

Poetry Series

**Kevin Kiely**  
**- poems -**

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# Kevin Kiely()

Kevin Kiely poet, novelist, literary critic, American Fulbright Scholar, and PhD in modernist and postmodernist poetry from University College Dublin – was born in County Down, Northern Ireland. His commentaries on literature, the arts and culture appear in main stream media such as Village Magazine (Ireland) and other publications.

## Selected Publications:

Quintesse St Martin's Press, New York 1985.

Mere Mortals Poolbeg/Odell & Adair 1989.

Plainchant for a Sundering (poem-sequence) Lapwing, Belfast 2001.

A Horse Called El Dorado O'Brien Press, 2005 Bisto Award.

Breakfast with Sylvia Lagan Press, Belfast 2006 awarded the Patrick Kavanagh Fellowship in Poetry. US Edition 2007.

Francis Stuart: Artist and Outcast Liffey Press, Dublin 2007; Dufour, PA 2008 Authorised and Official Biography.

The Welkinn Complex Number One Son, Florida, FL., 2011.

SOS Lusitania O'Brien Press (2012) 'One Book One Community' title for the Lusitania Centenary in 2015.

Plays produced by RTÉ include Children of No Importance and Multiple Indiscretions. Theatre productions include In This Supreme Hour at the Playhouse, Derry.

Selected Anthology Listings for Poetry: Something Sensational To Read in the Train foreword by Brendan Kennelly, Lemon Soap Press, 2005; Catullus: One Man of Verona ed. Ronan Sheehan, Farmar & Farmar Ltd 2010; Ends & Beginnings anthology eds. John Gery and William Pratt AMS Press Inc, New York 2011; A Map of Melancholy (long poem) in Windows Anthology eds. Heather Brett and Noel Monahan 2012; In Place of Love and Country eds. Richard Parker & John Gery Crater Press, London 2013.

kevinkielypoet wiki

# A Map Of Melancholy

To P.M.B.

1

The cut aches beneath eyelids of sky a glimpse of cherry red  
dusk light distorted through water in a glass, trees are sickly yellow  
in winter's killing ice, only the season of Zanna?symphony of trees swirl  
coiling uncoiling her hair, shoes nickel into silver along Rue Tillich  
in the purlieus of Rosenzweig Strasse within walking distance of fountains  
spray can graffiti, slick kitsch colour: tone koan but there is no continuing  
city, not only people but things get broken, elevators from the underworld  
to the bright vaulted halls where you clamber with others noisily, wearily  
while she stops in the conspiracy of streets mends a broken fingernail  
with a tiny brush and polish, twinned with each tree she passes  
through the park blonde hair subsumed in pink blossom, blown  
like strawberry cotton candy, her laugh at playful songs of love because  
for her it opens in the spectacle of a thousand starlings flying  
and her rowan berry lips open to smile in a sunbeam focus  
for to touch her heart is to feel life flowing as the fiery arrow  
of sunrise above a sleepless ocean of milk and is by the action  
of her hands suspended raised towards you and the trees move in turn  
moving sunlight and the seashell teeth that change into pearls  
while her voice ends the sonic of suffering where the extremity  
of feeling pours out flooding the senses and dreadlocked anxiety  
opens into what life, what bliss. The photograph at the Causeway  
of her diastemic smile against the breaking surf on rocks where  
metaphysics lose out to the sensual and she owns the heaving  
ocean and the jagged bedrock grotto that enshrines her cult, so you  
cannot think within this liquor of confusion yielding to laughter  
and what is her smile, she will not answer every persistent  
question directly, she wants it now and you better know what it  
is, the information is given in smiles, read them carefully and  
most of all life tells you what you see is perfect but as soon as you  
reveal this she will shrug ruefully in the ultimate sport and would  
you ever want it to end. In solitude such is theophany and solitude  
is stronger than songs about it, deeper than contemplation  
but who would neglect her for solitude.

