hand
a bovine testament to the need
for population control.
'Wha'? ' she stares blankly into middle space
her mothers voice shrill and tinny
spelling out the name of a washing powder brand.
'...if you move that account around, it should be
all right, ' He moves in and out
of earshot, a worried shadow
with quick panicked steps.
So many voices, overheard
I wonder, how few heard over
the din?

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Panic? No.

Panic? No.

Unease; a queasy swell of uncertainty and discontent;
heart beats faster, hard to concentrate,
fidgeting and fretting.

Panic would tighten its grip
till discomfort becomes physical pain.
This is less than that,
but bad enough.

Panic is for 3 am when no more taxis
turn off the main road past my window.
At that hour there are few excuses
left and hard enough to lie even to myself.

But a thought is left
that the next taxi will be the one
despite a dull realisation
that this is unlikely before dawn.

No, this is unease;
the cautioning voice that warns
you will be gone for this night.
Where are your promises now?

Could you really lie so falsely
(a rhetorical question, no answer necessary.)
I adopt reasonable tones even in my head -
where are you when you are supposed to meet me?

I call this rude (I mean torture)
and thoughtless(which means scourge)
ah the insincerity at the back of that
I knew, the moment you rang and warned of delays.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Pomegranate

I collect words;
Collate and catalogue them
in some library of the mind, to which
I get sporadic access, as the muse decrees.

I hope if I store enough words, there will always be one
no matter how scarce the favours scattered:
that paucity of concept will yield
before the wealth amassed in syllable and diphthong.

I hold some words in high regard
I once spent a day musing on the sound of 'leech'
and make alliterative lists of favourite mots
Whistling, Wonder, Weird, Wildflower.

But of all the troves and chests and caverns
overflowing with jewelled noise, bedecked with meanings and
subtle shades of burnished thought, lies
one word, elegant in its simplicity, its economy of meaning:

yet extravagant in form, reigning
Supremely succulent in tone
a taste of desire and wealth, one word -
Pomegranate.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Presents of Minds

I bought wrapping paper from the street sellers,
the best stuff, cheap and bright;
for I remember Christmas mornings,
peering in the early half-dark-
the light reflecting off the tinsel wrap;
so that right away I knew the provenance of the gift,
that someone young and lively, with no parental claims
(who could care less if the gift were educational
who would rather die than buy functional)
had bought that garish glitzy useless precious
plastic packaged piece of commercial tat
my mother wouldn't buy on principle and
my heart would swell with joy and I would bless her name
as, now my sister has become the mother,
her children breath prayers of thanks
whenever wrapping paper holds its sway,
For Aunts and all they stand for

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Requiem

In Nomine Patre
who art encountered
in the skies on
clouds with harps
and cherub faced saints
and the few women
who art thought fit
to be entered there..
Et Filis
whom I hold personally
to blame,
for every slight
and night I suffer
in this female form:
each sickly youth
who ever wrote of
this feminine
in terms of sweet and soft -
each woodwork class
that was only meant for
boys
Et Spiritus Sanctus..
Sonctimonius
Git, tongues of flame
crying shame on my mini
skirts and weekends away
and highheeled shoes and jobs
on building sites; on fights
and girls who
whistle in the corridors
of power
Amen!
In peace repose, rest and decay
Say no more, enough
was done in your name.
Abide in the past. RIP.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Ruminations on Eternal Love

Renaissance and Restoration,
diffuse threads in that fraying coat, Time;
twisted, knotted, intertwined,
mine own heart and thine.
Floating walnut shells in streams
of conscious thoughts,
ideas swimming salmon-like. Upstream.
a dream in taffeta and cream,
literally, a scream. Lace
and face-saving flutters,
ivory and bone to
wave, semaphoric love, a wink and nod.
Uttering the unthinkable, in profane temples,
scepters, crowns and bedpans,
dismay and intervention.
We get on like parliament and crown.
Down by the quayside,
mine is still a wanted face; can you place
me, in that languid wandering eye?
Oh, that you and I could die.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Saving Sylvie

I was restored by the sight of her
my bustling nursing Sylvie with long smiles,
and I told her so.
She shook her head, still smiling.

