Poetry Series

Martin Swords

- poems -

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Martin Swords (9th December Nineteen Fifty)

Welcome. 'Fáilte'- from yet another Irish Poet.

My Blog www.martinswordspoetry.blogspot.com
Writers Group www.wicklowwritersblogspot.com
YouTube Martin Swords Wicklow Writers

Member of Wicklow Writers Group.
Background in Design and Communications.
Writing Poetry since 1990

Works:

'Voyages'....Wicklow Writers' Anthology 2
'Voices from the Shore....
Wicklow Writers CD Poems/Stories
'Lifelines '
New and Collected 21
Glendalough and Laragh News
various poems

A Bowl of Rice Always

A fractured home
A distanced heartache

A chopstick, an empty cup
A windchime in a garden

A bowl of rice
Always the small things

Martin Swords
May 2009

Martin Swords

A Pheasant Calls

A pheasant calls its pleasant pheasant call
Beautiful to its Lady
This peasant peacock
Struts its stuttered strut across the garden
Steady stepping slow measured steps
Followedbyaraceacrossthegrass.
The Lady Hen moves meekly mildly after

This strangled Pavarotti of the long grass
Crowcalls his pompous self
Importance, magnificent bumptious bird.
Napoleonic sense of style,
In cockade coloured collar
Like barricade badge on such a noble neck
Your Lady Hen follows out of sight, as your Royal commands

I know you Mr. Pheasant, I meet you every day.
You are the Office Bully
You are the Club Bore
You are the Chain of Office
You are the Blazer Bugger
You are the Fourpenpocketperson
You are the Badge Bearer
You are Through the Chair
You are Out in Front
Is that your wife behind

I see you Mr. Pheasant, I know your pompous play
In you we see ourselves,
You make us all look stupid everyday

Across the garden now beneath the birdfood
You peck your lordly selfish portion,
Chest out, head back, all colours blazing.
Your Lady Hen still follows meekly to the fare
Lady Marian to your Will Scarlett, humble,
Dressed in the muted magnificence of Motherhood.
Loud Lord and Lovely Lady, a salutary pair

Martin Swords, September 2007

You need to be familiar with the poise and mannerisms of Pheasants to know just how pompous and arrogant they appear, and how they look like people we all know.

There are many many Pheasants, and pheasant-people here in Wicklow, Ireland, and elsewhere!

Martin Swords

A POPPY SEASON

She is a Welcome Home
A room full of people.
She is an egg neatly broken
A Roulade sweetly rolled.
She is a lost recipe

She is her mother
At her mothers knee.
She is the Deb with the frizzy hair.
She is first to cry
And first to laugh.
She is the woman from the Meals on Wheels

She is a wet dog in a blanket
A long walk by the waters edge.
She is a silver rosary
A Hail Queen of Heaven.
She is a missal of memorial cards
A future firmly rooted in the past
In Birth, in Life, in Death,
She is unafraid

She is the mother of two sons, and a husband
She is Mam, but never Mummy
She is busy when there is no need
Is tired too often
She is the strong stem
She is a Poppy in a window

May 2001
Martin Swords

This Poem is written for my wife of almost thirty five years, who likes Poppies. You may need a knowledge of nineteen fifties Irish Catholic,
guilt ridden angst, to get all the references. Or you may not.
Let me know.

Martin Swords

A Tree Has Fallen

i.m. Tommy Nolan 1940-2008

In a silent belfry
An old bell.
From the sea at Wicklow
A new rope.
In the graveyard
A new sound.
The Tolling Bell
Calls loud
To the quiet hush
Of the slow walk.
Ask not for whom,
It tolls for Tommy Nolan.

Back from the valley
Forest hills,
Derrybawn,
Lugduff, Camaderry,
Brockagh,
The toll returns,
The woodland wakes
A sturdy forester.
A tree has fallen,
Back to the earth.
Ring on Toll.
Echo Thanks.

Martin Swords August 2008

Tribute for a grand character with whom I worked.
A former forrester from the village of Laragh,
Glendalough, Co. Wicklow, Ireland.
The church bell tolled again first for Tommy's funeral

Martin Swords

A View at Rheinfall

At the Rheinfall.

Be happy. Don’t be
Concerned with correct.
Be happy. Let it flow.
Give happy. And receive.

Look at the river rushing.
Its vibrant, pounding
passion moving fast.
Is this the river's youth?

Life is Rheinfalling away,
Soon there will be little time.
Soon we will be far downstream,
Drifting on the quiet waters

Like two Autumn leafs
Far beyond the falls.
Happy, remembering
The Rheinfalls of our life

Martin Swords
Rheinfall
Flueringen
Schaffhausen
3 Sept.2007

Martin Swords

A Walk In The Woods With Robert Frost

Overcast but warm,
The day dry, unusually.
Walking the woods with the dogs
As many times before.
Lucy and Tig, away in the rough dark deep,
Yipping with the scent of deer, excited.
Ruby, river scrambling, biting
At the bogwater, wagging, from the shoulders back

Along the old familiar track, into
The clearing where the roads diverge.
I stopped and stood. Which way to go?
Think of another Poet, and roads not taken.
Yes, I've been here before. This way I came.
That way I saw a squirrel once.
And down that way a badger
Straight on, the Mill Pond where ducks dabble.
Behind me then a stag, stares my way, and
Startled, slips into the wood.
I think again of Robert Frost and look a different way.
I stand a while. I turn, retrace my steps, recall, relive,
I'll write this down, and this will be
The road I've taken.

