

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.