

NOTES FOR BROADSHEET POETS

Richard Ormrod

Truffling

'Much have I travelled in the realms of gold'.

Keats

Rooting, snuffing and grubbing
in the cryptic mud of my mind
trying to find a truffle-gem, a poem,
I dig, mole-like, blind –

Sniffing, sifting, clawing the soil
on the alert for the slightest
whiff, nose deep-pressed
in the dark dank earth, lest

despite delving, gouging and probing
the elusive wealth, black-gold
like oil, should foil, escape me –
or grasping, I lose my hold

on its squelchy surface, earth-clogged
like iron-ore before cleaning –
but this find, when refined, is
the gourmet-gold of meaning.

Dens

A poem is a place
I shelter in: dark, secret,
warm – almost like a womb;
or, child again, a hide or den:
a canopy of coats between chairs
a rude tent to camp in
(playing at explorers or Dan Dare);
or high in the sky of the tree-
house, lost among leaves;
re-emerging hours later, as though
I'd never been away: *they*
barely noticing my absence...

or later, an allotment shed
during a downpour: crouching
among the tools, pots, packets
of compost for veg waiting to be fed,
seeds desperate to be dug in;

later still, a book-lined study
in a staid house, cocooned
from neighbours' noise, dogs
or phones: cloistered as any monk
or hermit, waiting for the holy
grail of words: the only lasting den
I still seek refuge in.

Omar Sabbagh, now a well-established poet and critic, was a former young *Agenda* Broadsheet poet.

Poetic Logics

Sinéad Morrissey: *Parallax* (Carcanet, 2013)

Michael Symmons Roberts: *Drysalter* (Jonathan Cape, 2013)

The discussion which follows of Sinéad Morrissey's latest (T.S. Eliot-prize-winning) Carcanet collection, *Parallax* has three major parts. First, a fleshing out of the eponymous theme; second, a highlighting of those moments in the collection where the poet shines with virtuoso colour, whether while instantiating the eponymous theme or not; and third, some (far more minor) criticisms, which latter may be taken to be valid only because the stakes are set so high.

In the Oxford English Dictionary definition given as the epigraph to the collection, we learn that the concept of 'parallax' is in essence the idea that the apparent nature and position of any intended object is displaced by the change in the position of observation. In one sense, to be fleshed below, the idea – hailing from Nietzsche or a scenic Henry James, a 'lying' Oscar Wilde – is that at every point in space, the story (time/narrative) changes. And ranging point of view or what narratology calls 'focalization', is at the heart of some of Morrissey's won effects. That said, difference, in whatever sense, makes no sense unless there is a commonality, however thin, which allows us to dub and render difference.

So, for instance, the collection's opening poem, '1801' is made up of three staggered/sectioned stanzas, which begin with a 'cloudless morning' vista, move to 'afternoon airy and warm', and ends with 'visited evenings... sharp with love'. The final image in the final line runs: '...the new moon holding the old moon in its arms.' This ending highlights both the passage of time (the three sections) and the unifying recursions of time structured by memory – the final words of all three sections are: 'alms,' 'alarm', 'arms' – time regained, then. In one sense, by suggesting how that final line sums up the whole poem, enacts it, I am suggesting that feature of what we might call 'necessary' poetry which is over-determination, a taut, but still fertile, hanging-together of things.

Analogy, like parallax, works by suggesting difference, but as the ripest fruit of unity. All the sliding points of view, however differential and displacing, are dependent on the 'objectivity' so to speak of there being the very (many) subjective points of view. Whether it's the poet's persona

hearing 'In other noises...my children crying' ('Baltimore') or, much later, the intriguing idea that 'Death was so much closer' for her 'younger self', when she'd a more over-determining fantasy regarding her future, as 'dead already' or 'at least a grandmother' – the change or shift in point of view, whether spatial or temporal, is dependent on an overall executive intentionality. Another good example comes at the end of (already-cited) 'Baltimore'. The 'infant sleep' at the end of this poem about children, is both the putting to rest of the other, the infant, and the mother as penning poet putting poem to sleep. Two mothers, one child; two children, one mother...

Another way perspective shines through the collection is as the conceit of the penultimate poem, 'A Lie', has it: namely 'That their days were not like our days, / the different people who live in sepia'. Which is to say the passage of time continuously and radically alters sense; a caught image in a photograph here images the fictiveness of, if not the past, our only point of access to it. And this idea is fleshed out here and there in the collection as both liberating (poetic in its essence), but also as dangerous.