Martin Swords June '07

Martin Swords

All The Boys

On back a bedroom door
A hook, a cap, untouched
This many year. The head
That wore it laughing
Lies in Messines
Under the green grass
Cut short back and sides
Like all the boys

Martin Swords
May 2008
Wicklow Writers

Martin Swords

Artificial Paradise

It’s an Artificial Paradise
Here in the Vale Da Plenty

Security keeps the peasants out
Unless there’s bins to empty
And shirts to iron
Beds to change
Floors to sweep on Wednesday

They’ve a Portuguese lady does each week
They think her name’s Miranda
But they’re not sure
They’re always out
At the clubhouse bar veranda

Ferdinando cuts their grass
And trims their Bougainvillaea
If he trimmed for them
In Tunbridge Wells
Neighbours would fill with envillaea

They’ve been out here for six months now
They hear that things are grand
With Richard and Rose
At boarding school
In lonely grey England

Must dash they say we’ve got to play
A four with Bruce and May
A lovely couple
Don’t have kids
But a yacht called Little Ray

If they’d had kids they’d be so tied
It might have cramped their style
So they play all day
With their Little Ray
It’s like their Little Child

Oh its lovely here a paradise
They call it Vale Da Plenty
Without their golf
And sun and fun
Their lives would just be empty

Martin Swords Sept ’08
Vale da Pinta/Gramacho
Lagoa Portugal

Martin Swords

As I Came Over Wicklow Gap

As I came over Wicklow Gap
All on a summer’s day
A sight I met which held me trapped
And took my breath away
A view emerged as if to say
Stop and remember well today
Treasure the memory from this day
Before you’re on your way, now
Before you’re on your way

As I came over Wicklow Gap
All in a summer still
The sun shone on the mountain cap
A single shaft of golden spill
And lit ablaze the very hill
I can recall it still
If ever my spirit’s ill
It lifts my heart and always will, now
I know it always will

Martin Swords
May 2009

Martin Swords

Autumnal

Now is the golden browning of the year,
early dusky evenings, and the quiet.
A time of listless leaves and branches,
a settling, and a dignity of dying.

Smells of damp and rolling mist,
now haunt the hedges and the willows
of the river valley field.
The evening bells sound dampened in
the thick of Autumn air.

The year is closing down
to sleep the winter sleep through frost and chill.
Silent snow will follow in its time
sealing the land in white and crispy cold,
freezing in death what life will need to live

When all is dark in winter, thoughts
of bluebells ringing in the dell
keep hope alive that spring will peal anew

Martin Swords
June 2002

Martin Swords

Bob Dylan, and me.

Bob Dylan, and me.

I know Bob Dylan well.
Grew up with him,
We all did.
He was the voice
We didn’t have.
Said the words
We didn’t know to say.
Such words.
He saw and sang
Of things we saw
Yet wouldn’t speak about.
Where we were awkward,
He was talkin’ out.

For forty years
I’ve looked up,
Listened up, to him.
Now changed, aged, yet
Both forever young,
I’m glad we grew together
In interesting changing times.
We never met,
But it’s alright.
We spoke.
We played our parts.
He needed me to listen all along.
The singer sings
So others hear the song.

Martin Swords, June 2003

Martin Swords

'BOOKMARK'

Bookmark
by Martin Swords

Life is a book,
An unfolding story.
Tentative beginning
A meeting, a parting,
A kiss, a laugh, a tear,
A maybe making up.
Lots of maybe.

Life is a gripping story
Unexpected twists and turns,
Page turning tensions,
Joy or tragedy
In a throwaway remark.
Read it well, live
And learn, read on,
Read on a few more
Chapters, then The End.

Mark this as well.
If Time allows you
Yet another book, this may
Mark your exit,
An early ending in
A yet unfinished tale.
Others may wonder
Why you finished here

Nov '07

Martin Swords

Breakfast for One

Breakfasts were special.
Two plates.
Two eggs.
Together.

Cup and saucer.
Egg and spoon.
Salt and pepper.

Kind people ask.
I cannot tell.
There are no words.
At breakfast

One plate is lonely.
The egg is spoiled.

No pepper.
I never liked it.

Only the salt is set.
Only the sharp taste.

Martin Swords
April 2008

Martin Swords

Broad Casting

The Bishop and The Priest, The Teacher,
Doctor, Auctioneer,
these were the Grey Gods of the Grey Fifties
Even the Politician and the Merchant
had to pay Respect, to gain Respect.
Knowledge was broadcast at us
Like seed scattered on an empty field.
We were told the answers to the questions
we didn't dare to ask.

Then the men in hornrim glasses spoke.
With no mention of God the new
black and white God spoke in every livingroom.
It told us what we ought to know,
it opened doors and shone light in the shadows
where the grey sins lay hidden by the Grey Gods.
We thought we were seeing.

The new Grey God lives among the stars.
In glorious colour it speaks,
it tells the news, it makes the news,
it tells us what it is we ought to know.
A black and white view in colour.
The old Grey Gods look on, green with envy.
The strings they pulled were never as long,
strong or well played as this brash messenger.
This full colour God in the sky.
We still think we're thinking.
Nothing changes but the colour.

Martin Swords
Jan 2009

("Broadcast" was originally an adjective and adverb, and meant literally "scattered widely", particularly in the farming context of sowing seeds.)

Martin Swords

Businesspeak

Listen Well.
"Rheumathroid Arthritis
Is a very competitive market",
The busy businessman
Said on the radio.

Businessreport.

He might have said
"The end of Rheumatroid
Arthritis would be good".
But he didn't.
That would be a
Shareholders nightmare.

Businessthink.

Maybe he could find
A disease that wouldn't
Be a competitive market.
Where he had the only pill.
That would be good.
A good disease.

Good Business.

Business as usual.
The Disease Business.

