

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.