So as an example of the way the decaying of time allows for healthy liberating 'lying' (Wilde's term for Jamesian 'scenic selection'), we have the poet's persona in 'The High Window' writing as 'requested' (from a lover's point of view) 'a Raymond Chandler spin-off, / a spoof in style, but from the blonde's perspective.' This leads to an entertaining and colloquial bit of poetic fun. However, in 'The Doctors', we scent the bad 'pun' simultaneously – in the sense of a Stalinesque doctoring and airbrushing of the past. Such crimes against memory and/or commemoration are just as much the consequence of that textuality rendered unavoidable by the passage of time, as the ability to read new pasts, which mean new presents, which empower us poetically or symbolically to carve (a healing and) a new future.

Another kind of sliding or eliding of perspectives is apparent in the (both) use of ekphrasis and (at the same time at times) the poetic reflection on that very use. So in 'Photographs of Belfast by Alexander Robert Hogg' we learn of how 'One cannot tell / if the room in the photograph / entitled *Number 36* // is inhabited' ... That inability to tell is actually telling (in both senses). But the poet is more emphatically sovereign in 'Shostakovich'. Not only is this a poet (Morrissey) writing of and as Shostakovich – a nominal ekphrasis – but the foil within the poem (Shostakovich) ends with a fantastic couplet: 'In all my praise and plainsong I wrote down / the sound of a man's boots from behind the mountain.' That's flair (for both artists). A bit like the ending of 'Migraine' (another poem which uses outer space as vehicle for inner story and storytelling):

I can no longer see your face.
Posed in unravelling sleeves
and disappearing lace,
I have given up all hope for what was whole –
the monkey under the orange tree,
the tatterdemalion nightingale.

Not only is this vanishing hope rendered hopeful, but those last two images, Simic-like or Stevens-like, are suggestive of how after time renders the 'whole' inaccessible, the poet (very poetically) embraces this point of view and, by so vividly highlighting it, simultaneously suggests the necessity or objectivity of all of us having or being limited to a point of view. Indeed, the entertaining conceit of 'Puzzle', a playful rendering of a pat childhood arithmetic riddle ends, in the sestet of the sonnet, like Samuel Johnson's riposte to Bishop Berkeley, by going off on a tangent, goofing off in a manner of speaking.

As yet I have suggested how the poise and control of the poet renders some fantastic effects, and makes us 'see' in many different and differential ways, spatially and temporally. However, at times, and far more rarely in the collection, the poet's craft seems slightly flawed. An example might be 'Lighthouse'. In this poem, we have the prime instance of the eponymous theme: a lighthouse, we read, 'blinks and bats / the swingball of its beam, then stands to catch, /then hurls it out again beyond its parallax.' Light and house; (the very condition of) seeing (at all) and grounded, de-limited perspective; Logos and epilogue; unity as the condition of multiplicity. Indeed, this just quoted image is far from censorable. However, for all this just-cited brilliance (lighting up the poet's home and hearthside with flair), we have one of a few examples where the micrological detail is better than the whole conception; or puts into relief the overall failure. 'Lighthouse' opens with 'My son's awake at ten, stretched out along / his bunk beneath the ceiling, wired and watchful.' Not only is this opening flat, too deadpan in relation to the attempt at profundity which entails, but it is also a stale representation of teenagehood. To boot, if we are being critical, it would seem de trop to mention in a poem how his 'bunk' is 'beneath the ceiling'. It would have to be. It is only the overall thoroughgoing success of the collection which makes moments like this glaring. They are rare.

Another instance is the last poem 'Blog': pure bathos when related contrapuntally to the wholly successful opening '1801.' And yes, it is intentionally bathetic, given the theme/title, but it is a let-down all the same. We end with 'My good friend Jack told me to write it down.' It's a weak ending to a weak ending. Far from that 'Fool's Gold' (highlight, in this critic's

point of view, of the whole collection) which is redolent with alchemical bonding, loving election, where the penning persona *knows*

the trick
to set me there,
my newfound noble elixir,
the needle to be passed through,
the famed alchemical ingot
I could not do without –
was you.

This wonderful ending to a wonderful poem had me thinking of another love-lyric, ‘The Thieves’ by Robert Graves, which – a muddle and not a muddle – in its middle runs:

After, when they disentwine
You from me and yours from mine,
Neither can be certain who
Was that I whose mine was you....