Martin Swords Nov 2005

Martin Swords

calling

something
draws me
to this place
quiet
peace
the sound of water
spilling over stone
empty echoes
wind in winter
lapping lakespit
rain
dripping down
sedges softly
is it a need
a call
being answered

May 2005
©Martin Swords

written in glendalough,
wicklow ireland, in winter

Martin Swords

Circle

Cyrcle

The old men said,
So short…
So quick…
is life to pass.
Yesterday it was…
much to be done,
remains undone.
Is this May or June,
which year?
Last year only,
I was ten years younger.

Old men looking backwards.
Young men looking on.

Fearless, full of want,
forever at their feet.
What could they know,
the old men?
What could not be done?
A life of time to realise,
to realise that soon
it will be yesterday
and much to do
remains undone.
So quick…
So short…
Young men will say.

Martin Swords March 2001

Martin Swords

Doppelganger

I saw myself on T.V.
I think. In black & white
on channel four, tonight.
My Doppelganger from 1938.
He looked just like me
When I was 14, in1964.
I have a photo. In black
& white in an album.
I was serious then.
He was serious too,
beating a drum
and marching in the Hitler Youth.
He looked just like me.
Maybe he was me.
Maybe he was you.
Maybe we've all got a
Doppelganger in the Hitler Youth.
In black & white.
If only we could see.

Martin Swords
July 2005

Martin Swords

Dorothy Horan's Good Advice

Given to me by
Dorothy Horan of Tiglin
May 2006

If you think you're beaten, you are.
If you think you dare not, you don't.
If you like to win but you think you can't,
It's almost certain you won't.

If you think you'll lose, you're lost.
For out in the world we find
Success begins with a fellow's will.
It's all in the state of mind.

Life's battles don't always go
To the stronger or faster man,
But, soon or late, the man who wins
Is the man who thinks he can!

Martin Swords
Tiglin

Martin Swords

Down Among the Drunkies

It’s half past twelve
And all around
The Drunkies head for home
Some are walking
Some are talking
Some are better left alone
Who’re you lookin’ at…

Strangled laughs at jokes unfunny
Strangled bars of song
The Drunkies’ never stuck for money
The Craic keeps rolling on
Two more pints of Craic
And a small Craic with ice
And have one yourself…

To broken homes and broken wives
The Drunkies stagger back
Broken promises, broken noses
Bedroom opens, romance closes
Tears on a pillow not a bed of roses
Have you ’ere a cigarette...

But there’s nuttin’ heavy like...
No Drugs... None o’ that shit...
Only the few pints like...
And the Craic....
Y’ know yourself…

Martin Swords

Martin Swords

Empatheia

Empty

Without you.

Martin Swords March 2001

Martin Swords

Far From Athy

Pat told stories of old times, living in digs
in Athy, working on the roofin' for aul' Hammond.
Me with my booklearning piped up
"I heard of Athy,
"And look! a barge comes bringing from Athy
And other far- flung towns mythologies." ",
lines from the canalbankpoet.
"Bet he never saw it in the lashing
rain", Pat observed dryly.
No. Nor I had never seen it his way,
from a cold slate roof breaking galvanised
tacking nails with the long ripper,
and only the price of two pints in his pocket,
till Friday.

He was glad for me that I hadn't.

Martin Swords May 2009

i.m. Pat Swords 1915 - 1978
On His Birthday 1st May

Martin Swords

Gold Ring

The count was ten
And still he did not move
He lay beaten, badly, cold
Giving his life in the square ring
to win a purse of gold.

The count was ten
It could have been ten thousand
All that he ever had, was spent.

May 2004
Martin Swords

Martin Swords

Half Past Midnight Grafton Street

Half Past Midnight Grafton Street
Filling time with only
French fries and a coffee
I’m sat with the lost and lonely

Christmas lights and mannequins
Expensive bags with names on
Glamours chat and giggle over skinny drinks
Avoid the old bag lady hanging on

Still sitting with the empty cup
Watching the world ignore her
Cold tea and a warm seat
Out of the cold and frivolous festive cheer

Half Past Midnight Grafton Street
A tired old lady shuffles out
Out on the cold expensive street
She starts her lost and lonely walkabout

Martin Swords
Nov 2008

Martin Swords

Hermitage

Many’s the fainthearted
Full of fear and fright
Guided from dark danger
By the calling bell and light

Some are the downtrodden
Seeking to find their way
Some are the lost forgotten
Journeying out to pray

Others seek the hallowed ground
To stand where Kevin stood
To walk by the lake where Kevin walked
To the Saint’s cell in the wood

Most are good God fearing
Knowing right from wrong
Longing to touch the hermits hem
To grow in the hermits song

Longing to touch the hermits hem
To rest in the sanctuary found
To grow in the way of the hermits step
In Glendalough Holy ground

To grow in the way of the hermits step
To find in themselves again
The simple truth of quiet content
The core of self, the inner being
The honest look, that way of seeing
The hermits gift, the hermits tranquil way

Martin Swords Oct.2009

Martin Swords

House Of Fun

"You must be jokin'"
Joked the lads at the bar,
Tough walking. Drink talking

She couldn't hear
But knew exactly what they said.
She'd read these sniggered signs
Before. The fat plain girl
Just looked away.

Another night at the dance
Dancing with her sister.
Lonelier here in this noisy
Market House of Fun than
Alone on a mountain path.

Is there no fat plain boy
To walk a wooded way.
To hold her hand.