I am the last patient in a ward
of ten; the others have been cured
and moved on, to families
and welcomes home.
I am the death head's at the feast.
No wonder Sylvie looks so glum.

If I weren't here the rows of
starch and snow would be unbroken.
I would hold court on the balcony
be wheeled ceremoniously, one last time
to doctors' jokes and nurses' smiles.
I would if I could but I won't, you know.
I stay here just to spite you, Sylvie.

I hear they are remodelling the ward
where will they put me, I wonder?
In my darker nights I fantasise.
I am in a broom closet,
just me and the shelves
and Sylvie comes to pick up some bedlinen
and winks, woman to woman.

I am in the garden,
overgrown with ivy,
a living statue, a grey memorial
Comes my doctor with a bouquet
and behind her with a wreath,
the ever hopeful Sylvie
and she sighs, to see the empty line
on the headstone she donated.

In the bright day, I think
I may have misjudged her. I
love her even; like I love
the nectar in these tubes.
Ah, I am restored by the sight of her
galled, and reminded of my decreasing
and I told her so.
She just shook her head, still smiling.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Scorpio

So it has come to this, reading the future
in small boxes of text, in the Evening Herald
seeking predictions in lines of small font
seeking patterns and clutching at worn straws

Venus, where are you? I need some love
all we Scorpios get are dire warnings and sex
Mercury in retrograde and dark strangers
and ring this number for more information

I read and sigh, at the very same time
mentally berating the fools who believe
in this easy manipulation of our hopes
and peddling of chances, coming soon, tomorrow.

And yet, and yet I still read them, still frown
if they predict a cross and tiresome day ahead;
and smile in guilty relief when they promise
love and money and letters from old friends.

And I quite like the Scorpio profile
sultry and sensual and deeply and psychic
I'd sooner be the stinger than the Virgin
or the fish or the ram, or two-faced twins

So I turn, involuntarily, to the page of print
where the letters and the stars sidle together
and glance, just glance, at the latest revelations
from the mage that is the features editor.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Secrets of the Dead

When I couldn't bear it anymore
the nurse pointed to the glass door
and said:
the grounds are lovely
at this time of year.
I didn't like to tell her
I was dying for a cigarette;
there were quite a few inside,
guttled from the same.

I found a bench, private on a gravel walk
and tried to breath and inhale
all at once. I saw an old man eyeing me
greedily following each smoky tendril;
Jaysus, I could taste that, he whispered
and I nearly offered him one.
But the nurse stood sentinel on my manners.

Pleasantries suspended, down he sat;
flannel under duffle; woollen hat.
It's not the illness that I mind, he said
it's the dying; and he choked and wheezed
with mirth, gallows humour being in fashion here.

D'ya know what, he said, I hate the thought of them ones
pawing through my private things.
I left a letter in my bedside drawer-
I wish I'd burned it long ago. They'll
see my dirty underwear; What will they think
of the magazines? I could weep, he confided,
I'll die of the embarrassment;
this set him off again, asthmatic chuckling.

We were driven back inside with the rain;
I took up my accustomed place again
and tried to think of clever things to say
and visiting time dragged on -
while I made a mental inventory of
underwear and poetry and love letters
and tampons and diet sheets and tried
to calculate how fast they'd burn.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Sentinel

Standing stones, standing like stone
carved in stone,
Waiting.
You are patience, endless endurance
hard as granite,
Unyielding.
I have stood in your shadow and cursed
you are silent,
Resistant.
I have blessed you for your dark shade
you are neutral,
Indifferent.
I wonder what it is awaits you,
as the years pass,
Unremarkable.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Sleeping Dogs

Do not awaken slumbering beasts;
They are guarding secrets
Deeper than you know.
Do not provoke their interest
or you will flee
before the reddened eye and bared teeth.
Sleeping Dogs guard the gates of hel
and feast upon the arrogant or unwary soul -
Who fears not the past, is a fool.
Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Smoke Rings

In haste
smells and sounds are punctuation
to the sermon.
Drifting lights, like
smoke, smudge the
water,
glitter,
twist,
in haste.