*

Something strange happens when logic becomes poetic logic: senses are conflated, equivocation and ambiguity become vehicles of sense, clear and distinct distinctions are evaded or elided. As an example, and taking a very basic Freudian perspective: it just so happens that a man who expects (too) much attention, narcissistic supply, who wishes for a kind of omniscience or omnipotence – wishes to be always desired via the (infinite) mirror of the other. Now the ‘fact’ of the matter is ambiguous: two diametrically opposed scenarios result in said symptom. Either said neurotic has had too much attention: thus expects it as his due; or he’s had too little: thus strives after it continuously to compensate for its (sometime) lack. This example evinces a poetic logic. Analytical logic would aver that two (strictly) opposed meanings cannot lead to an identical consequence. However, poetic logic thrives on these confluences; nay, makes use of ambiguity to amplify meaningfulness. And this kind of eminently poetic logic I find exemplified throughout Michael Symmons Roberts’s superb collection, *Drysalter*.

In the opening poem (the first of one hundred and fifty fifteen-line poems) ‘World Into Fragments’, we start with the ‘Small breaks.’ This is ‘a world more fragile than we thought.’ This fragility is crystallized however, in such

potent images as ‘great forests disassemble like mosaics,’ and ‘sun and moon as vast burst bulbs.’ Indeed not only is a discordant world congealed thus, but look closely at the workings of the sensibility. The sibilants in ‘forests’ and ‘disassemble’ and ‘mosaics’; the vivid assonance and consonance of the second citation – formal flamboyance and control typifying the collection. What these lines signpost is a sensibility that is both necessarily passive, that is, following the matter of language, and also at the same time (the sheer coherence of the images) indicates an authorial control which tallies with it, paradoxically, poetically. Indeed, throughout the collection, Roberts seems to find ways of being both poignant and filled with quiddity (15 lines being one beyond the propriety of a sonnet) and universal (150 divided by 15 is 10). Like Eliot, he finds the ability to philosophize in concrete images, beyond the supposed bad taste of (discursive) ‘ideas.’

The next two poems in the collection are immediately continuous in their equivocal juxtaposition. ‘Something and Nothing’ (a title repeated in the collection, as if to compound the antinomy) opens with a ‘dancer in the woods’ whose ‘breath’ quickens ‘on the breeze.’ She is both something then, but also: windily spent. At the end the poet goes ‘to her, since I know no better.’ A metaphor then for the poignancy of verse (a dancer in the forest), and the fact that it might not ‘matter’ (‘breath’ exhausted, by the ‘breeze’). The poet who goes to her goes to her from (poetic) need, as well as because there’s no other alternative. Poetry is both a bounteous luxury and a staple. The following (contiguous) poem, ‘Setting The Trap’ is also a metaphor *in toto*, but contains effectual imagery within its architectonics as well. The ‘bait’ the poet leaves at night is left ‘untaken / is removed, the plate washed, table wiped, / and all the vast and empty sky forsaken.’ Ignore the rhyme: there is a far more incisive effect here; the concrete (metaphor of) the trap is rounded off with a discontinuous image, the vast and empty sky. Concrete tale and universal sense are tied together in a force-field which typifies successful poetry: that is, in this critic’s view, poetry which tells concrete tales and at the same time tales about the very nature and essence of poetry in general. Here the tale about the trap and the bait is a tale leading to the pessimistic ending, in which no-thing is caught, the sky (equally) empty – whether the sky is empty, though, because it just is empty, or whether the sky is empty in a more substantively-intended sense, as ‘forsaken’, is a question for the reader to negotiate, thankfully.

In ‘Ascension’ we have a perfect example of said (double) poetic logic; we open with the following stanza:

Because the sun has a dark heart,
the heart must have a dark sun shut inside,
unable to rise or blaze or set.

Ascension, like the idea of ‘transcendence’ generally, normally betokens objectivity in a philosophical sense. In that, it means ‘going beyond’ the subjective(ist) prison; going or intending beyond solipsism: being able to reach out to an ‘objective’ world. And yet here the image is a chiasmus which is both poignant for that ‘other’ who is the reader, and at the same time denoting (via the paradoxical paralysis) failure to go beyond, ‘unable to rise or blaze or set’. Or later, take ‘Signs and Portents.’ We end this poem with:

When all is said and done it’s just a breeze.
I go on daubing words across my house
to *deliver us from*, then I run out of space.

‘Signs’ then, the gift of ‘deliverance,’ (an-other kind of ascension or transcendence) by poetry or from evil, as well as the ‘portent’ that it’s just a ‘breeze’ and that the poet (and his poetry) doesn’t ‘matter’ – especially as he runs out of space, an image of the perfunctory.