Martin Swords November 2007

Martin Swords

How?

how can
I show
you how
short life
i

21 June 2005
Martin Swords

Martin Swords

I Stood in Line

November 4th 2008
United States Presidential Elections

I stood in line
To have my teeth examined
I stood in line
While my chains were locked
I stood in line
For a bowl of soup
I stood in line
With no poll tax
I stood in line
To board the bus
I stood in line
To face the water cannon
I stood in line
To speak, to be heard
I stood in line
To be listened to
This day
I stood in line
Proudly stood in the line

Martin Swords
Nov.2008

Martin Swords

It Was a Good Day

The Anniversary Hand

It was a good day
Everyday
It was a great time
All the time
Since I met you

It was a great life
Full of life
It was good together
Altogether
Just we two, plus two

And though it wasn’t perfect
Some might say
We think it’s good together
Day to day
This family way

It’s good to sit together
Looking back
We’ll carry on whatever’s
In the pack
We’re dealt

It is a good day
Everyday is grand
The King and Queen of Hearts
Are winning
Their Last Hand

Martin Swords 29 March 2007

Martin Swords

It's Better With The Good Eye

Nostalgia isn’t what it used to be,
Looking back at oh so far away.
Memory’s just another way to see.

A place to go on holiday for free,
Forty years ago if it’s a day.
Nostalgia isn’t what it used to be.

And was that other person really me,
What changed, why could I not stay?
Memory’s just another way to see

The way things were around us then when we
Thought all our dreams were surely on their way.
Nostalgia isn’t what it used to be,

The sky was always blue it seemed to me,
Every day the sun shone so they say -
Memory’s just another way to see,

But now I know that life’s not lunch for free
That bitter fruit is served on many days
Nostalgia isn’t what it used to be,
Memory’s just another way to see.

Martin Swords
“Prompt Poems”
Villanelle
March 2008

Martin Swords

Joyful and Triumphant

As the hymn always reminds me, it was indeed

JOYFUL AND TRIUMPHANT

Christmas, I remember,
Was the only time the fire was lit all day.
Da lit it real early with twists of the Evening Press,
Bits of broken wood, and coal brought from the
Backyard in the ashbucket.

The room was warm, flickering.
Once a year smells of Nutmeg, Spice and
Stale Guinness mixed with coal smoke, Pine,
And White Pudding.
Everything was lit up, for breakfast!

Red and white chains of Crissed Crossed Crepe
Hung from light to ceiling corners.
Cards on the mantle, Holly Berries over the picture
Of The Big Fella', and The Sacred Heart.
And the Christmas Tree had
Cottonwoolballsnow.

The path was frosted white on the way out to the lav.
I rode my big wheel trike, squeaky, on the lino.
"Triumph", was written in old fashioned
silver letters on the red metal bars.
I was five then, Full of Joy.

It was happy and warm that
Christmas, I remember.

Dec.2005 Martin Swords Tiglin

Martin Swords

Listening at Sally Gap

There is always a wind
one or other of the four winds blowing
moaning with the loneliness of the place
soft ground tough grass and hard sheep.

Ghosts of soft footed rebels tramping to the
safety of their mountain valley holds
before the Military.
The wind still carries their shouts

their cries their pleadings and their hopes
mixing with the bleak empty sounds of this place
a trickle of water on stone
a gurgle of water on wet black turf

Is that the thin echo of a sleán slicing sods,
or that heavy hollow sound, the turf-cutter's
clunkin' bottle of sweet milky tea
corked with a scruntch of newspaper

Or a bit of broken fence banging in the wind

Martin Swords
May 2009

Martin Swords

Lonliness

After Billy Collins

At edge of town I once saw Loneliness
sitting with his friend Together
sleeping in a shelter.

I, heading home from nightshift to family,
was alone, not lonely.

But they were there together, huddled
for heat in the long cold night.
Each was all they had.

Soon, on some cold or stormy morning
one would fail to wake.
Then the loneliness would double,
being alone, utterly.

Martin Swords
Nov.2008

Martin Swords

Mountain Stream Song

As a silver comb slips
through newborn golden hair,
soft stream trickles
merrily through the moss.

With plith and splinkle
the drops play
their mountain music
on the organ stones

I stop and listen
sharing the nascent song,
soaring,
searching for the words,
enchanted.

©Martin Swords Jan.2007

Martin Swords

New York Valentine 9/11

Chance may be a fine thing so they say
And chance may make a difference today

Brrrrr...Brrrr…
"pick up Martha
Brrrr…Brrrr…
pick up. pick up!
Brrrr…Brrrr…
answer, oh God!
why doesn't she answer?
she's lost her phone…
she's at a meeting…
she's afraid in the new job…
Brrrr…Brrrr…
some insurance company
in the Tower
which Tower
shit. I can't remember
Brrrr…Brrrr…
oh God. look. it's terrible.
the end of the world
the end of our world
Brrr…Brrr…
please God, please God. I'll be good
I'll pray. I'll give money
but please let her answer"
Brrrr…Brrrr…
Brrrr…Brrrr…
Brrrr…
"hello….hello….that you Albert..
I was asleep….I got flu honey…
…remember? "

The end of someone else's world today
Martha and Albert live to die another way

Martin Swords
Prompt Poems
"Valentine" Feb '08

Martin Swords

NewEnglanding

New England.
White steeples over branches.
White houses made of wood
At home among the trees.
Tall grass and meadows,
Stonewall homes to scampering things.
Sound of cars, grass-cutting people,
Intruding
In quiet calm Connecticut.
New England sunset, sense
Of frogs and Robert Frost.

Split log fence and old walls
Tell tall tales unchanged of
Gentle manners, courtesy and friends.
Peace and order threatened by a new world
Rising, rampant, in an old state.
Yet save the quiet for even' sun,
New England summer evening sitting,
Rocking, Robert Frosting on the porch.
Which road led here?

