

Aistir ar an mBus Áitiúil

Shín Seán a mhaide amach don mbus
os comhair Tigh Kruger amach
mála Lidl ina lámh shíonchaite
seanachaipín ar a cheann.

‘Nach bhfuil an aimsir go hainnis,’
agus é ag beannú don tiománaí Páid.
D’fhéach sé timpeall go cúramach.
‘Suígh anseo,’ a dúirt a chomharsa Síle.

Ar an mBuailtín bhí bean ann le bugaí,
leanbh ann ag gól go cráite,
sheol fear go dtí a suíochán iad
‘s chealaigh sí a mac ar a cíoch.

Ag Ard ‘a Bhóthair bhailigh an bus beirt,
cailín óg, a gruaig rua mar chlóca
thar a guailí agus a buachaill
caol fionn ag breith ar a lámh.

D’aimsíodar na cúlsuíocháin
is chuach iad féin isteach iontu
ag gáire ‘s ag pógadh
an turas ar fad.

‘An Daingean, ár gceann scríbe’,
a dúirt Páid leo tríd an maidhc.
‘Bailígí bhur mbagáiste ‘s bhur mbratacha,
‘s ná bígí ag amadaí cosúil leis an lanúin thall’.

Orna Ní Dhuinnshléibhe

Bright patches along the way

Against the low pewter sky
a cream cow is a bright patch,
and there is the vivid green field
the sun always favours, except today.
On Illaundrane white waves crash.

See along the tarred road by the gorse
three blue-daubed sheep huddle like clouds.
Beyond, pine trees rush up the misty hill.
Along the verges range montbretia, yellow ragwort,
purple loosestrife, red fuchsia, lacy meadow sweet.

Ivy muffles stones of a little cottage ruin.
Who lived behind the faded green door?
Come back, it seems to call to the white and blue bus.
But we are gone on our way to the next bright patch.

You can't see all that when driving a car.

By Pam Muller

Local Link

You're at voyeur height,
peering down on the August
Supervalu parking lot chaos,
huge spotless pickups,
sleek silent e-cars,
holding their ground,
stopping traffic both ways.

You can see over hedges
into gardens,
paved, mostly, with
newly converted sheds,
Covid offices, holiday lets.

In Ventry we backtrack
and I see
the open top
double decker
that toured
the champion ladies football team
yesterday,
parked behind the church.

Back west
we stop to let
a frightened camper van
inch by.
Beyond the hedge there's
a sunlit field covered in thistles,
gracefully bent,
done,
awaiting their next season.

By Cheryl Donahue

Friends to the nerves

Before the tear of wheels
beneath our feet, gravel
errant amongst the herd

path trodden, boot steps
setting pace at the rear,
skitters on toward dawn

shadows, hunch of age
steady, along the light
buckles of dung drops

and bog sop springing
meadow sun clusters,
rising early, plucked

so ghosts might stay
at bay, in our minds
a while still, we call

for calming tea, sleep
in the memories, past
footsteps now paved.

By Seán Carlson

Mountain Dew

Shred of cloud
snagged by ridgeline
weeps its mist
distilling down, through
bracken and bare rock coalescing

Carved glacial bowl
collects the new
melds with its ancient
united, untouched
hidden from view

By Teresa Preziosi

Montbretia

Consider the panicked cockscomb
that grew against my father's stone shed,

their orange blaze, the slender sword-like
leaves I hated as a child, so much so I pulled them
(leaves and corms) to stem their spread.

Consider how they light up miles
of Iveragh hedgerow in August,

last vestige of the summer sun
as we drive home from the beach at Derrynane.

Consider its cousin Crocosmia Lucifer
planted on my rockery in the hope of an inferno,

new shoots plucked by deer in hours.
Consider their leaves multiplying

without a single blossom sprouting,
my neighbour's rockery a red fever of flowers.

Consider my son, the tenderness with which he offers me
bouquets of his favourite flower, plucked with small hands.

Consider how the heart can turn a flower
I once considered ugly
into the most beautiful thing ever.

By Faye Boland

A Question of Edges

Troops of bluebells march
downslope from a base of alders.
For a split-second, you'd swear
they were lemming-like
in their intent. Not that the drop
over the low stone wall
would ruffle their poise.

Hard to imagine that these stones
once prompted a random urge
to take ease in the building,
like those footmen who served
colonial masters and who sat,
protesting that they needed time
for their souls to catch up.

Another blink and I'm seeing
a melange of purple and green
stone-images in procession, draped
in flowing chasubles, bells ringing
an order of place in a priestly
column that once marched
confidently to known edges.

And walls? What are they for anyway?
This one was built to hold
a slope together. It's done that.
Now the stones shape-shift, become art.
Ghost-shadows glimmer after rain.
Merciless thrushes have made the low end
a slaughterhouse for snails.

