

SOME POEMS - ROGHA DÁNTA

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Liz Berry

SOUTHWOR^QRD*editions*

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Bird

When I became a bird, Lord, nothing could not stop me.

The air feathered
as I knelt
by my open window for the charm –
black on gold,
last star of the dawn.

Singing, they came:
throistles, jenny wrens,
jack squalors swinging their anchors through the clouds.

My heart beat like a wing.

I shed my nightdress to the drowning arms of the dark,
my shoes to the sun's widening mouth.

Bared,
I found my bones hollowing to slender pipes,
my shoulder blades tufting down.
I spread my flight-greedy arms
to watch my fingers jewelling like ten hummingbirds,
my feet callousing to knuckly claws.
As my lips calcified to a hooked kiss

silence

then an exultation of larks filled the clouds
and, in my mother's voice, chorused:
Tek flight, chick, goo far fer the Winter.

So I left girlhood behind me like a blue egg
and stepped off
from the window ledge.

Éan

Nuair a d'íompaíos im éan, a Thiarna, ní stopfadh faic mé.

Deineadh cleití den aer
is mé ar mo dhá ghlúin
le hais na fuinneoige oscailte d'aoibhneas éirí gréine -
dubh leagtha ar ór
an réiltín deiridh roim' breacadh lae.

Thánadar, is iad ag amhrán:
an chéirseach, an dreoilín
fáinleoga ag iompar a gcuid ancairí tríd na néalta

Chas mo chroí mar a bheadh cleite.

Scaoileas m'éadach leapan le géaga báite an dorchadais,
mo bhróga le béal oscailteach gréine.

Nocht
d'aimsíos mo chnámha cuasacha ina bpíopaí caol,
mo shlinneáin ag gobadh síos.
Leathas mo lámha eitleacha shantacha
chun súil a chaitheamh ar mo mhéireanta ag glioscar mar a bheadh
deich gcinn de dhordeáin,
mo chosa crua ina gcrág go hailt méire.

Is mo bheola ina gcloch crua isteach i bpóg cam

tost

ansan líonann ceiliúradh na fuinseoige na scamail
agus, i nguth mo mháthar, dúradar le chéile:

Tek flight, chick, goo far fer the Winter.

Mar sin d'fhágas mo chailínteacht ar nós ubh ghorm
is thógas céim amach

thar tairseach na fuinneoige.

Bhíos chomh headtrom

is iad dom' iompar as Nead an Dreoilín
thar phortaigh coinchréit is guail.

Chonac mo mháthair críonna ag beannú sa bhuaille
iompaithe
timpeall naoínra is monarchan,
ligeadh do leoithne bhog mé thabhairt amach thar
cósta.

Mar chorrán gealaí d'eitlíos

batarálta agus gan port

d'iompaigh na stoirmeacha isteach is amach ar buille
ní raibh smut beag dem chorp nár bhéic.

Go dtí go mbraitheas ar deireadh é airde binne mo sciatháin
agus d'aithníos mo ghuth
gan a bheith foclach ach ina hamhrán dubh ar dhubh

D'árdaíos mo scórnach i gcoinne na gaoithe
is seo an méid a chanas.....

Birmingham Roller

“We spent our lives down in the blackness... those birds brought us up to the light.”

(Jim Showell – *Tumbling Pigeons and the Black Country*)

Wench, yowm the colour of ower town:
concrete, steel, oily rainbow of the cut.

Ower streets am in yer wings,
ower factory chimdeys plumes on yer chest,

yer heart’s the china ower owd girls dust
in their tranklement cabinets.

Bred to dazzlin in backyards by men
whose onds grew soft as feathers

just to touch you, cradle you from egg
through each jeth-defying tumble.

Little acrobat of the terraces,
we’m winged when we gaze at you

jimmucking the breeze, somersaulting through
the white breathed prayer of January

and rolling back up like a babby’s yo-yo
caught by the open donny of the clouds.

Colúr Rollach Bhirmingham

“We spent our lives down in the blackness... those birds brought us up to the light.”

(Jim Showell - *Tumbling Pigeons and the Black Country*)

A strapaire, tú dath ár mbaile:
coincréit, cruach, bogha sín íle an ghearradh.