And You stand,
Your hand upon my shoulder.
I inhale your scent and almost weep
for fresh spring mornings and the taste of autumn-
You have taken me from the bustle,
You have restored that most bittersweet of senses-
You have stirred in me the embers of lost hope
And in remembrance I burn incense,
for You
have kissed me from my drugged sleep
And in faith
for You,
I leap.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Snow in Dublin

You can keep your snow-capped mountains
I can pass
on fields of virgin white.
The real power of snow is seen
on chimney stacks and pavements,
perfection silhouetted against a city skyline.
Ice on the locks
of the Canal;
Prim herbaceous borders
flaunting feather boas of powdered frost
sequined like housewives at christmas.
Children freed from board and desk
run amok. Good oldfashioned amok.
There are no smells to rival
your neighbour's breakfast
cooking on a snowy morning.
Skies of leaden foreboding,
offset by central heating and
curried chips.
The fleeting pathos of a snow day
the knife-edge balance of work and
roads too snowbound for traffic
O! the thrill.
You can keep vistas of grandeur
nothing beats the slow and stately grace
of the 46A sailing past, unable to stop
on brakes too far gone for snowy roads.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Solstice

1.
Circular
these are the paths we walk
Spiral.

I turn inwards
following the threads
of a rambling thought
in the still-dark of dawn.
Once familiar shapes now
loom, catching me
unawares; opening my eyes
to their true nature
immutable, inscrutable;
more, suddenly, than the
gentle mounds, motherly breasts
undulations of Tara
I turn again
disoriented, in my own land.

II.

I am shaken
my presumption is revealed.
How I have said before
I know these things
I who missed the stark pride
of Lia Fail; the cool aching
slope of the mound?
I who was used to run
over the edge
of what this new light shows
to be a chasm?
Dizzying heights and depths
spinning in infinity

III.

I sink into knee-high grass
my senses filled, my eyes
dazed. The light eats sky
til only day remains.
the veil has descended
as the dark recedes
and all around me-
familiar terrain, well loved
tracks, the geography of
Tara reasserts itself.
But I have glimpsed
an inner scheme; overlaid
the landscape of my soul
with the bones of this place.

I walk the spiral
from the Royal mound
to Eireann; in the bowels
of the earthworks, on the edge
of the ramparts
marvelling.

IV.
As the full day blossoms
smiling on a motley group
of locals, pagans,
lost drunks and tourists
drums and voices raised
I struggle to reconcile
an eternal moment
an internal moment
with the careless gaiety
of an Irish feile in summer
that heartbreaking suspension
simultaneous dwelling
that - to me -
is Solstice.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Speak or be Damned

There is nothing like the itch
of unspoken secrets, the fever
of injustice when we know ourselves
maligned. The ache of heart
when innocence is bought and paid for.

What coinage this, tarnished and warm
from dirty pockets? have you ever realised
betrayal in the silence of a friend? oh, i
am heartsore with the glances
whispers like arrows and words
like stones.

Were you, like me, brought up
to be graceful? don't give them the
satisfaction, don't backbite, don't bite back.
if you do, the taste of it lingers like
drinking blood, curdled.
and what can you do?

Speak and be evil spoken:
stay silent and be mis-spoken: the
burden of soiled trust is not easy to unload.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Stolen

Lately he has thought of past moments
of childhood's stolen hours
of sneaking past the guardians of his age and sex
and holding to the innocence he felt once
was worth the loss

But if his heart should wander
where will it go?
What is there for its sweet enduring hurt?
What went before, is gone, was never reached and is no
more
and all paths returning stand in silence-
unpassed.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Swans and Chimney Stacks

Only in Dublin
would two swans
crossing the docks
greet you in March

Light reflecting
refracting the image
of urban life
and city living

hazy sun and
smokey stacks
a tall ship mast
and two wild swans

Welcome to my city
cosmopolitan
21st century
metropolis

Welcome to my city
Viking terrority
mystical land
mysterious port.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Sweet, I kiss your lips

Sweet, I kiss your lips;
it is a way to say those words
the words we say so often
but cannot say enough.