I look to this wall-map again and again
to steady myself, to breathe meaning
into fragments, to plot a soul-graph
across divided experiences: its edges
are mine too, its faded gloss
a mirror, its luminous elegance
a half-finished heaven.

By Michael Joyce

Foyle's Bog

We sit at home on weathered súgán chairs,
you look out the window deep in contemplation.

Today is the day our harvest is ready to be brought in
my uncle's trailer to the shed for a winter of warming.

I now stand firmly on my two feet as I sink
ever so slightly into the soft boggy ground.

Each summer is framed by the stages of its cycle:
cutting, turning, footing, stooking, bringing home.

Stories of men long go float between us – Christy Daly
with three sods in the air and he cutting the fourth.

The skylark soars impossibly high signalling
good times ahead. A bog omen.

Mountains glow a purple hue, their contours
trace an indelible image in my mind.

Track machines have destroyed so much here,
haemorrhaging millions of years of incubation.

Bog, butter, bodies are excavated so we can say you can't bate
the smell of a sod smouldering on the fire over and over again.

I lean on my father's shoulder knowing the day is nearly
at an end, no more turf, no more of this ritual, this freedom.

By Paul Murphy

Wild West

A sign reads:
'HOLD A BABY LAMB'

Hostage to the Western
drama of this place.

'*Out West*' that spells
of wildness,

where fugitive islands splinter
from slated cliffs,

outlaw outcrops.

Swaggering road of holstered hips,
saloon door swing of sea against stone.

Snap-crash, a beer bottle thrown,
crack of guns fire bullet rocks.

A giant lays slain,
rock-face to the heavens.

By Melanie Joy

Things worth noting

The walk to the shed takes only a moment.
It is that twilight time where the light is somewhere
between purple and rushing to be inky black.
I turn to see the last of the mauve air sink behind
the mountain near my house,
and the Alders have something to say.
I watch them for clues –
a gathering of wisdom in my garden.
She's leaving, they say.
I feel it in the underground network of mycelium beneath my
feet.
I know, I whisper back.

They are right of course.
The call comes at 3am,
The Alders stand stock still, stop breathing until I leave the
house
and embark on the pilgrimage home to bury my mother.

By Siobhán Flanagan

Purple Mountain

Looms and rises,
mist plumes around her brow
tumbling down the heather haze
to sink deep into the valley where
rock eyes wink and shimmer.

Alone,
but you are never alone
– voices from the Calling Stone
echo, ebb and fade, sucked
into the bowl of the Pocket.

Silence is never silent
where the White-Tailed Eagle calls
above amber-eyed hares, twitching
hunkered in hollows against the wind
that buffets the silver reeds to shiver.

Still, but never still
soon sweeps the mantle
raining misty from the sea
and bluffs spring to life
shooting snaking ribbons falling

falling. Cloud's shadows fold and
ripple moving over Purple Mountain
from beehives to sheep paths
are ancient trails untouched.

But change is always changing
even as the sun sinks beyond
the ink-dark blanket and wind-barrelled
birds take unexpected turns from their
avian satnav, spreading alien seeds.

By Anne Tilby

Zebo

By Mike Bowler

We had the name before we got the dog. I had seen Simon Zebo playing for Ireland when he executed an amazing trick, flicking the ball from behind with his heel and into his hands. Then he body swerved a defender before haring to the line for a try.

The collie Zebo was six weeks old when we bought him from a local farmer. He was a present for my wife, Petra, when she had finished her course of chemo. She had bravely battled the ‘alien’ as she called her cancer.

When the black and white bundle of fur was placed in her arms, I knew she was smitten when he licked her nose. He had an unusual white stripe down his face with a matching white tip to his tail. The first thing he did when we got him home was to widdle on the welcome mat.

When he left the puppy stage he came into his own. He did all the long walks with me when I started training for the Camino. I planned to do the French Way from Sarria to Santiago de Compostela. It was to be a memorial walk for Petra whose people came from Alsace. Zebo filled the empty house with his healing grace.

Bluebells carpeted Liberator Park on the edge of town. Primroses paraded along the hedgerows. Daffodils swayed like drunks in a dance. Fairy fingers pointed to the cobalt blue sky. Furze bush blazed on the hill of the Well.

The ephemeral white of bog cotton coloured the slough where a solitary hare stood still. With a yelp from Zebo it bounded across the heather, seeking freedom. Some days we would only meet the odd farmer waving a scythe in greeting. Lambs were skittish and I had to assure the farmers that Zebo wouldn't worry them. I joked that it was more likely that the sheep would herd him. He was always scuttling ahead in his own world until my shrill whistle brought him to heel.

By Autumn we were up to four hours and I felt ready for the epic trek. It was the end of October when I noticed that Zebo had lost his appetite – a dog who could eat for Ireland. The vet diagnosed a tumor in his liver, and it didn't look good. I was faced with making the heartbreaking decision. The day before I was to fly out, the vet was due to come and put him to sleep.