Ár sráideanna in bhur gcuid sciatháin
smúit os cionn simléithe monarcha ar do bhrollach,

do chroí i bhféiríní smúiteacha na gcailíní
ina gcófraí d’áilleagáin glóracha.

Fáiscithe i ndallachar na bhfear i gcúl gharraithe
ar ar leáigh a lámha chomh bog le cleití

go leagaidís láimh ort ón ubh
trí gach iomrascáil caol bháis.

A chleasaí na n-ardán
is sciathánach sinne ad’ fhaire

ag pocadaíl gaoithe, tóin thar ceann
tré phaidir fhuar bhán mhí Eanáir

ag bogadh aníos arís mar dódí linbh
i mbreith láimh na scamail oscailte.

Christmas Eve

Tonight the Black Country is tinselled by sleet falling on the little towns lit up in the darkness like constellations – the Pigeon, the Collier – and upon the shooting stars of boy racers who comet through the streets in white Novas. It's blowing in drifts from the pit banks, over the brown ribbon of the cut, over Beacon Hill, through the laploved chimneys of the factories. Sleet is tumbling into the lap of the plastercast Mary by the manger at St Jude's, her face gorgeous and naive as the last Bilston carnival queen.

In the low-rise flats opposite the cemetery, Mrs Showell is turning on her fibre-optic tree and unfolding her ticket for the rollover lottery *though we ay never 'ad a bit o luck in ower lives* and upstairs in the box-rooms of a thousand semis hearts are stuttering and minds unravelling like unfinished knitting.

And the sleet fattens and softens to snow, blanking the crowded rows of terraces and their tiny hankies of garden, white now, surrendering their birdfeeders and sandpits, the shed Mick built last Autumn when the factory clammed up.

And the work's gone again and the old boys are up at dawn to clock on nowhere except walk their dogs and sigh at the cars streaming to call centres and supermarkets *because there ay nuthin in it that's mon's werk, really bab, there ay...*

But it's coming down now, really coming over the stands at the Molinuex, over Billy Wright kicking his dreams into the ring road and in the dark behind the mechanics the O'Feeney's boy props his BMX against the lock-ups

Oíche Nollag

Anocht tá na Críocha Dubha maisithe le flichshneachta
ag titim ar na bailte beaga lasta sa dorchadas
mar a bheadh réaltbhuíonta - an Colúr, an Soitheach Guail -
ar réalta reatha na boy racers
is iad ag imeacht ar nós cóiméadaí tríd na sráideanna ina Novas bána.
Tá sé ag imeacht i bhfeacht ós na claiseanna,
tharis ribín donn an ghearradh, tharis Beacon Hill,
tré shimléithe na monarcha.
Titeann flichshneachta i mbaclainn Mhuire na bplástar
le hais mhainséir Naomh Jude, a gnúis aoibhinn, chomh saonta
le banraíon na scléipe i mBilston.
Sna hárasáin íseal airdeach le hais na reilige
tá Mrs Showell ag casadh ar siúl a crann solas-bhuan
is ag oscailt páipéir an ticéad lotto
though we ay never 'ad a bit of luck in ower lives
thuas staighre sna bosca-sheomraí beaga i míle semi-d
tá croíthe stadach is gach aigne ag sceitheadh
mar a bheadh cniotáil scaoilte.
Ramhraíonn an flichshneachta is bogann go sneachta,
ag clúdach na sraitheanna ardáin
lena ngairdíní bídeacha, bán anois, ag scaoileadh
a gcuid cothaitheoirí éin is a loganna gainnimhe, an shed a thóg Mick
an Fomhar seo d'imigh tharainn nuair a mhaolaigh an mhonarcha.
Is tá deireadh leis an obair arís
na seana leaideanna éirithe leis an ngréin gan iad ag clockáil isteach ina
aon áit
seachas a ngadhair a thabhairt ag siúl is ag ligint osna
an fhaid is a dhíríonn na cairteacha ar call centres agus ollmhargaí
because there ay nuthin in it that's mon's werk,
really bab, there ay...
Tá sé anuas díreach anois, ag titim
ar na seastáin ag an Molinuex, thar Bhillly Wright
ag lascadh a bhrionglóidí isteach sa chuar bhóthar
is sa dorchadas laistiar des na meicneoirí