Sweet I kiss your lips
to transfer from my heart to yours
the feeling that you bring
of joy and love.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Terrority

First

was the spear shaft
spiked in my soft flesh
with anger and with fear
and I first heard the word
'mine'

after were many spikes
cranogs and fences,
ramparts and causeways
pinpricks that tore
perforated the completeness
of my soul
and many voices shouted
'mine'

soon after
deep scars
gashes across the face of me
a million hands all grabbing
all tearing
all shouting
'mine'

All using part of me
a sacred communion

throwing me like offal to pigs
drawing lines through my
energy
all building boundaries
all enslaving me
all claiming me,
'mine'

I contemplate
spinning out of orbit
into the ice-cold rind of space
into the red-heat of a burning sun
into the wasteland of eternity
and when their shouts have silenced
point at the endlessness of time
and tell them
'mine'.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

The Alabaster Babe

Here, among the hollyhocks
be-decked, like the lady I am
Spurning, with fiery virtue
a god of love disguis-ed as a ram
Here, among the primrose,
beneath a christian sky
head, held like a goddess
and breasts bared to your curious eye.
Here in country garden,
in city mews and courtyard I am found.
In mundane worlds a touch of magic
in profanity a patch of sacred ground.
I am the alabaster babe,
my diety forgotten in your day
I am the prettiest flower of your garden
a piece of pagan past that got away!
Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

The Committee for the Formation of Pagan Creation Theories

The scene: a darkened amphitheatre,
the centre stage bare but for the lone poet,
the spotlight his at last.
He raises soulful eyes to heaven and quoth he
'In the beginning, you see
there was this god called He
and She was his wife. In boredom
they created their own offspring,
and thus it all began'

The muttering from the back grows louder-
'Ballcocks! ' a learned colleague calls.
Standing with the righteous wrath of
six halves and two chasers
'In the beginning there was the Great Mother Cow,
and She created the Great Bull
by whom she had the Heifers of Plenty
everyone knows that'

'What? '
the elegant repartee of the Lady Principle
of the Esteemed College of Bards and Ovates
interjects with her customary pith.
'That shit? you think that's how it all began?
My good man, you obviously forget
We bards know it best. Danu and Dagda
carried the world in a bag
til their Bowling night,
and they needed a strike to stay on top of the league
And we are hurtling through space as a result,
our mission is to win them first place.'

Togas flapping, she is soon drowned out
by the combined wrath of the Roman school
with some support from the Greeks
who are chanting 'Zeus' and making rude gestures
indicating virility; Homer has Plato on his shoulders
and both are trying to headbutt
the Master of the College at Byzantium.
In the melee,
the Egyptians manage to shout
something about dungbeetles laying eggs in the sky
and ugly big jackal-headed mothers.

The Amazonian tribes politely submit their views
ignoring the vulgar jeers of the Phoenicians
who smile the other side of their faces
when the Norsemen decide they can't hear over them
and decide to make a stand for public manners
mainly on Pheonician heads.
Snorri Snugglesbum, Master Saga writer, challenges the hall
to prove it was not Odin, on a Tuesday, in the Library, with the

candlestick.

At last the dust settles, another robust debate
abated. The Committee for the Formation
of Pagan Thoery of Creation
surveys the scene with complacent eyes -
'Well that was interesting ' The chairman sighs happily
'Same time next week, lads?
and someone else can bring the biscuits'

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

The Garden of the Wild Wild Rose

Somewhere
there is a verdant, green and sunlit glade
o'erhung by ivy, kissed by violets
where Bella Donna sweeps a bow
to passing Star of David
Where sweet Wild Garlic fills the air at dusk
and Heart's Ease shyly compliments the setting sun

how many hearts have tried to find their way
to the Garden of the Wild Wild Rose?

