

## *North Brunswick Street Lullaby*

When the sirens don't blast the air,  
When they've put out the fire  
And broken up the break-in and the melee  
Then the passing traffic sounds like the sea  
Saying hush uselessly to the crowds  
On the streets, who're out of their heads,  
Who're seeing different things in the same light,  
Who won't stop telling everyone about  
The taxis having it sewn up altogether,  
The next big thing who's a Cavan boxer,  
The latest cheapest one-way ticket west,  
The boyfriend's new girlfriend's bad conscience,  
That song, the song you've never heard,  
That goes something like this.

## *Nightjar*

Everyone knew about it before long,  
My mother's mother's return  
To Newmarket from Hong Kong  
With her policeman, his pension

And, stranded with them, her ayah,  
Who with her eyes closed and no-one about  
Would burn orange peel on the aga  
And kept one other personal habit,

Hanging washed pos off the ash trees  
In her family's back garden  
Where they'd out-stare the neighbours  
Like some never-seen-before bird.

*Flood*

The trees, up to their waists in earth,  
 Up to their oxters in water, are for once insecure;  
 Even the dumb animals have gathered on the mounds  
 They call hills east of Gort.

I'm stranded in the low haggard cottage  
 Practicing philosophy and maths  
 And keeping a weather eye on the range,

When you tiptoe into the bedroom's flood-plain  
 And floor me with linked tables of flotsam,  
 Plantation ecology, train-times and lovage

And you drown out the tree-dwelling bird,  
 The land's flat liquid veins, the sounds  
 Of rain on deepening rock-bottomed lakes, the pure  
 Ferocity of weather, its grey flights and its weight.

*The Man on the Street*

He shelters in the post office  
 When the rain washes down his trees.

The sky clears? He passes round the flagon  
 And talks England with some young one.

Come midnight he smashes bottles on the street  
 And blinds the traffic with his wit.

By morning he's pasted to the hard shoulder,  
 He wouldn't notice if you chalked his outline there.

## *Costello's Legend*

*from Douglas Hyde's Love Songs of Connaught*

1.

He heard too late  
About Una's love.  
He'd escaped south,  
She was in her grave.

Afterwards he began  
A life of adventure,  
Swam the Shannon at Glin,  
Saved towns from the invader,

Tamed horses, wild boar,  
Slew champions in prize fights  
You had to be there  
To credit his feats.

2.

But this fame meant nothing to Costello,  
He never forgave himself, never married,  
And as he'd directed, was buried  
In the same island graveyard as Una.

An ashtree had grown out of Una's grave,  
Another grew out of his and it's said they inclined  
Towards one another and leaned out of their way  
Until the tops met and entwined.

Last week, when I looked across  
From Lough Key's shore, I saw only rushes, gorse.  
Maybe none of this happened  
Or maybe you had to be on the island.