Martin Swords
July 2002

Martin Swords

Nora Prays for Peace Surely

In the shadow of Synge

"It'll be more he'll be wantin' surely
And him after proppin' up the counter
Down in Paudín's half the night.
Holdin' court and rameishing out of him
Aye.., and they hanging on his every word
As if it was worth listenin' to at all at all.
Rameish and rubbish he'd be givin' out
And buying all round him,
"...May the givin' hand never falter…"
and "…a bird never flew on one wing…"
they'd be thinkin', pretendin' he was a great fella'
"You're surely right Dan, never a truer word was spoke"
the shout would go up making him feel important.
And they laughin'.
Whiskey and Porter how are ye, and not bit,
bite nor sup in the house.
It's a power of sorrow does be on me
With the way he is now.
And yet…when we were young there wasn't
A man in the Glen to match him for herdin'
Sheep and shearin'…he was bright,
And I was glad.
Oh no…none could touch him for a fleece.

Fleece…it's him bein' fleeced below in
Paudín's now. A changed man this thirty year
Since the business with the scythe.
Mind…it doesn't stop him liftin' pints,
bad arm or no, but his pride is gone.

Whisht…I hear his foot on the step,
Please God and His Holy Mother,
He'll be drunk to fall off straight, and leave
me in peace in me bed of sorrows".

Martin Swords
May 2006

To all scholars of John Millington Synge 1871 – 1909, apologies.

This poem is written in the style and language used by Synge in his plays " The Playboy of the Western World, The Well of the Saints, In the Shadow of the Glen, etc.", partly as an exercise, and partly because I love the language of the plays surely.

Martin Swords

On The Wing

Far out on the wing with
the boy with glasses.
Wormwatchers.
Goalmouth players kick
and jostle back and forth.
Calling, shouting, scoring,
muffled joy.

Team Mate.
Always picked, never last.
Sharp Wit, Lad, Answerer- Backer.
But as for goals, nothing.
Still.

Still out on the wing,
Playing the game,
winging it.
Haven't kicked
a ball in years. Even
the boy with glasses
moved midfield.

July 2006
Martin Swords,

Martin Swords

ONE DAY IN MIND

(Findlater Street 1959)

The sound came faintly, growing
As he slowly worked the street.
A gentle song of unrequited love
Sung true to note in a voice
That once was strong.
The lilting rolling song matched
By his lolling rolling gait, moved closer.
The Streetsinger came calling
Once or twice a year.
Never asking, never begging,
Just singing, hoping, trusting.
Closer now his face reflected
Hardship, the ups and downs, and downs
Of life lived hard.
In someone else's shoes and shirt and tie,
Clean but tired and faded.
He wore his broken heart
On his shabby shiny sleeve.
The song moved on and faded
As he worked his way back down the other side.
Then stopped.
Looked at his meagre coins,
Walked sad slow steps away.

Another street. Another song.

We never knew his name but we remember.
Did he recall Findlater Street,
A young boy holding out a single shiny shilling.

He gave us more than we gave him.

Martin Swords, February 2000

Martin Swords

Ordinary Heroes

We cannot all be heroes, some lives are lived
In unheroic ways. Some succeed in simply
Getting on, raising kids, getting on with others.
Doing good for others when they can.

For many simply this would make them heroes,
Yet life gets in their way. Bad luck, bad breaks,
Bad choices hold them back. Aspiring to an "ordinary"
That would often be enough to be OK.
The game is played to ever-changing rules
That let you know you haven't won today

We cannot all be leaders, some of us are led.
Without the led where would the leaders be?
Out in front of nothing, going nowhere.
And do they lead, or just chase blind ambition,
Stepping on the others on the way.
And are they really winning, or just allowed to win
By others, in the slower lane.
Chasing their prize of happiness,
In a far far quieter way

"They also serve", perhaps; while all The Heroes race
To lead and win. But who is leading who?
What really is heroic? What price is just
Too much to pay to win. We cannot all be Heroes.
Some of us are led. We cannot all be out in front.
But some of us are winning in our quiet heroic way
Running in a different race,
Succeeding every day.

Martin Swords Oct,1999

Martin Swords

p.s. New York

New York. New York
July Four.
Looking down, looking up.
Among the missing,
West and Liberty.
Sad streets
Paved with pride.

July 2002

p.s. post september.

Posted on the N.Y.F.D. Memorial site, ground zero,4 July 2002

Martin Swords

Martin Swords

Pangs

Writing the Poem.
Putting it down on paper.
Like standing naked
with your thoughts exposed.

Composing the Poem.
The calming help
of getting your mind
to talk to itself.

Struggling with Rhymin’
Develops your Thymin’
and depends very much
on the humour that I’m in.

Wanting to publish
is a burning desire
Even for only
An audience of One

And One is well pleased
To see One in print
with a work that
One hopes is well done

Standing naked.
Talking to yourself.
You could do vorse.

Martin Swords April 1999

Martin Swords

Plastic Daffodils

I wandered lonely as a prayer
Along the monks path by the Glendasan
When all at once around a rocky bend
I saw a sight afloat to make me take a stand
A host of plastic bottles thrown away
Waving their caps and labels o'er the land
I often think in solitude so grand,
For all their cheap and handy ways
Discarded plastic bottles of today
Are simply just too big a price to pay
And then my heart with sorrow fills
A refuse sack with plastic rubbish daffodils

Martin Swords February 2009

Martin Swords

Regret

After Billy Collins

The phone rang.

It was Regret calling, again.

“You should have called, you should have called
and told me, you should have said how you felt,
what it was about, and how things were misunderstood.
You should have called.”

All right! All right! I’ll phone. I’ve got the number here.

But it’s too late, there’s no one there to answer.

Regret will call again.