and unzips to piss a flower into the snow
well gi me strength Lord, to turn the other cheek
for we'm the only ones half way decent round ere
and the tower blocks are advent calendars,
every curtain pulled to reveal a snow-blurred face.
And it's Christmas soon, abide it or not,
for now the pubs are illuminated pink and gold
The Crooked House, Ma Pardoos, The Struggling Mon
and snow is filling women's hair like blossom
and someone is drunk already and throwing a punch
and someone is jamming a key in a changed lock
shouting *fer christ's sake, Myra, yo'll freeze me to jeth*
and a hundred new bikes are being wrapped in sheets
and small pyjamas warmed on fireguards
and children are saying *one more minute, just one, Mom*
and the old girls are watching someone die on a soap
and feeling every snow they've ever seen set in their bones.
It's snowing on us all
and I think of you, Eloise, down there in your terrace,
feeding your baby or touching his hand to the snow
and although we can't ever go back or be what we were
I can tell you, honestly, I'd give up everything I've worked for
or thought I wanted in this life,
to be with you tonight.

leagann ógánach des na O'Feeney's an BMX i gcoinne na lock-ups
scaoileann a mhún i lorg bláth isteach sa sneachta
well gi me strength Lord, to turn the other cheek
for we'm the only ones half way decent round ere
agus iompaíonn na tús bhlocanna ina bhféilirí Aidbhinte,
gach cuirtín ag nochtadh gnúis ina mhearbhall sneachta.
Sí'n Nollaig í go luath, seas leis nó ná dein
mar anois tá na tabhairní lasta i mbándearg is ór
The Crooked House, Ma Pardoes, The Struggling Man
líonann sneachta folt mnáibh mar a bheadh bláth
tá duine éigin ar a chaid cheana féin, ag caitheamh slash
is tá duine ag sá eochair i ndoras athruithe
ag béiceach *fer christ's sake, Myra, yo'll freeze me to jeth*
is filltear céad rothar nua in éadaí leapan
téitear cultacha oíche beaga ar an sciath thine
is deir na leanaí *one more minute, just one, Mom*
na cailíní fásta ag faire ar dhuine éigin ag fáil bháis i sobaldráma
ag brath gach titim sneachta riamh ina gcuid cnámha.
Tá sé ag cur sneachta orainn ar fad
is smaoiním ortsa, Eloise, thíos ar d'ardán,
tú ag cothú do linbh nó ag cur a mhéir sa sneachta
is cé nach féidir linn filleadh ar an t-am a d'imigh thart
abraím, go macánta, thabharfainn suas gach rud a dheineas
nó pé rud a cheapas a bheith uaim
le bheith leatsa anocht.

Sow

“Dainty footwear turns a young lady into an altogether more beautiful creature...”

(*Etiquette for Ladies* - Eliza Sell)

Trottering down the oss road in me new hooves
I'm farmyardy sweet, fresh from the filth
of straw an' swill, the trembly-leg sniff
of the slaughter wagon. A guzzler, gilt.
Trollopy an' canting. Root yer tongue beneath
me frock an' gulp the brute stench of the sty.

I've stopped denying meself: nibbling
grateful as a pet on baby-leaves, afeared
of the glutton of belly an' rump. I've sunk
an when lads howd out opples on soft city palms
I guttle an' spit, for I need a mon
wi' a body like a trough of tumbly slop
to bury me snout in.

All them saft years of hiding at 'ome
then prancing like a pony for some sod to bridle
an' shove down the pit, shying away
from 'is dirty fists. All them nights,
me eyes rolling white in the dark when the sow I am
was squailin an' biting to gerrout.

Now no mon dare scupper me,
nor fancy-arse bints, for I've kicked the fence
an' I'm riling on me back in the muck,
out of me mind wi' grunting pleasure,
trotters pointing to the heavens like chimdey pots,
sticking V to the cockerel
prissy an' crowing on 'is high church spire.

Cráin

“Dainty footwear turns a young lady into an altogether more beautiful creature...”