Perhaps one of the most beautiful images of this antinomian and poetic logic comes in ‘To Listen’, where we read of how ‘The night sings / in tongues and a black flower / opens inside of us.’ Indeed in the recursion of identical titles, throughout the collection (such as, for instance, ‘Something and Nothing,’ or, ‘The Original Zoo’) as well as the nominally paradoxical use of titles such as ‘Elegy For The Unknown Elegists’ or ‘The Darkness Is No Darkness’, the essence of Roberts’s metaphysical sensibility looms out and glares at us. There are also ‘Hymns’ and pseudo-psalms and self-named ‘Songs’ throughout, which add a seventeenth century flavour, as in Donne or Herbert. Not to mention the medieval register of some of the songs and hymns, alluded to in the first place by the eponymous ‘Drysalter’. These latter conjoin distanced irony and immediate uncton, seamlessly, with the seriousness of all true play. But for all the evident intelligence and ratiocination in the verse, that verse is suffused with and spent by concrete, coursing telling.

One might typify the effects of this superlative collection by contrasting two stanzas. In ‘Asleep In The Back’ we open with (the poetic logic of):

It’s dark, by which I mean it’s clear enough
to see this child’s head rest against
the window, but not to recognize the face.

From that ‘hermeneutic circle’, then – the idea that every revelation or representation or disclosure (the window) is at the same time operative in hiding something else from view or comprehension (not to recognize the

face) – to the closing of, say, ‘To An Immortal I’:

For you alone, I make an offering,
you who have heard it all before,
I give you this, my mortal song.

The alternation, then, the chequering of touching, nuanced intimation with the (riskier) boldness of a brilliant poet coming into his own.

As I see it, this collection with many faces and with one, is – like, say, Paterson’s *Landing Light*, or Heaney’s *District and Circle*, or, most recently Wiman’s *Every Riven Thing* – a prime example of poetry that is (absolutely) ‘necessary’. Which is to say, in one of Roberts’s own phrases, the taut conjunction of ‘something and nothing’: poetry which we never expected; but once there, poetry we couldn’t do without.

Belinda Cooke

Dennis O’Driscoll: *The Outnumbered Poet: Critical and Autobiographical Essays* (Gallery Books, 2013)

This collection of essays reflects the temperament that triggered the numerous accolades that have appeared in the press in the wake of Dennis O’Driscoll’s sudden and untimely death on Christmas Eve 2012 – all pointing to his good nature, humour and generosity to other writers. In every sense, the genuine article, like a close friend, he invites you in to share his reading passions and memories of poets he has come across in an intelligent, down to earth, homely, addictive read. In the spirit of Jane Austen’s Mr Bennett (‘What then do we live for, but to make sport for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn’), he pokes fun at absurdities within the poetry scene with an insider’s willingness to be the butt of his own jokes – all told with the art of a born storyteller.

There are hints of such self parody immediately in the book’s opening section, ‘In Person’ where far from, say the French tradition of *flânerie* (aimless, reflective strolling) or Wordsworth’s wandering ‘lonely as a cloud’, as a full-time tax inspector his opportunities for ‘poetic’ strolling are confined to his own estate: ‘a side-on view of a corrugated iron warehouse, clapped out Portakabins, bathyspheric tanks. Cavities crater the site, like the boreholes of a mad mineral prospector’ (‘Walking Out’), all described with the poet’s eye. ‘In the Midst of Life’ he relocates next to a graveyard, less a setting for the muse than a source of dark humour: ‘I was never a great admirer of death. I have always regarded it with a healthy disdain ... I would conquer my death phobias by facing down the enemy ... eyeball the headstones and inoculate myself against all thoughts of mortality for the rest of the cheerful day.’ Given his recent death, these comments cause the reader a sharp intake of breath, but expect more of this, for such observations feature strongly, variously humorous, poignant or laced with a seize the day attitude to the poetic life.

‘Working Bard’ debates job security versus going freelance, with the first of his many lighthearted digs at creative writing courses:

... how would I survive if my pay, prospects, pension and tenure were to depend, irrespective of the vagaries of a fickle muse, on my being able not only to prove my poethood through regular publications, but also to act as a kind of creative satnav, plotting my students’ routes to expressive fulfilment.