And at its heart a green-blue pool
home to lily-life and croaking frog
glinting like a bride's diamond in the gentle light
while white bindweed strokes the side
of rush-filled shallows
a surface still and smooth
mirrors back the cloudless sky

a perfect minute of eternal silence
in the Garden of the Wild Wild Rose

The ravens in their lofty tops
the robin her shady bower both hear the whisper
light as air, the tiny breath that stirs the grass
the beating of a mayfly's wing
the storming of a butterfly
the gossamer touch of fairies

the movement of a tiny soul
coming home to the Garden of the Wild Wild Rose

one petal of the silver rose
floats like a child's dream towards the pool
settling on the clear waters like a chaste kiss
so soft it barely moved the air
yet like the leap of Salmon from its wake
a thousand ripples spread across a lake.

The value of all living things is seen
in the Garden of the Wild Wild Rose.

(In Memorium Roisín Mary Donnelly 18th July 2003: when printed in correct form the couplets are in italics)

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

The Gypsy came, riding.

The Gypsy came,
riding! With thunder hooves
his horse played herald
to his royal approach
and I, a Lady, turned my head
and hurried

I burned like Lot's wife
and glanced - my undoing -
his eyes met mine
a gypsy like a ghost
from the romances
my mother read
a gypsy king
a vagabound

He hung around
and the Gentlemen began
to talk of him
a fine fellow
a rare one for the dogs
and games played with badgers
on moonfull nights
and rare one for the ladies
and other nocturnal sports

He stared and me
til I lost countenance
and lowered my eyes
and he began
to woo me, like Desdemona
had been courted -
with stories.

And I became the
the Gypsy's lady
favoured of all his patrons
Until he left, my GYpsy
not fled but moved
amid flurry and laughter.
I would not plead.

Next Summer I watched
the roads
in dust and cool
at twilight, at dawn, at
all those times the poets love
and women hate with reason.

I heard last year
there was a merchant's son wed
a flightly lad given to sport

a darkhaired, wideeyed man
who used to spend each summer
wandering.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

The Homecoming

Stooping slightly, she drew a laboured breath
one hand on the pantry door, steadying herself;
one hand on my shoulder; 'Are you there? '

I smelt the talcum powder and the toothpaste
on her breath, and the faintest smell of
mothballs on her famous Sunday coat,
and her lavender perfume that made me sneeze and
choke, when I was young.

How many years has she come here like this,
Every year a phantasm of the past,
surrounded by the children of her long-dead friends,
and the ragged remnants of her own clan?
How many Christmas dinners, Sunday lunches,
haunches of meat, lakes of gravy,
thousands of sticky cakes in formal slices-
my head spins. I hardly know her, we have not
had ten thousand words;
her life to me is a smooth blank page and
yet, I am her next of kin, her sole bridge
between the living and the dead.

She thinks I look like my mother.

She tugged at my sleeve and smiled; we stayed our
slow and shuffling course across the sunny
room. With a small crow of glee, one frail finger
pointed, and she crooned
'pretty, pretty, sweet, sweet baby'
and his chubby fingers groped for hers
and held, and basking in her adoration, flesh of my flesh,
blood of my bones, smiled into her ancient eyes and
bade her, welcome home.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

The Madness of The Woman

You see black
I see a spectrum of invisability
the myriad shades of the dark rainbow
like the spread of raven's wing
under the yellow mellowness of an Autumn Moon

You see rain
I see diamonds of potential crashing
soft tears of heaven salty with life
worlds contained within, the moment of creation
plummeting toward earth to burst open into growth

You see mountains
I see the slumbering form of beauty
curvaceous limbs caressed in silken folds
breasts marked by the fall and rise of shadows
ropes of silver rivers binding Her to us

You hear the wind
I hear the Song that called us into being
undulating notes of power, secret cadences
voices lifted, speeches spun, prayer uttered
all human history and earth's in one voice

You see only what you want to see
I see all there is to be seen
You think the world can be reduced to numbers
and you call me mad?

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

There Are Scratches Now

There are scratches now,
tiny imperfections,
like the laughter lines of a supermodel.
Mere creases, hints of age.