(*Etiquette for Ladies* - Eliza Sell)

Ag sodar síos an t-sráid im chrúba nua
táim blas-mhilis feirmiúil, úr ón mbrocamas
tuí is tarraing, anáil cos chlaonta
leoraí an áir. Pótaire, bréag-dhromchlach.
Striapach is tamáilteach. Fréamhaigh do theanga
fém éadach is anáil isteach boladh salach an phraisigh.

Stopas á shéanadh: ag cogaint
chomh buíoch le peata ar dhuilleoga beaga, eaglach
roim' chraosaireacht boilg is tóin. Shúncálas
is nuair a chrústaigh na leaids úlla ina lámha boga catharach
d'itheas ar nós muc ag caitheamh seile, mar tá boc uaimse
go bhfuil aige corp cosúil le umar doirtiúil sceitheach
go dtochlóin mo shrón ann.

Blianta fada boga i bhfolach sa bhaile
ag pleidhcíocht mar a bheadh pony d'iallait stúmpa éigin
go sáfaí síos isteach sa chró mé ag cúthail
roim' na dornacha salacha. Na hoícheanta sin
mo shúile iompaithe bán sa dorchadas is an chráin ionam
ag scréachaigh is ag alpadh go bhfaighinn éalú.

Anois ní chuirfidh aon fhear ó mhaith mé,
aon ghearchaile ard-nósach, mar stracas an clái
ar chlár mo dhroma sa phloda
as mo mheabhair le gnúsachtaíl áthais,
crúibíní chun na spéire mar a bheadh simléithe
ag léiriú V i dtreo an choilligh
ceartaiseach ag crónán ar spíce ard an teampaill.

Black Country

Commuters saw it first, vast
on the hillside by the A41,
a wingless Pegasus, hooves
kicking road into the distance.

It had appeared over night.
A black shadow on the scrub,
galloping above the gates
of the derelict factories,

facing East, towards the pits,
mouth parted as if it would
swallow the sun that rose
from behind the winding gear.

Word spread. Crowds gathered.
Kids, someone said,
but when they examined its flanks
they found pure coal,

coal where none had been mined
in years, where houses
still collapsed into empty shafts
and hills bore scars.

A gift from the underworld,
hauling the past
from the dead earth. Old men
knelt to breath the smoke

of its mane, whisper
in its ear, walked away
in silence, fists clenched,
faces streaked with tears.

Na Críocha Dubha

Taistealaithe a chonac ar dtús é, leathan
taobh sléibhe le hais an A4,
Pegasus gan sciatháin, crúba
ag baint smúite an bhóthair amach uaidh.

D'fhás sé thar oíche
scáil dhubh ar an gcoimín fairsing
a chosa in airde os cionn geataí
na monarchana iata,

aghaidh Soir, i dtreo na poill guail
béal crochta mar a bheadh sé
ag alpadh na gréine a d'éirigh
laistiar den bhfearas lúbach.

Bhí an scéal amuigh. Bhailigh sluaite.
Leanaí, a dúirt duine éigin,
ach nuair a scrúdaíodar cliatháin an chapaill
thánadar ar fíor ghual,

gual áit ná raibh sé ar fáil
le blianta, áit gur sciorr tithe fós
isteach i bpoill mianaigh folamha
créacht ar na cnoic go fóill.

Bronntannas ón domhan thíos
ag tarrac an t-am a chuaigh thart
ón gcré marbh. Chuaigh seana leaids
ar a nglúine is bholaíodar an deatach

óna fholt, cogar
ina chluais, shiúlaíodar leo
go tostach, lámha faisicthe.
a ngnúis breac le deora.

Homing

For years you kept your accent
in a box beneath the bed,
the lock rusted shut by hours of elocution
how now brown cow
the teacher's ruler across your legs.

We heard it escape sometimes,
a guttural *uh* on the phone to your sister,
soft or *blart* to a taxi driver
unpacking your bags from his boot.
I loved its thick drawl, g's that rang.

Clearing your house, the only thing
I wanted was that box, jemmied open
to let years of lost words spill out –
bibble, fittle, tay, wum,
vowels ferrous as nails, consonants

you could lick the coal from.
I wanted to swallow them all: the pits,
railways, factories thunking and clanging
the night shift, the red brick
back-to-back you were born in.

I wanted to forge your voice
in my mouth, a blacksmith's furnace;
shout it from the roofs,
send your words, like pigeons,
fluttering for home.

