

## THREE POEMS



*Cathal McCabe*

IN MEMORY OF MY MOTHER

Streaming from the lamps below  
The snow lies thick and deep  
    A carapace  
Streaming from the lamps below

A train whistles through the dark  
A deadline cold to keep  
    I lie here as  
A train whistles through the dark

Eleven years into oblivion  
You too lie in a deep  
    Dark place  
Eleven years into oblivion

The trams clatter into the night  
And at times it's hard to sleep  
    But it's not because  
The trams clatter into the night

The wind skates all too recklessly  
The feckless paths are steep  
    On roads of glass  
The wind skates all too recklessly

You are no longer what you were  
I make the hopeless mindless leap  
    To realize  
You are no longer what you were

Although I think of you as warm  
You lie beneath a sorry heap  
    Of grit and ice  
Although I think of you as warm

And you are standing at the door  
Alive and we are in your keep  
I close my eyes  
And you are standing at the door

*Łódź 1993*

PHILOCTETES

This is the wound that will not heal.  
Lifted from your mother's womb—your mother's wound—  
Wound as you were in cables and leads—lifted clear  
Of the motorway carnage (seen now from above)  
—Miraculous assumption!—lifted clear,  
You lie now on a headland  
Gazing out to sea. This is the lovely  
Isle of Lemnos, and you are alone—your mother is dead—  
Alone with a wound that will not heal.

SESTINA

Imprinted yet on my retina  
Are your lips caught in a frozen kiss,  
A photograph I've come to love,  
In which, as ever, you have appeared  
To comfort me, and then to paint  
A picture of the past, all the black days cancelled.

Nothing now concealed.  
Stronger, better, my Milena,  
For you no point  
Of no return. Believing in a hopeless case,  
You cite again your credo, where I would have despaired:  
*If you do not love me I shall not be loved*

*If I do not love you I shall not love.*

When, like Thomas Kinsella,  
I stood on Ballydavid pier  
Alone, absorbed, in a  
Bitter wind, I thought of the carcass  
We had seen—our love, I thought—at Rosses Point.

*What's the use? What's the point?*

I asked, like Dylan (himself in love)  
In *Idiot Wind* (the title not his but Weldon Kees'),  
Taking his tired counsel  
To heart, not daring to hope for the rush and restart of *Festina  
Lente* (the *Miserere* of Arvo Pärt).

Portstewart, Portrush, Port-  
Ballintrae; Warrenpoint,  
Cranfield, County Down; Cercina  
Then, the island where we took our love,  
Far from Gauguin's "sale  
Europe", though far, too, from the magical quays

Of Donegal, where I could have thrown the keys  
Of the car into the blue, poured  
Us another glass of whatever, said this town here, Kinsale  
Or Dingle, will do, called for another pint...  
I think of all our drinks, our whiskies—lemon, cloves—  
Vodka, boukha, gin; our bottles of retsina.

And ever since we've been apart,  
Pained and out of sorts, I've thought of you, Justyna,  
Concluded that the only cause for comfort now is love.