Martin Swords
Nov.2008

Martin Swords

Sarah's Saturday

Like an egg, she felt complete, enclosed,
Protected, full of promise,
And yet, Sarah wondered, and yet.
Alive, alert, attractive, alone,
She had personality, sex appeal.
Her sparkly lovely eyes, her Snow
White red wet lips, attracted.
There was a man at the office once,
Told her so, but he was married.
She was full of figure and full of life,
Two days short of thirty seven
On yet another Saturday night
She curled up comfy watching telly
In her cosy little room
"Her cosy little womb" she called it,
Wondering if any man would enter,
If anything would develop.

Martin Swords
Prompt Poems
"Egg"

Feb 2008

Martin Swords

School Daze

Mommy’s out
And Daddy’s drunk
I’m just lyin’ here in my bunk
Imagining

Down at school
They’re all such fools
I’m not playing by their rules
I’m thinkin’

Pickin’ sides for basketball
I’m not on any side at all
I’m just leanin’ ‘gainst the wall
‘n broodin’

All alone’s my favourite call
Shootin’ cans, can hit them all
I’ve a gun in my hand
And I’m eight foot tall

Someday soon I’ll show them how
They don’t know me anyhow
They’ll look up when they’re lyin’ low
They’ll look up and then they’ll know

Rather live in Middle-Earth than Middletown
Magic in my hand I feel it call
They will feel its power as they stand against the wall
Magic handed wizard now I’m nine foot tall

They’re falling down, they’re runnin’ scared
Today I’m Lord of All
I’ve a gun in my mouth, I’m famous now
Look up, I’m ten foot tall.

Martin Swords Oct.2008

Martin Swords

Significant Children

I met a man who told me once
about …a doctor…..well known…
….master of the hospital….
…who delivered most of the…
…significant children in this town…

the child who grew into his parent’s wealth,
did nothing all his life, had lots of fun.
the girl who had it all, but happiness,
the dead one with the needle in her arm.
the boy who couldn’t explain his feelings,
and shot his classmates as a kind of statement.
maybe not the poor child who failed at school,
but cared enough to become a senator.
or the plain girl from basketball, the tall one,
who started the hostel for the homeless.
no, none of these were significant,
not even the doctor.

what was significant, was the way he used the phrase,
without thinking, and how it came naturally to him.
did he know how much he really said,
the significance of it.

Martin Swords
June 2009

Martin Swords

Some Times

Sometimes
Time is measured
In Christmas decorations
Minute baubles and second
Sets of lights. A treefull.
Hours in attics reaching the
Back wall where the good stuff is.
Silver Birds in black tissue paper
not to be used. They were Nana's.
The Crib in the cardboard held by
Five years' sticky tape.
The old figures with the three legged
Donkey and the chewed-up
Baby Jesus in the manger.
Meg, had left her mark.

This yearly task,
The Getting Down,
The Putting Up,
The Taking Down,
The Putting Away Again
Flimsy boxes, treasured memories.

Sometimes
At The Putting Away,
Thoughts come unbidden
Of the next Getting Down.

Martin Swords 15 January 2008

Written at Vale de Pinta Lagoa Portugal

Martin Swords

sorry, too late

was a boy in Birmingham
bought himself a gun
was a mom in Memphis
looking for her son
everybody’s raging
over what was done

went down to the swimmin’ hole
where we used to play
now it’s full of chemicals
sign says “keep away”
everybody’s’ wondering
how it got this way

everybody’s sorry
everybody’s sad
everybody wants to know
how things got this bad

fishermen in Grimsby
used to fish all day
now the boats are rottin’
fishing doesn’t pay
fisher folk are sorry all
the fish have gone away

everybody’s sorry
everybody’s sad
everybody wants to know
how things got this bad
we think we’re intelligent
but really we’re just mad

Martin Swords
Prompt Poems
“Sorry”
Feb 2008

Martin Swords

STARBORN

STARBORN

For Grainne
Requiem for Baby Ronan

We are the stuff of stars.
A star for each of us
hides in a starry sky.
There’s one,
shooting, blazing,
brilliant for an instant,
and then gone.
Whose star is that,
so bright.
Starchild.
Starbourne.
Stark night.
Remember, thankful
to have seen that light.

Martin Swords 19 April 2003

Martin Swords

STEPPE

Steppe

i.m. Vasily Grossman 1905 – 1964

A lone soldier's voice
Lifts comrades' chorus
"My Lady Death, we beg you,
Please wait outside."
'The Little Blue Shawl'
Makes men cry for
Wives and Motherland

A soldier's overcoat
Is worth more
Than a silk dress.
A foot bandage
More than silk stockings.
A candle brighter than
A diamond ring.
All the wine and caviar
For a pair of boots.
A warm hat and a clear head
Moves further than a
Cartload of furniture.
A night in hiding
Better than being found.
A soft kiss
Better than rough love.

"Not a single hen to cackle,
Not a single cock to sing."
This is the road to Moscow,
This is sound of Stalingrad,
So the Babushkas tell,
The old ones, for those
Who cannot speak.

Martin Swords June 2007

Martin Swords

Tableau for Armistice Day

Posted on Nov.11th 2008 Armistice Day

In Memory of all the Irish Soldiers who were
killed or injured in The World War 1914 - 1918
including family members

' All The Boys'

Polished pride of place
The massive table, heart
Of the home, the only decent
Thing we ever bought.
Solid as a six year marriage
Set with a cloth at the sunny end
For tea. For two.
The rest littered with work,
A warm scarf half
Knitted, a stocking with a ladder.
Letters from the Front.
My pen, my paper,
"Dearest Harry…."
Nothing more.
A sodden handkerchief
My beads. Our picture.
And staring starkly back at me
A passion from Passchendaele
"…….in action……..."