Glaio

Choimeádais do bhlais i dtaisce ar feadh blianta
i mbosca fén leabaigh
glas meirgeach dúnta ag uaireanta fhada deaslabhra
how now brown cow
is slash an mhúinteora ar do cholapaí.

Chualaíomar é teite uait ar uairibh
glór siar ón scórnach uait ar an bhfón chuig do dheirfiúr
soft nó *blart* do thiománaí tacsáí
ag baint do mhálaí ón mboot
Bhreá liom an síneadh leathan, g'eanna ina nglór leathan tiubh.

Ag folamhú do thigh, ní raibh uaim
ach an bosca sin, tochailte oscailte
chun blianta d'fhoclaibh cailte a scaoileadh amach -
bibble, fittle, tay, wum,
gutaí chomh h-iarniúil le tairní, consain

go líobfá an ghual astu.
Go gcaithfinn siar gach rud: na claiseanna,
na bóithre iarainn, glór mór na monarchana
na meithle oíche, an bhríce dearg
drom-ar-dhrom inar rugadh tú.

Go ngaibhnín do ghuth
im bhéal, lasair na gceártan;
é bhéiceach ó dhíonta tí,
ag seoladh do chuid focail, mar cholúir
ag eitlíocht abhaile.

The Year We Married Birds

That year, with men turning thirty
still refusing to fly the nest,
we married birds instead.

Migrating snow buntings
swept into offices in the city,
took flocks of girls for Highland weddings.

Magpies smashed jewellers' windows,
kites hovered above bridal shops,
a pigeon in Trafalgar Square learnt to kneel.

Sales of nesting boxes soared.
Soon cinemas were wild as woods in May
while restaurants served worms.

By June, a Russian kittiwake wed
the Minister's daughter, gave her two
freckled eggs, a mansion on a cliff.

My own groom was a kingfisher:
enigmatic, bright. He gleamed in a metallic
turquoise suit, taught me about fishing

in the murky canal. We honeymooned
near the Wash, the saltmarshes
booming with courting bittern.

When I think of that year, I remember best
the fanning of his feathers
on my cheek, his white throat,

how every building, every street rang
with birdsong. How girls' wedding dresses
lifted them into the trees like wings.

An Bhliain A Phósamar Éin

An bhliain sin, is fir le cois na dtriocharaí
ag diúltú eitilt ón nead,
phósamar éin in ionad.

Sheol gealóga shneachta imirceacha
isteach in oifigí na cathrach,
thóg ealta cailíní do phóstaíochta sna Garbhchríocha.

Bhris snaganna breaca fuinneoga seodóra,
chuaigh gach cúr ar foluain os cionn siopaí brídeoige,
d'umhlaigh colúr i Trafalgar Square ar a ghlúine.

Ba mhór an díolachán ar bhoscaí neadaireachta
De réir a chéile deineadh coillte fiáine Bealtaine as pictiúrlanna
agus péisteanna á gcur ar an mbord i mbialainne.

Ar theacht an Mheithimh, phós saidhbhéar Rúiseach
iníon an Mhinistéara, bhronn uirthi dhá
ubh bhreac, tig mór ar bharr faille.

Ba chruidín mo ghrúm fhéin:
diamhair, cliste. Las sé i gculaith
mhíotalach ghlas ghorm, mhúin iascach dom

sa chanáil gruama. Chuamar ar mhí na meala
in aice an Wash, an riasc goirt
glórach le cúirtéireacht na mbonnán.

Nuair a smaoiním ar an bhliain sin, is fearr is cuimhin liom
scaipeadh a chleití
ar mo aghaidh, a scórnach bhán,

an slí inar chan gach foirgneamh, gach sráid
le ceol na n-éan. An slí inar árdaiigh gúnaí pósta na gcailíní
isteach sna crainn mar a bheadh sciatháin.

Miss Berry

I have learnt to write rows of o's bobbing
hopeful as hot air balloons from the line's tethers

and watched eight Springs of frogspawn
grow legs but never...

and conducted clashy-bashy orchestras
of chime bars ocarina thundering tambour

and curled my hand over another hand
to hinge the crocodile jaws of the scissors.