2

I know that to reject most of what we are told will seem elitist

but when she talks there is more than plenitude beyond nature's bounty  
I don't believe anymore in soundbite it is abused, I don't accept your rejections  
of the sacred that I have tasted in her eyes and her voice which you fake  
in your many presentations. Go ahead manufacture your news & things but I  
may

spit on most of them because we are fleeting, you shall not lead me next  
door to doom you shall not make me fear what you honour.

I know our limbs are the cage and this song is free and felt from inside  
outside your strictures: this song is given forever by her to me, so world  
I say to you: go on your way without her or with her for she will be known,  
the one untorn seam and though you don't believe me, the untorn mind  
your world is your own in everything you sign but it is less than schedules  
or crumpled cups, you will never destroy my darling: you will never  
break me again in this life and her eyes shine at night beyond car lined  
avenues of despair, call this fanciful but it is true and holy as the truth  
that we are all one among the melancholy world of tears and woe  
our joy resounds in longing chains of loneliness and her shadow  
in pain shows the world transfigured beyond gloom.

3

She is alive more than time's apparent movement taking me with her  
more than time ever shall; life is not life as when travellers exhale and ask  
how much time have we got? I don't ask. I don't ask anything because she  
is in the Holograph and the Melancholograph, resplendent archive  
where time is a dimension an abandoned vista of cities on a sea  
bound by elliptical landmass linked to wider seas, therefore watchers  
from deep spaces have pity on us when the night is long and laden  
with luminous laptop windows and real pain below the forgotten livid sky  
looms and does not regulate, for even the zillions of stars on threads  
smoulder into powder and she shall not, she shall not leave me alone  
for dear life is not tawdry and living is not a feather plucked for extinction  
nor pain itself longing in purification of the blood in its own seascape towards  
vision which renders the pigeons flying from the seawall a visual quotation and  
the herons on the deepest rocks looking out to sea some salt encrusted mural  
on a medieval ship for if you had found the lost map with her the geography  
beyond the maelstrom and with widening gaze accepted in formidable strength  
that we are weak, we are dying, we are cinders already clinker less in sound than

castanets and when she turns to gaze into your eyes urgent as the time of night  
in the airport throng where lone purpose and intent, smoke-rooms foggy  
with swirling glass and the ouroboros invisible visible, orchestral melancholy  
trains speeding full entering the M-tunnel, the hem of the sea is not beautiful

then, neither lace nor silk desert dirt sand, threadbare grass oasis littered rivers  
in flood, the furrowed oceans of silent fish who stare aimless  
through their ceiling at the sun.

4

Nature hides mysteries in water and in the oceans that potentially reveal  
the spectacle, insubstantial to the spectator publicly watching in disbelief  
as mercurial moods calm crazy hollow displace and obliterate  
steadier modes of thought grimy blades of grass framed in ice  
and sculpted ice demigods tight shoes bearing their feet poised  
on the steel ridged steps still targets, time-beings, ghosts, limp hands  
on rubber handrails not always elliptical, moving these creatures  
after such a night, in clothes from stage screen and store to the percussion  
of turnstile check-out, adagio of talk, the partial resolve of the known transaction

coffee bakery aroma of kiosks, luggage on wheels, life's hectic spiel, serious  
gloomy

sorry faces mocked by weeds and vinegar rain. There is only one journey  
and it is to her smile, to the angel threaded strands of her hair in the sun  
to a cup she graced with her mouth and tongue, to a grove of cherry trees  
she planted for peace, to her house on a hill above a divided city where she  
looked

on killing, and her eyes and actions kept a glow beneath the darkness.