How can I fill this table,
Alone

Martin Swords
Jan 2006

Martin Swords

That Mary Duffy One

Mary Duffy.
I hate that Mary Duffy one,
full of airs and graces,
with her shiny angel dress
and flappy wings.
I've only a brown shepherd
thing, borrowed from my
sister, fat Margaret,
huge, tied with a rope.
And a tea towel.

And she's always first
at sums with her "Miss,
Miss, Miss", hand in the air.
She's got coloured crayons
too, in a glittery plastic box.
I've only a short brown
pencil. And I never put
my hand up for adding
or taking away, hidin'
down in the back row.

My brother Martin says
the Duffys always kept
pigs.
And smelled.
That makes me happy,
But I still hate
that Mary Duffy one.

Assumpta Swords.
Second Class

October 2006

Martin Swords

The Birches at Birkenau

‘Birkenau’ – the Birch Wood.
Gathered among the beautiful birches
outside Auschwitz – Birkenau
the Chosen People waited, hoping in vain.
Deliberately deceived, mothers, daughters,
Fathers, sons, frail, infirm, families, waited.
Only delayed because the chambers
and the ovens were full, no Exodus.
Still waiting, waiting for us.

Lost treasures, among the roots
a button, a gold ring, a child’s buckle, survive.
Carved in birchbark a plea – ‘remember’,
cries out for the lost tribe
this grove once mocked.
The birches and the memory still grow, pointedly,
heavenward, screaming at God.
Golgotha – place of skulls.
Birkenau – place of birches.
Even the trees were corrupted.

Anniversary of Liberation of Auschwitz

March 2005
Martin Swords

Martin Swords

The Dark

Clock

Clock Tock

Tock Tick

Tick Tock

Tock Clock

Clock

Dong!

Dong!

Dong!

Still

Awake

Still Awake

Martin Swords Nov 2007

Martin Swords

THE FAIRY WOMAN

The Fairy Woman

Who is She
She is The Fairy Woman
She says my name
She speaks with her eyes
She sees my soul
Naked

She calls to me away away
My mind she weaves with spells
I am caught
And unresisting
Enchanted

I know her now
She is mine. I am hers
The Fairy Woman of Donegal
She makes the snow swirl
She makes the sun sing
She knows me
She knows me well

Martin Swords March '07

Martin Swords

The Girl With The Sad In Her Eyes

Tired beyond her years
She wore her life on her
Face that day in the traffic.
A once white Debutante
Who longed for life and love.
Maybe life did not deliver,
Or delivered too much.
Where were you rushing to
From the traffic lights,
Girl with the sad in your eyes.
Too rushed to notice me noticing
Too rushed to care.
Debutante, too sad

Martin Swords
Nov 2001

Martin Swords

The Land of Longing

Welcome to the land
of the Frothy Frappuccino
Filet Mignon, Lobster Burgers
and Coffee that comes every
which way but coffee

The best in America seemed
to come from somewhere else
Paris France, London England,
Belgium Belgium, carrying its
Continental Chic to this Big
Brash confident yet
uncertain country

Only the polished clock in
the local rail station, the
red bonneted shiny chromed
sixteen wheeler on the
interstate, and Grand Central
spoke to me in American.
They said "Howdy".

Martin Swords June 2008

Random and possibly unfair impressions
from a visit to Connecticut and New York,
in the head for years and only now prompted
onto paper in Starbucks, Dundrum Shopping
Centre, triggered by noticing the spelling of
Frappuccino. Strange.

Martin Swords

The Late Gift

He had only one more gift to give,
the manner of his going.
He had only one short life to live,
and only now was knowing
it was shorter than he thought.
And yet….. the gift….
……..the gift of going
without having others wait
longer than they should.
Without clinging to a type of
life far beyond its good,
was a lesson only late learned.
“Die when you’re still alive”,
he thought, “when you can be
remembered laughing, not
as a weeping dribbling dimentiate.”
He hoped he could deliver.

Martin Swords July 2008

Martin Swords

The Nearly Man

I am a Nearly Man,
At least that’s what you think
My bent back
Or withered leg,
My hanging hand
Is all you see.
My slurried speech
Is all you hear
Because you will not listen.
And even if I could speak
What would I say worth hearing,
You’ve already decided.

Inside I’m five foot ten
Straight backed Adonis,
Striding purposefully out,
Singing sweet songs and airs.
Poems of love and wit,
Words of wisdom flowing
Just inside my lips.
And stories told
Over and over inside my head.
This ability I have
Is just a disability to you.

But which of us is whole.
Which is the nearly man.
I who think but cannot say
Or you who will not think
And cannot see the man
Not even nearly.

Martin Swords
June 2001

Martin Swords

The Shallowman

The Shallowman has friends
he counts as assets,
for favors he might need
from time to time.
He lists their skills and
contacts in his busy greedy mind.
He'll call them when he needs them
when next he's in a bind.

The Shallowman is jovial and great fun.
With tales, and yarns
he'll entertain the crowd
Backslapping, and backstabbing
he'll amuse and castigate all round
They'll laugh,
but not laugh with him.
The Shallowman can't read their hollow sound.

The Shallowman is lonely at the end
for all the hale and hearty cheer is false.
the friends when stripped of favours
don't deserve a second thought
the Shallowman can't see their worth
when they've nothing more to offer only friendship
and friendship by itself can't satisfy
his lonely shallow want.

MARTIN SWORDS, JUNE 1999

Martin Swords

The Smith

What is this magic you do?
Taming the fire
Bending the earth
Making beauty from brute strength
Giving death a sharp edge
Creating in your mind and fire
Tools and everydays that
Humblefolk might live in peace
Making death and making life
With the same hammerblows
Are you a god or a man
Or the spirit of earth and fire
That men fear and love you, Smith

Martin Swords March 2009

Martin Swords

The Valley Of The Two Lakes

The Valley of the Two Lakes

Walk slowly,
In slowly slanting sun
Down the Valley of the Two Lakes

Listen,
At rocks edge, ripples
Like a cat lapping

Watch,
As lazy heron casts
A fishy eye

All is quiet
All is still
In the Valley of the Two Lakes.