He describes the first time he mixed his day job and the muse when asked to write a poem to mark the opening of the Revenue Museum at Dublin Castle and concludes with a seriously held view that it would be presumptuous to define himself as a poet – that is a decision to be made by others – yet he also amusingly notes that it is one step up from admitting to be a tax collector guaranteed to clear the room at a cocktail party.

The bulk of the collection is in Section two ‘Poets and Poetry’. It starts with a few more personal pieces and general discussion before going on to pieces on specific poets. ‘Making Amends: Assembling a *New and Selected Poems*’ is a batch of delightful, painfully accurate aphorisms: ‘poets are less wary of *Selecteds* than *Collecteds*, preferring to mark time with a milestone than to call time with a tombstone’, and includes this hilarious description of one poem’s fate: ‘like a pet dog, cruelly abandoned in the hills, which tracks his way home and is grudgingly readmitted to the household’. ‘Blurbonic Plague’ is packed full of real examples of side-splittingly, dreadful blurbs mixed in with O’Driscoll’s imagery on his disapproval of the whole underhand process: ‘blurbs clinging like parasitic ticks to poets’ collections’, ‘overheated hogwash and whitewash’, ‘pressing public valentines on their subjects ... for “the best grandmother in the world,” ’ not to mention the soundbites used to replace the word ‘writing’: ‘and hats off to the poet who... wrenches it into being, slaps it on the page, applies the flames of her passions’. He finally makes fun of creative writing tutors blurbing their students: ‘Two dotting blurbists, enlisted like godparents at a baptism’. This essay, in particular, is just dazzling in the density of its humorous examples mixed with a more serious invective against what can be mutual backscratching.

His lecture, ‘The Library of Adventure’, however, is the jewel in the crown of this collection as he takes us through his own personal reading journey. Once read, it will have you dashing off to re-read your Dickens, Austen, Tolstoy – or even loved childhood favourites. From his childhood speed-reading of two books a day to the transition at puberty to slow reader savouring every word, this is an essay that will provide a sharp shock of recognition to all who have that strong desire to know and read everything:

I sometimes want to bypass the reading process altogether and ... simply *inject* knowledge into my veins so that they might course with whatever wisdom or insight the reading of Proust or Plato, Maria Edgeworth or William Faulkner would confer.

The range of this essay is breathtaking in its passion and research as it races through the views and habits of book readers, such as the endless buying of books in a life that is too short. Given the laughter up to this point, one

is struck by how absolute his commitment to reading is – slow reading in particular: ‘in poetry, rereading is the whole point ... eventually you live in the poem and it lives in you.’ He also takes another pop at the teaching of creative writing, this time in the way it can demean reading: ‘A kind of booster rocket to be discarded once the would-be author has been launched into inspirational orbit.’ He argues that only when we are ‘prepared to be challenged and resisted and appalled, as well as charmed and cheered and inspired by what we read are we engaging deeply with literature, opening ourselves fully to its scope’, noting also the race against time in such a reading life: ‘as if we are barely granted a sidelong glance at the world when it is time to leave it again.’

His next two pieces are concerned with poetry readings. ‘The Outnumbered Poet’ is another superb lecture. Drawing again on a mesmerizing and eclectic range of sources combined with his own experience, he evaluates the worth of the poetry reading. He kicks off with a mock-serious ‘history of the poetry reading which includes great examples of ancient disdain for the practice from Pliny and Juvenal and more recent ones from Leopardi: ‘a coarse barbaric vice’ and Flann O’Brien’s tale of a man who rips his face off when forced to go to a reading. Clearly, throughout history, everyone has wanted to perform but no one to listen. The American poet, Thomas Lynch, tells us: ‘if a poet is outnumbered it is a success. If outnumbered by a dozen or more it is huge success’. O’Driscoll mischievously takes him at his word and digs out a story of an island farmer who, out of courtesy, was forced to listen to a poet reading to him when he wanted to get on with his work. To this he adds negative comments from poets who hate readings such as Wallace Stevens: ‘poets like millionaires should be neither seen nor heard.’

He proceeds with the shenanigans that go on at readings involving would-be poets and those at various degrees of fame: disputes over who should read first; tales of ‘famous poets’ putting up with sleeping on floors and that ultimate feeling when you have finally ‘arrived’ (and here one feels he writes what he has lived), when you his experience the first expenses-paid night in a hotel: ‘when the poet rips the plastic hygiene cover from the tumbler and throws open the mini-bar like the door of a Dodge City saloon.’ From here, for the ‘famous’ poet, the problem shifts as expenses are paid but touring means less time to write: ‘should they like Enver Hoxha or Saddam Hussein employ look-alike stand ins?’ He concludes by coming full circle noting that, in spite of everything, poetry readings still contribute in myriad ways to the poetry community and that as far as reading aloud is concerned we shouldn’t forget that most important audience, our inner voice, as we read our work distracted by no one but ourselves.