No?no?no?

no?no, I tell you I have been within her sacred grove and we shall not be burned  
like the combustibles when the grey smoke of bitumen throbs among  
the vertebrae of flames and the stench is hell, for to be touched by her  
is healing and in an instant all pain, all death, all longing disappears  
and in her eyes and voice is the resolution of the quest while in her kiss  
a true home emerges for this earth that baffles astounds, repels  
and yet astonishes in its chant, fix your eyes on her gaze and this is  
easily done, ask nothing of her as the tar barrels burn and the city  
is shaken in quakes as if time stops the ripples of blood that form in pools  
it is not blood it is wine from the vat, no more no more, every blown leaf  
and flower calls you out to her: all is resolved we have not been created  
for horror solely and the cause only known in part so let the complete  
resolution in your eyes merge with her rippling smile within without  
while nature shines and we will know, let me repeat we will know before  
we die: it is told in the pools of her eyes into which I move down behind  
a waterfall to a volcanic marble entrance that opens where starlings beat  
warmth and music from their wings, the goat chews grass for its green wine  
cherry trees cast their fruit into baskets, the stage set house where she comes

to the window wild, wide-eyed, beckoning and my name on her open lips.

Note: (i) An early draft of John Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' begins: "The cut aches..."

Kevin Kiely

# Art's Festival

Across at the pub some local Michaelangelo  
Has muralised you in a suit on cloud nine  
A sort of Sligo in Heaven  
Executed with naive lumps of paint

The journalist, the peacock scholar, the piss artist  
Made their carnival on high stools  
About your moved bones in happy Drumcliffe  
Willie, the most holy last lovely Romantic  
The skipper at home his spirit soaring

Indeed I felt no need to curse your bones  
Near the upturned huge boat of Bulben  
Or your epitaph from Shakespeare's Timon  
Festive ghost—cast a cold eye on poetry

Kevin Kiely

# Belfield Metaphysical

The sky is a mere exhibition in pools of rain until the sun  
unfolds the froth of clouds casting off cosmic oceans  
of light and without horizon limitless, where there is silence

No sense and white grains sifting infinitesimally tiny  
winds of light, fine salt of light that does not blind the eyes  
because seeing is seeing more than ever in distance

If not forever, endless in dimensions beyond comprehension  
there is no heat or sound. Silence: the obverse of the world.  
Where is this zone? The return, with tactile contact at the railings

The overpass balcony: noise of cars and trucks below—  
a wet ash twig studded with black seeds, ivory bark in  
ordinary sunlight: leaf-bows, lettuce green, edible in beauty

The unread gashes on the bark, this key-twig to re-open saturday  
pulp crumbs blow along the beaches of the world  
forming in books and dissolving in dust and into books again

So much missing prosaic terza rima sentinel of the shelves  
there is not a bright grain on the photocopy, metaphors will fit  
not fit, lame language, scratches of pen on train tickets, words on the dull

White page desktop from pressed keys: through a portal of silver  
fleece the aircraft banks to climb stairs of clouds, levels off—  
the horizon's walls are lit with streams of leaking light

The jolt that suggests speed beyond dials. The ache of longing:  
take me away finally from all this, take me home from each  
day's lost and found, the sulphur of solitude

The wealth of her mirrored who heals the naked chaos.  
Anyone will tell you there is the trouble with Medusa,  
and Medea's hatred is not exceptional. The quest for Moneta

is a path through fear between the flint of conflict  
and the night of eureka. Behind the hours is essential cold  
the candle looks back to centuries, the flame makes the room a cave



These books speak scenes of innocent love with new dialogue in dreams

Kevin Kiely

# Breakfast With Sylvia Plath

1.

in Café Insomnia, anaemic sunlight  
traffic outside  
the rain flecked picture window  
sizzling bacon, eggs wide eyed  
frying on the gas

the face by turns, almond pale and fire bright  
a streak of lip paint on the brilliant teeth  
she eyes the menu in a seething force-nine rage  
her conversation post modern in its tangled sense

...bad dreams about a hare  
run over by a Morris estate wagon  
driven by Edward Hughes  
his Meinkampf look (his cock runneth over)  
the car with a split screen  
two steering wheels, one for her father, Otto  
who skinned a rat in front of his students  
cooked, and ate it

I won't mention that awful weevil of a woman  
I will never speak to God again

Edward Hughes should have  
scratched on my tombstone:  
it was a fight to the death  
she or I  
had to die  
something of me died with her.