I have accompanied a small mourning party
to a blackbird's burial plot

and rolled countless bodies, like coloured marbles,
across gym mats

and conducted science's great experiments
using darkened cupboards, plastic cups and cress

and unhooked a high window on a stuffy day
and heard the room's breath.

I have measured time by paper snowflakes,
blown eggs, bereft cocoons

and waved goodbye in Summer so many times
that even in September my heart is June.

Miss Berry

D'fhoghlamíos conas scríobh i línte ag bogadaíl
chomh dóchasach le balún d'aer te ón dtéad taca

is d'fhaireas ocht Eanáir de ghlóthach na bhfrog
is a gcosa ag fás ach riamh.....

is stiúraíos ceolfhoirne cnag bhrúite
is cling na mbarraí ocarina lena dhromaí tóirniúla

is lúb láimh ar láimh
i lúdrach gialla móra an t-siosúra.

Bhíos ar thórramh beag caointeach
go huaigh an londuibh

agus tharlaíos iliomad coirp, mar mhirlíne daite
trasna mataí aclaíochta

is ag tabhairt fé na turgnaimh eolaíochta móra
i gcófraí dorcha, cupáin plaisteacha agus biolar

is d'oscail fuinneog árd lá meirbh
is chuala anáil an tseomra.

Tá am tomhaiste agam le calóga sneachta déanta as páipéar
shéideas uibhe, cocúin cráite

is d'fhágas slán sa Samhradh chomh minic
go mbeadh fiú i mí Meán Fómhair mo chroí ina Mheitheamh.

The Night You Were Born

November 27th, a month before me, all the lights
in the Black Country out for the evening,

Wrens Nest tucked under a blanket of darkness,
mithered only by the fog-beams of your dad's van

as it sped to the hospital. In the back, the dog,
snuffling in her bed of tools and woodshavings.

In the front, your mom, panting on the turns,
her frightened moon face waning at the window.

I think about that night when I doze, heavy
with our son, in the snow-soft hours.

What it would have been to have seen you, pushe
howling, from that red tent of legs,

the first word on the page of our story.
I press myself against you in the darkness, listen

for your murmur as he moves inside me. Oh love,
I can almost hear it now: that first cry –

a raw thread of sound spooling through Winter
to stitch our lives together.

An Oíche A Rugadh Tú

Samhain 27ú, mí romhamsa, gach solas sna Críocha Dubha
múchta don tráthnóna.

Nead Dreoilín fáiscithe fé phlaincéad dorchadais,
seachas splanc na soilse-ceo ó veain d'athair

is é fé luas chun an ospidéal. Ar cúl, póirseáil an
ghadhair ina leaba uirlisí is scamhacháin adhmaid.

Do mháthair, chun tosaigh, ag osnaíl ar na cúinní
a gnúis gealach eaglach ag meath ag an bhfuinneog.

Cuimhním ar an oíche san is mé lán codaltach
lenar mac, sna huaireachta boga cloch shneachtúla.

A leithéid de radharc tú fheiscint, brúite is ag béiceach
amach as an bpuball dearg-chosach

an chéad fhocal ar leathanach ár scéil.
Cuardaím tú sa dorchadas, cluas led

chrónán is é ag bogadh laistigh díom. A ghrá,
cloisim ar éigin anois é: an chéad osna -

snáithín amh fuaimne ag roithleán tríd an Gheimhreadh
chun ár saol a ghreamú le chéile.

Black Country/Standard English

from Bird p.6

charm/birdsong or dawn chorus

jack squalor/ swallow

fode/yard

from Birmingham Roller p.10

yowm/ you are

cut/

tranklement/bits & bobs or ornaments

onds/hands

jeth/death

jimmucking/ shaking

babby/ little child

donny/hand

from Sow p.16

oss road / street

gilt /sow

canting / cheeky or saucy

guttle/chew

mon/man

saft/foolish

squalin/squealing or crying

bints/derogatory slang for girls

Aistriteoir: File sa dá theanga í Dairena Ni Chinnéide tá deich chnuasach filíochta Gaeilge foilsithe aici móide aistriúcháin. Sé'n leabhar *Deleted* (2019) le Salmon Poetry, a céad chnuasach as Béarla.