‘Readings remembered’ is another densely packed piece taking us back

to the start of his earliest memories of poetry read aloud, to his encounters with numerous high profile poets in the years of his work within poetry. His anecdotes are all great fun, such as the tale of how he got a lift to his first public speaking contest by a priest who had met the queen: ‘a grand little shtump of a woman, very aisy to talk to,’ or the time he tried to contact the current poet laureate c/o Buckingham Palace’ assuming he’d live there. Once he meets many high profile poets it is the tight encapsulation of their characters that shine out. We have the funny tale of a very down to earth radio presenter trying to interview Robert Graves who had already developed dementia. He is particularly astute in capturing the essence of Robert Lowell’s charismatic appeal:

Lowell’s authority and vulnerability, acuity and frangibility, his paradoxical air of urbanity and otherworldliness bewitched his Kilkenny audience ... a model of delivery and presentation which deepened understanding and enhanced appreciation of the work.

Lowell provided him with the most memorable of all his poetry reading experiences citing his advice on the four *musts* of oral performance: ‘humour, shock, narrative and a hypnotic voice.’ These memories of the above poets and others provide a nice balance to the downsides of readings discussed in ‘The Outnumbered Poet’.

The rest of the middle section covers key reviews, retrospectives and more extended pieces on various poets he admires before wrapping things up with the final section on Seamus Heaney’s work. Consistently we see him able to paint pictures of the individuals often *in situ* that are both concise and vivid, well-evidenced by the piece on Gallery Press’s editor Peter Fallon. He takes us back to Fallon of the early seventies’ Dublin bringing poetry out of obscurity: ‘His dashing dress code, an exuberant spillage of ink-black hair lent him an aura that was as dandyish as it was hippyish, as mystical as it was modish.’ From here he takes us through Fallon’s career as a poetic ‘mover and shaker’ on to his establishment of Gallery Press in Dublin and relocation to his Meath Farm. He also touches on his relationship with his Meath neighbours. In the process he cites the hilarious poem on men caught after drinking ‘afters’: ‘Sure I thought I left ages since.’ (‘The Late Country’). O’Driscoll is equally insightful on Thomas Kinsella in a piece which, along with describing Kinsella’s ‘hobby’ of poetry by evening and work as civil servant by day, is also very informative on the way Ireland was gradually moving out of its fifties’ stagnation and the role of Kinsella’s boss, T K Whitaker, Ireland’s most famous civil servant in that transition.

The most substantial piece covering the work and life of Michael Hartnett

is over 80 pages with the potential to build to a complete monograph. His regular meetings with Hartnett in Dublin throw light on his idiosyncracies, alcoholism, brilliance and failed potential. He cites Hartnett's own comments on the influence of his parents: 'I'm dangerous, cantankerous, cranky, a stirrer up of shite and a poet. When you put them all together, you've a dangerous little bundle.' This piece shows Hartnett as a gifted maverick with a particular commitment to writing in Gaelic but whose early flowering – producing a selected poems before he was thirty – was curtailed by chronic alcoholism. He notes; 'His writing is quite simply incomplete; an air of unfinished business, of scaffolding still in place'. This is a study that is presented with both affection and deep insight into the mind and work of the poet and is thus very moving to read.

Space does not allow for detailed examination of all the wonderful essays in this collection but they are all consistently on a par with those discussed. Along with his essays on Seamus Heaney, he writes on a diverse range of poets: Billy Collins, Julia Hartwig, Anna Kamieneska, Czeslaw Milosz, Tadeusz Rózewicz, Yehuda Amichai, Douglas Dunn, Vasko Popa, among others, not to mention further essays on unusual topics such as in 'Plumping for Poetry' connections between fatness and thinness in relation to poets or in 'The Widow's Tale' female poets writing on the deaths of their husbands.

It is greatly to Gallery Books' credit, with the assistance of O'Driscoll's wife Julie O'Callaghan and David Wheatley, that they succeeded in publishing this collection within twelve months of Dennis O'Driscoll's life. The contents provide a wonderful testament to a man who clearly had his poetic priorities in the right place. His wit and wisdom offer a restorative tonic, helping one to see what is important to a reading and writing life – the perfect text to sit on any writer's desk.