2.

Sivvy ordered  
from the tightly clenched menu  
pointing with a bandaged thumb

two glasses of milk and bread  
nothing else, thank you  
the waitress moved off

other tables were served hot food  
but the bee keeper's daughter  
shrill in convulsive chatter  
shaken through the air  
crackling with blue light  
her bones almost wrenched from the muscles  
as if, at any moment the jelly would spill out

fingered a piece of bread,  
but did not eat, her milk untouched  
then another mood swing:  
I lost an overcoat and keys  
but I had a spare set—  
I sucked but not for long  
the sweet and sickly atmosphere  
of 23 Fitzroy Road, London NW1

on the wall  
outside the front door  
a blue plaque to W. B. Yeats  
which I knew  
was mine too  
when I became Christ and Keats

place a dozen yellow roses  
in the empty oven, door open  
towel inside for a pillow

O my children

Kevin Kiely

# Cypress

Cypress—  
you stand proud  
giraffe-pride

and with disdain  
if you had eyes  
your limbs

aloft towards the Roman blue sky  
and your dome of hair  
makes you human, seasonal

with tufts of grey  
you are vain cypress  
with a green sneer

do you really raise clouds  
with those streaked limbs and branches  
do you shake the banner of swallows

a fluttering black dragon net  
and healing bird music  
with expansive grandeur

above the city  
but you, cypress are unimpressed  
since we need each other

amidst the enduring magnificence  
the possibility that all is mystery  
let us share the spoils, many ruins

have ghosts that long for restoration  
trees flourish eternally where the poet  
walked you stand in line and adorn

I sing of you and make your name  
while you grant me song  
we are friends in spectacle

read in cycles of history  
and the sun's corona  
least in the fields of  
emotional life

Kevin Kiely

# Homage To Thomas Macgreevy

Pound praised you in a letter  
'promising' typed Ezra  
Not in the cast of thousands  
In those necropolypytic Cantos  
Yesterday a slim volume of real poems  
The surprise of some translations  
All wrapped in acknowledgements annotations  
and an introduction

The cool gallery lit by many a gem  
A Poussin amongst them  
Beside your portrait by O'Sullivan  
The speakers at the launch  
Tried to answer some questions  
About the long silence on your part  
Bound by the laws of Baudelaire  
The Holy Spirit of Creation  
The need to sign cheques  
The civil servicing of Art

Afterwards at Toque Poussin  
Someone remarked sadly:  
He went down with a touch of the Rimbaud's  
I pray to Tom who was a kind of saint  
And a patriot.  
The waitress spoke English badly  
There was plenty of ice  
Our coffee delayed  
While old café songs of Paris were played  
Would this city suffice?

Kevin Kiely

# House Of Figs

the 'Inbox' lights up with 'Bethany' and clarions like room service  
from the distant past: 'Ride the shock waves of changes,  
full circles, and settling or shaken perspectives...'

the feverish reply launched into the echoing miles of ether  
towards Washington in the Pacific North West:

'how bleak the backlit Plutonian shores of Sligo...'

I am conflicted between images of you: one is the female  
crucified Jesus. Sunday school revolt, ideational acting out  
of the repeated headline: 'Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani'  
a saddle of calligraphy on each thigh from the ink-jetting pen

anoint these sheets with the mask of your face  
strut those ghostly blue outline tattoos of Kentucky:  
the speeding boxcar, the saltshaker amidst healed scars  
and burns, while civilized life inscribed in law  
demands life be lived: 'Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani'—  
what kind of lawful life produced  
a phrenology on your Lempicka thighs  
in the white room that grew goose-flesh walls  
the cuts around kneecaps released the flowing  
lifelines of wine down your sloping limbs

and through you, a lover can enter the house of figs  
the hazel eyes of the sphinx burn with fiery gems  
one eye for sunrise, the other sunset  
from where does our hope, our joy, our ecstasy come—  
from our tragedy, is your answer. Yet, your post-romantic  
'goodbye until.' Turning into the alley with a wilting hand  
'some things last a long time.' The moon shines stark  
from a broken cloud illuminating the goddess and  
her incense cigarette. 'Some things last forever.'

