

the horizon seemed at least as near as England. It is equally our neighbour, just one which is a bit further away. The European Union politicians, I suspected, would not have been best pleased at my interpretation of that geographically rooted word “neighbour”. “America,” I declared firmly. “America is Ireland’s neighbour.”

And so, my letters to Ireland were finally posted, with American rate stamps attached, and duly arrived safely in the mystic isle, via Shangri-La’s post office.

IRAN

It takes eighteen hours by bus to cross the stretch of desert that seeps between Zahedan and Shiraz, in the far south east of Iran. The landscape throbs. Engulfed in black, I have never been so hot in all my life. I fanned myself with a photograph. It caused great interest. “Home,” I said, searching in my phrasebook for the Farsi word. It was a picture of the Moher Cliffs and their uncertain Atlantic floor. The photograph was passed around the bus. The man who returned it to me consulted another for English words. “We also,” he said carefully, looking out the window at the desert, “would like to live in the sea.”

HARRY CLIFTON



Patrick Kavanagh once wrote, “There is no virtue in a place”. Growing up in a Dublin housing estate I had no reason to dispute that statement. Nor another by the same poet that has stayed with me over many years of wandering:

I turn away to where the Self reposes,
The placeless heaven under all our noses.

A young person, living as he or she does on the level of sensation, will tend to be dazzled by geographical variety. The city of Paris rubs off in a different way than the American midwest, the Jos plateau of Nigeria differently than the mountains on the Cambodian border. Having lived and written in all those places and many others, it is no longer the difference between them that interests me, but what they share in terms of

a common human experience. Loneliness, love in all its forms, the terrible fact of death. Older, and knowing as one does what time can do to people anywhere, one tends to conflate, even to cut out local reference altogether. This is from a poem I wrote about the Swiss sculptor Giacometti, a night-wanderer in his adopted city of Paris:

Not Paris now, but infinities
Of disconnected people, faces, times,
Humanity dissolving into shapes
At the ends of avenues, at the ends of rhymes.

But if placelessness is the ideal, and “here and there cease to matter”, as T. S. Eliot writes in the *Four Quartets*, then why leave Ireland in the first place? One reason, I think, is that my generation still equated Ireland with innocence and Elsewhere with experience. To grow morally, it seemed one had to leave, at least for a while. And then there was the danger, if one stayed in Ireland, of being categorised, boxed-in, neutralised for life. To de-categorise, to remain faithful to one’s own self, however small, it seemed better to be away. After that, there were the personal reasons—mixed ancestry in my case, and the delusive wish to be active in great causes—all of which had to run their course.

Now that all of that is in the past and I come and go freely between Ireland and Elsewhere, I am inclined to reverse the original innocence-experience polarity and say that for me Ireland is an immersion in complexity, Elsewhere a finding of ideal distance. Paris, the big international city where I live, is also, like Giacometti’s shed, a place of necessary bareness and withdrawal. It’s as simple as that.

GREG DELANTY



Living abroad, specifically in the United States, has affected my work in various ways. Without any predetermination on my part, I found myself writing emigrant/immigrant poems. Outside the quality of the writing which is paramount, expressing the world of the emigrant/immigrant seems important because it has not been articulated through poetry in any extensive way by anyone with first-hand experience. Considering that emigration is such a profound part of the Irish psyche, it is surprising