I tucked him in on the sofa for the last time, tears troubling my eyes. As I patted him goodbye, he licked my hand and I tweaked his ears.

‘Beddybys.’ I said the final word that Petra had made up for his bed time. When I went in to check on him next morning there was no tail wagging a welcome. He had done me one last favour by slipping away in the night.

My friends helped me place him in the garden that he loved to play on. We covered him in the green sod of sadness. I could feel a void opening up inside me, deep as the grave. We went to the Kingdom hotel for breakfast as if we had buried a human.

They say that the Camino is where you find yourself. How you decide what is important in life. How to resolve problems. To dwell on the transience of the world. Well, it was my time now to grieve for Petra, to accept and let go. Zebo had helped me heal when I lost her.

I knew there would be no welcome for me when I returned. No hug from Petra and no tail wagging like a windmill. On the return flight a poem by Kipling popped into my mind:

The Power of the Dog

*‘When the spirit that answered your every mood
Is gone—wherever it goes—for good,
You will discover how much you care,
And will give your heart to a dog to tear.’*

Writers' Biographies

Is scríobhnoir í **Orna Dunlevy** atá ag maireachtaint agus ag obair i gCorca Dhuibhne. Oibríonn sí i mBéarla agus i nGaelainn agus tá filíocht, drámaí agus gearrscéalta foilsithe aici. / **Orna Dunlevy** lives and works in the West Kerry Gaeltacht. She writes in English and Irish and has written and published poetry, plays and short stories.

Pamela Muller was born in South Africa in 1958 and has been living in the South West of Ireland since 1978. She is a long-term member of Clan na Farraige Writers Group, Kenmare and Sneem Writers Group. Her debut anthology *New Soil* was published by Revival Press, Limerick in March 2024.

Cheryl Donahue chanced into West Kerry while on a short holiday in December 1996 and has (mostly) been living there since. She started writing poems after a personal bereavement and a surprise friendship with an interesting poet. She finds poetry a way to say what can't be said directly.

Seán Carlson is completing his first book, a family memoir of Irish migration. His poetry has appeared in *Honest Ulsterman*, the *Irish Independent's New Irish Writing*, *Ragaire*, *Trasna*, and elsewhere. His *Irish Times* essay, "The reach of a single village", about Moyvane, received a Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Award.

Teresa Preziosi emigrated from America in 2018 and settled into the townland of Sneem, a village with a rich creative community. A chance encounter encouraged her to join the local writing club. She has since cast off the mantle of corporate writing and returned to stories and poetry.

Faye Boland won third prize in the Bere Island Poetry Competition 2024, and first prize in the Robert Leslie Boland Prize 2018 and the Hanna Greally International Literary Award 2017. Her Chapbook *Fishing For Tea* was highly commended in the *Fool for Poetry* Chapbook Competition 2024 and she was highly commended for the Desmond O'Grady Prize 2019. Her first poetry collection *Peripheral* was published in 2018 by The Manuscript Publisher.

Michael Joyce lives in Ballyheigue. His poems have been published in *THE SHOp*, *The Galway Review*, *Inside Out* and *Still in the Dreaming*. He was a recipient of the James Award at Ballydonoghue Bardic Festival 2023 and 2024 and has contributed regularly to *Just a Thought* on Radio Kerry.

Paul Murphy is in his early thirties. He was born and raised in Ballyhar which is a few miles outside Killarney. He studied English in the University of Limerick, spending two years after graduation living and working in Vietnam. He has previously had poetry published in an anthology of Kerry writing entitled *Still in the Dreaming* and a short story in *The Galway Review*.

Melanie Joy is a west Kerry poet who takes endless inspiration from her surroundings. Her poetry has been selected for publication in multiple literary journals. She is working towards her first collection.

Originally from Dublin, **Siobhán Flanagan** moved to Kenmare over five years ago and lives there with her husband, daughter and two dogs. She likes nothing more than spending time observing the natural world around her, and from time-to-time writing about it.

Anne Tilby works as an artist, designer and poet in mixed media including trash, and preserving small things as everything is precious! She is lucky to spend time in both wild and beautiful Kerry and chaotic London. Her websites are www.bigfrieze.com and www.tilbysboatyard.com

Mike Bowler has published two novels, *Destiny of Dreams* with Poolbeg Press in 1990 and *Two Worlds* with Beyond The Vale publishing in 2022, as well as a short story collection *Last Season* in 2014. His short story *Hand of Time* won the Irish Post Short Story Competition at Listowel Writers' Week 1993 and his story *The Last Season* was a winner at Listowel Writers' Week 1994. His story *Remembering Nijinsky* was a Runner-up in the AIB/Western People Short Story Competition and the Ballina Salmon Festival and Arts Week 1996, and he was also a runner-up in the Irish Post Short Story Competition 2006, adjudicated by Martina Evans.