I shall rise from the dead by your anointing  
I shall not need to ask of this world in this world:  
shall any woman forgive our desertion? shall any woman  
forgive herself for falling in love with a man?  
and the leaves of the fig tree  
shroud their fruit in the gale, beyond tragedy





# Observe The Poe-Heads Of Ulster Marching Towards Faber & Faber

I give you two fingers in a definite V for victory  
This art thrives on excellence: not wet-turf stack poetry  
I could never dig with Seamus's sheep-shaped head  
And between forefinger and thumb hold a laptop instead

These careerist Norn Iron poets hijacked language to build a lego-fake  
Hyped up rural idolatry parading as literary earthquake  
While Charlie Monteith fawned on the London Literary Press via Faber & Faber  
British guilt exalted a daisy chain of re-verse-men smudging on Paper & Paper  
Frog-marching poeds cashed-in as civil rights fought wrongs in the North  
Alone: the real suffering people linked broken arms and marched forth

In a dirty tricks fix vacuous movement of empty mouth  
Akin to many of the mushroom-dolmen presses in the South  
Fitted green carpet-poets finding a slim volume audience at home  
Nostalgia for farm, kitchen, pigsty, and the sub-Kavanagh bog-longing poem

Imagine bleating sheep dressed in homespun ill-fitting woolly kilts  
And dull little po-hems like turf-smoke signals, basically: stilted verse on stilts  
But this cunning clique worked up a jumble of politics to blame and shame us  
And a pretence to proxy history while their aim was fame and be famous  
They made ideal Media fillers betwixt the Troubles and Full Page Ads  
A bunch of self-exiled, non-artistic have-nots and talentless-never-hads

Rising on the sectarian tide, implying they were speaking for their people  
As they pumped up their Plastic Paddy Parnassian Folkloric steeple  
Parading dialect as a hallmark: yet, overtly steeped in political journalese  
Fooling many with their coughs and preambles and non-literature-tease  
Nothing more than a crinkle suited hackademic phalanx pulling strings  
Through insider institutional congregational readings  
Keeping their bleary dreary eyes on the Guardian, TLS and the BBC  
London, Boston, New York, the Irish Times and RTÉ

These pretender dumb-pome-men with exported clipped tones  
Poe-Biz behind the scenes & bookings on the phones  
Ambassadorial culture-salesfolk who traded IN their native NI  
Hotly pursuing reputations for which they would die

Rather than spend a week in Belfast, Armagh or Derry  
Unless with a film crew, taxis, and dinners preceded by Tio Pepe Fino sherry

These were the dry-wall poet-spoofs, truly northern, truly rooted  
Never beaten, jailed, bombed out, harassed or hooted  
Living safely and squarely in Southern Ireland vainly and gainly  
Writing North of North about its pastoral landscape mainly  
Metaphor gone mad, slack cadenced vocality of the locality  
A poetry of fauna, flora and the threshing machine's practicality

These were a Fallacy all in one queue:  
Paulin & Murphy & Mahon & Montague  
Heaney & Longley & Bugaboo Muldoon  
Inhabiting their Shangri-La-La Land  
North by North of Pseudo-Brigadoon  
Frauds posing with putrid books in hand  
Soft-slippered yodelers out of tune

Never exposed for being right royal hypocrites  
Poking poetry-hams at home, at America and at peace-loving mainland Brits  
Ireland's self-styled scribe-heroes spewing fashionable green ink  
Of ploughs, potatoes, hayforks, yokel-clichés and the jawbox sink  
Pulling a fast one with nod and wink  
Smarter than their public don't you think  
They connived, cajoled and curried favour  
These cowards abandoned their next door neighbour  
And are outed here for their Caper & Caper  
Observe that the poe-headers of Ulster marched towards Faber & Faber

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Kevin Kiely

# Parnassus

Professor-poet invited  
the Mexican poet, the Indian poet and the Jamaican poet  
to his house for dinner  
greeting them with  
'The rumours of my being famous are greatly exaggerated.'