A Round Tower dizzy
Clicks and whirring
Picture everything
Picture the peace
Click the calm
Shout about the quiet
Record Replay Forget
Move on and never know

The sweet nothing
That is everything
In the Valley of the Two Lakes.

The Hermits knew
When they found it,
That nothing

But the Hand of God
Quietly touched
The Valley of the Two Lakes

Martin Swords May 2002

Glendalough, (Gaelic Gleann Da Lough glen of two lakes)
is a beautifull tranquil glacial valley in Co. Wicklow, Ireland.

Since approx. A.D.500 it has been a holy place, the site of a Hermitage and Monastery founded by St. Kevin.

I see it at its quietest and most peacefull, walking the dogs in the still of early morning. Sadly, too many visitors do not get to know the real spirit of Glendalough.

Martin Swords

The Walking Man

He used to be a Someone in the Firm
Used to snappy suits and natty ties
The white haired keen Exec.
Was tipped for progress,
The apple of the new Director's eye

A whispered indiscretion with expenses,
Hungover on the Presentation Day,
A hint of out-of–favour in the gossip,
Passed out by someone else's greedy progress.
The new Director won't return his calls.
He's on his way.

Freelance Consultant, everybody's at it,
It's quite the coming thing he hears them say
The Network's in good shape so what's the problem
He's cutting deals and setting up appointments
He's joined the Walking Men this very day.

The Walking Man is always on to something
With mobile phone and empty time to hand
His next deal's always just around the corner
He'll walk and phone and walk to make it land
Building hopes of future on an ever shifting sand.

The Walking Man sees former colleagues walking
Many other pin-stripes walking free
They cross the road avoiding bullshit meetings –
Telling each other lies that things are grand.
The last thing Walking Man wants
Is to meet himself and not like what he sees

Martin Swords Nov.2006

Martin Swords

This Is The Place

Where words and wisdom
Grow on trees
Rich ripe ready words
Falling on paper
Rhythms too are there
On branches, waving
In the wind
And thought bunches
Blossoming, scent
The air in this place
There are hills to climb
And wonder what's behind,
In this place
Water too is there,
Dripping, dripping
Slow, worrying a word
Into a rock

Martin Swords Oct.2007

Poetry Is The Place

Martin Swords

Time Was An Orange

Time was an orange
in a stocking was a treat.
Or maybe a banana.
Now it’s Star Fruits, Uglies
and Prickly Pears flown
round the world for dinner parties.
Hand picked gently by Josef
who has no shoes.
“No we can’t serve those again,
everybody has them.
We need the Jum Jum Fruit
grown only on the
western slopes of Kilimanjaro.
They’ll be a wow! ”
Like the fruit
we’ve come a long way.
Yet not far enough to know
the worth of an orange
in a hand knitted stocking.
But we’ll learn.

Martin Swords
Oct.2008

A sad reflection on the Celtic Tiger period in Ireland and elsewhere.
Maybe soon we'll be glad to have that Orange. Must start knitting
some stockings.

Martin Swords

TO A CROW

Despised Crow
Who loves you
But another Crow.
Blessed with ugly grace,
And coal scuttle call.
Strut like funeral folk
In suit of mourning,
Condemned to deal in death.
We cannot all be peacocks
Nor would want to.
Beauty is in the mind,
As some beholders see

Monochrome. Wow!
Ask any Crow

Martin Swords
April 2002

Martin Swords

to an insect on a windowsill

god you're ugly

and yet to another insect…..
who am i to feel superior
you're good at what you do
perfectly adapted to what you are
i couldn't cope in your life
and you can't drive a car
yet both our lives could be
stamped out in an instant
i know it and you perhaps
more blessed, can't
we are both alively
a little both the same
but god…..
you're still ugly

martin swords
june 2009

Martin Swords

To Ogden Nash, Poet, 1902 - 1971 A Tribute

For, From, and Because of
Ogden Nash,
Thanks

Nashing

I sit and read my Ogden Nash
Beneath my chestnut tree
The wind of inspiration blows
And wisdom falls on me
(and chestnuts too)

Olden Nash

Wisdom grows they say
With age, each passing day
At what age, in what theory
Does wisdom change to weary
Minds once bright begin to fade away

Robin Nash

A robin sits
And looks at me
"Have you any cake
For tea, I don't
Sing for free
You see"

Young Ogden

"Is Ogden coming out to play"
The other children called
Their names were Ungatt
Gilken, Fung, and hey!
They think Ogden's name's OK!

Martin Swords March 2006

Martin Swords

Verdun, Return

A letter came today…
He is coming home.
How long has it been…
Three years…nearly four…
We remember the day
he left. We took
the pony and trap to
Gorman's Bridge.
Not a real station,
a temporary halt to serve
the boys and men
who volunteered.
The sun shone, flags waved,
crowds cheered, and
the troops sang "Tipperary".
Sweethearts cried and
kissed, and cried again.
Whistles blew, the train
belched black and sooty,
omen like, on that sad dark
day of false fervour.

Innocence left that day in
a second class compartment.
It's a long long way, too
far, for King and Country,
for some that kissed that day
will never kiss again

Now he is coming home.
And we will kiss not once but
many times, a trainload of kisses.
For those with no return ticket

Martin Swords
May 2008
Wicklow Writers

Exercise, all given same first line and a choice of picture, in this case a steam train.

Martin Swords