The mirror you so carefully polished
that we as children coveted like gold-
the one you hid away in a black silk wrap-
it's out now and used.

I feel I should apologize.
Your shade, long departed, haunts me
each time I see childish hands
brandish it in glee.

It meant so much to you.
Don't get me wrong,
it meant to me, a multitude
as well.

It was you, your beauty,
reflected in a prism.
It was forbidden, the out-of-reach,
The untouchability of you.

I have given it away,
To your enemies, the young.
I have thrown it into the arena
to live or break, as it will

They have no respect,
Kids nowadays.
They are not easily impressed
By shine and glint.

Yes, it has scratches now
And tiny imperfections.
They were gained in the service
Of life.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Toast and Belgian Chocolate

We breakfast on toast and
Belgian chocolate;
dine on kisses,
sleep on promises
soft as feather beds.
It's not meant to be this easy, you said.

I disagree. I have fought my battles
and plead my case - Aengus owes me
for the many nights of lonely heroism,
stoic facing down of single combat.

We move in a shy dance
through past and present;
signpost failures,
and flag our successes;
with some aplomb
lay both at each other's feet.

I remark His presence
in the irony
of our sudden being -
laughing at our surprise
and tricking us out
in His favours, while we stare.

I owe Him an apology, unreserved
for the simple pleasure I receive
in the giving and receiving of a kiss
warming cold lips before we leave.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Virtual Betrayal

Virtual betrayal

Knickers! I say rudely
Damn and Blast; and other less
printable sobriquets

They are such fools
I rant. They think it's
all real.

This is virtual betrayal;
a virtual blade between
real shoulder blades

This is cyber-hurt
although I must admit
to shedding (real) tears

I am above it all,
I do assure you
They cannot touch me.

Except - I did think of them
once
as friends...

But enough of that!
I won't tell
if you don't?

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

What I gave up for New Year

how many years have I parroted
that I would give up the usual:
give up the fags and lose weight?
Drink less, walk more?
this year I am trying
for new and less banal
brighter and more imaginative
new year's demands.

I will give up
people who are bad for me
I will eschew their vision of me
that binds me, limits me.
I will renounce their prejudice of me
the way I am diminished by their
narrow and self serving lies.
I will give up
their sense of my failure
their disappointment at me
the way they wanted more from me
the way they expect so little of me
I will avoid, the saturated fat of life
the easy sense of usefulness that comes
from being all things to all people
and I will accept
that tough decisions make enemies.

I will resolve to
be more of me and less of them
to put me first, and mine,
ahead of everyone else and theirs.
I will make time that is mine,
and remove it from the claws
of duty or commitment,
squander it gloriously
in half hours of decadence
and no longer apologise
no more say sorry
to people who see kindness as
weakness.
I will be ruthless in my giving
as in my taking
stopping when I need too, refusing
to have gratuity
redefined as obligation.
And if they want to take, let them say
please and thank you.

I resolve on this, to remember
each day has its own beauty
distinct from the place it left
and irrelevant to its destination.

I promise myself, that i have
no less and no more than my rights
and will not accept the judgement
passed on me by others, whose
failed agendas seek me out
to hold me up, to expose and denude
instead i will clothe and adorn
myself if noone else will.

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne

Where Once Stood Tribes

Where once stood tribes
who rose and fell
on the bounty of a living land
soul and soil intertwined
One blood, one heart,
of one mind,
muscle and sinew
rock and tree

now stand deserts
razed and mined
farmed not free and filled
with remnants of a glorious past
now dismissed
barbarous land
savage land
free land

Once here ran the young
chasing after quarry
wild whooping youth
training for the fight
with hunt and flight
stone blow
axe fell
arrow flew

Once stood Warriors
honour bound to those
whose small lives fed
whose small bones ground:
love of warrior
for the fallen enemy,
so sweet in pain
life in death
alive in death.

Who can judge
from these degenerate times
the free and brave?
Bearers of ancient honours
honour of soul
of strong arm
of strong back
of keen eye
of fleet foot?

Geraldine Moorkens Byrne