Professor-poet's wife had also invited  
neighbours, a he-poet and a she-poet  
who brought along their baby daughter.  
During dinner the Mexican poet announced  
that he had two sons  
                            who were  
  fine young poets.

Professor-poet asked the she-poet  
'Will your daughter be a poet when she grows up? '  
She may well be, was the answer.  
Later she asked him when he spoke of his two sons  
'Do you think there will be a poet in either of them? '  
He confidently replied,  
'probably in both.'

Kevin Kiely

# Shakespeare & Co

George rules from his riverside bookshop  
four storeys high along rue de la Bûcherie  
Proudly claiming Walt Whitman as his ancestor—  
Shelf after laden-shelf rising like wine racks in the city  
The roving eye can soft focus anywhere—  
a Faber translation of Laments by Jan Kochanowski

for free accommodation upstairs—you must read a book a day  
tend the shop now and then, live on pancakes  
chocolate croissants or whatever your budget will allow—  
two Londoners outside the kitchen on clarinet and fiddle  
play Jazz suite No 2 (Shostakovich)

George seems oblivious among the backpacked youth at table  
facing a cracked plate  
a fork with sugar on the prongs and a pot of honey (miel)  
as he plans another week's rota  
for this Shangri-la  
where the living and the dead  
confront each other

Kevin Kiely

# The Uncrucified Buddha

He squats all gold  
unpierced by nails—  
head crowned by sunlight  
no blood stains, no spear or vinegar  
hand raised, the scent of rosewater

you must sit  
like a withered tree before a cliff  
and be absolutely quiet in concentration

the fragile flesh is sheer gold  
tingling with diamonds  
the seed-blossoms of the body  
float upwards into empty space

inside—outside are equally lit  
the eyes begin to blaze  
and everything brightens  
as if you were in a cloud and felt no gravity

the golden flower is crystallized

and desires cause freefall  
as you go through delusions undestroyed  
and contemplate the emptiness at the centre  
being empty is the strongest delusion

Kevin Kiely

# To Conjure Up

I went absent leaving you for Chicago  
The hotel became a hospital  
I signed my committal form at reception

At the Sears Tower in the elevator,  
A silver walled room, powered by jet engines  
Thrust me with strangers to the 110th floor

From this height through the windows - the lights  
In the towers of the city, the moving lights  
Of traffic and street lights still, far below.

A snowy cloud passed across the window, dimming  
The scene of the black and the lights and the towers  
With you missing I could only conjure you up.  
And then I said: I will give you all of this city

Below us from this mad height if you bow down  
And adore me. I bow down and adore you by the waters  
of Lake Michigan breaking and breaking in waves without salt

And she said: I will bow down and adore you.  
So I gave her the city  
With pleasure I gave her the city of Chicago

Kevin Kiely

## When It's Over—(Old Sonnet Form)

I've lost you then or is it you've lost me  
and once more on the newsfront what a mess  
I did, you did go deep we both felt free  
it's wiser not to damn but somehow bless  
the will's the way go onwards, all that stuff  
life's beyond belief and might have been  
not long now you know and that's no bluff  
who'll keep me clear, unseen and seen  
how far, how far and then how soon it's done  
after the feast, the vinegar until  
new gossip and in the memory of two or one  
cool reason, lessens the bitter pill  
It's nice to keep in touch and have a friend  
Forget, look up, remember there's an end

Kevin Kiely